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THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO MARKETING IN A DIGITAL WORLD

5TH EDITION

ROB STOKES
AND THE MINDS OF QUIRK

04

Content Marketing Strategy

What's inside: This chapter look at **brands** as publishers who need to understand those for whom they are producing content. **Content marketing strategy** is explained and situated within the greater marketing mix. **Organisational** and **conceptual requirements** are considered in line with your overall marketing strategy.

4.1 Introduction

While the phrase 'content is king' has been referenced for some time, it is only in the recent few years that Content Marketing Strategy has been solidified into a discipline of its own. Defining content marketing strategy can be tricky, however, with some practitioners focusing more on the role it plays in information architecture and others believing that it should be considered on a campaign by campaign basis. This chapter looks at content marketing strategy from a holistic perspective, as a process that includes an understanding of all the content your brand is creating, those for whom it is intended, and to what purpose. There is a need to understand the brand and consumer context and match these to the best route to customer (in terms of tactics). Ultimately this supports the design of communication that impacts people enough to make them want to share the content on.

In this chapter, you will learn:

- To understand the role of content marketing strategy within your marketing plan
- To be familiar with the steps involved in developing your content marketing strategy
- To recognise some models for understanding how types of content are absorbed or experienced by your target audience.

4.2 Key terms and concepts

Term	Definition
Algorithm	An algorithm is a mathematical, computational or statistical method pre-determined to take a number of variables into account and output a single, quantifiable result that is a function of all the variables. A good example of a commonly used algorithm is the one used by Google to determine which pages rank more highly on SERPs.
Content audit	An examination and evaluation of the existing content which a brand publishes.
Editor	A person who determines the ultimate content of a text, traditionally understood in the newspaper, magazine or publishing industry context.
Information architecture	The way data and content are organised, structured and labelled to support usability.
Persona	In this context, a character created to define a group of readers in order to speak to them as though they were a unique reader. Usually a hypothetical character created to represent and personify a set of traits.
Usability	A measure of how easy a system is to use. Sites with excellent usability fare far better than those that are difficult to use.

4.3 Defining Content marketing

Content marketing is an umbrella term, one which focuses on matching content (information or entertainment) to your customer needs at whichever stage they are in the buying cycle or customer journey. Unlike TV, where the advertiser pushes messages to a captive audience, the focus is on engaging content, which means that marketers must think like publishers (attracting an audience) rather than seeing themselves as advertisers (buying an audience) of a product. The Internet has, in many respects, cut out the middle man. Consumers and brands can now connect directly through a number of easily accessible online platforms.

The Content Marketing Institute offers the following definition:

> *Content marketing is a marketing technique of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action* (Content Marketing Institute, 2013).

This definition applies to all the spaces in which you share content – your website, campaigns and competitions, a company blog or the social media space – as well as the way in which that information is shared.

Kristina Halvorson suggests the model illustrated below for approaching the different areas of content marketing strategy.

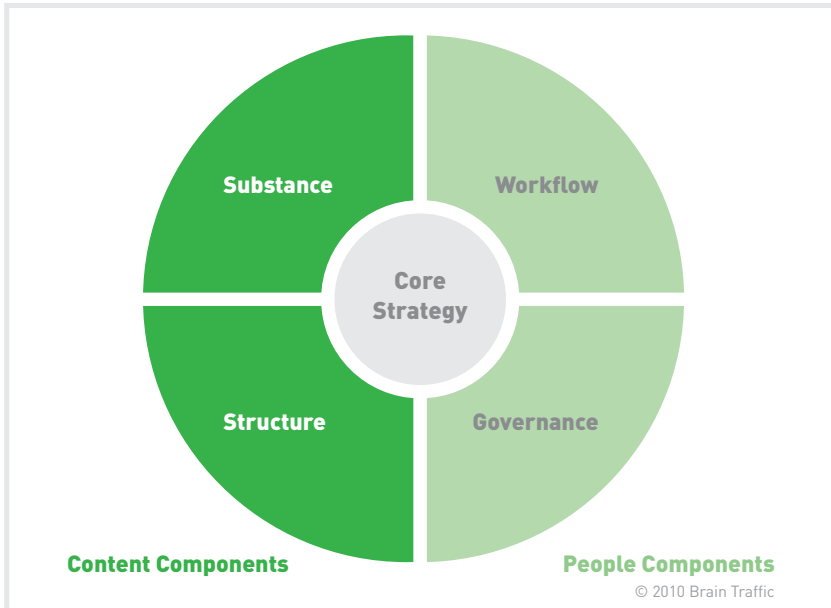

Figure 1. *A model explaining Content Strategy.*
(Source: With permission, Kristina Halvorson, 2010)

Content components

- **Substance**: Who are you trying to reach, and why?
- **Structure:** Where is your content? How is it organised? How do people find your content?

People components

- **Workflow:** How does your content happen?
- **Governance:** Politics, guidelines and standards (Halvorson, 2010).

As you can see in the above discussion, Halvorson suggests that one consider the bigger picture of content creation rather than just the product which is the end result. Content marketing looks at staff, tools, processes and outcomes. The end goal for these processes is, as outlined in the Content Marketing Institute definition, the delivery of a "profitable customer action". All content should be created with a strategic outcome in mind.

4.4 Strategic building blocks

4.4.1 Translating your brand essence

The brand essence is a sentence which sums up the unique attributes of a brand and the basis for its emotional connection with customers. Your brand essence should assist in defining a tone of voice for your brand and the style in which it engages with its customers. The brand essence can be a useful guide for ensuring that the content you create (and your marketing activity) represents the brand appropriately. Some relate this to your brand story. What is your reason for being, and how do you connect that with the interests of your customers?

Will it Blend? is a video series by Blendtec which builds on this principle. Blendtec produce industrial blenders. Their value proposition is that they can blend anything, and their very popular videos demonstrate this.

Figure 2. *Blendtec produce a series of entertaining videos focused on blending objects discussed in popular culture, such as iPhones. (Source: Blendtec, n.d.)*

4.4.2 Market research and consumer personas

The sweet spot for content marketing lies in an intercept between the marketing goals of a brand, the brand personality as it guides and differentiates that brand in the marketplace, and the consumer motivation for paying any attention to a brand at all. One device that is used in addressing consumer needs is the development of a consumer persona.

A persona is a profile that a writer creates to embody the characteristics of the target audience for whom he or she is writing.

NOTE

Read more about this in the *Writing for Digital* chapter.

Personas are based on the profile of users of your content. Creating a profile is all about considering the characteristics of your readers and their needs and desires.

It's important to focus on the motivations of the persona that you may create, rather than exterior signifiers that lead to the creation of a stereotype. The persona assists you in segmenting and understanding your target market and is a framework through which you can guide any content that you create.

4.4.3 Creating content pillars

Linked to the brand identity are certain themes, which could also be called content pillars. These are areas of focus that support the creation of content that match to a consumer's interest. These themes must be true to the brand essence, not focused directly on sales, and should also speak to the interests of the audience.

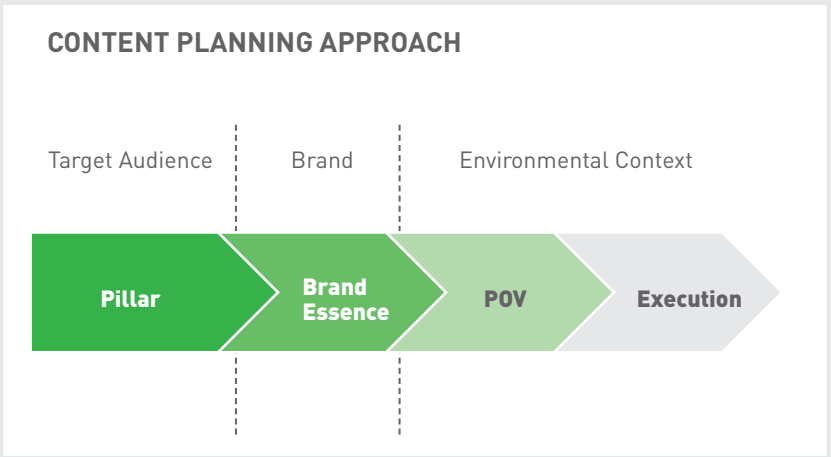

Figure 3. *Content pillars can be considered in line with the brand's essence, and then situated within the context of the reader.*

For Coca-Cola, for example, consumer interests filtered through the brand essence of 'Coke brings joy' could result in the following pillars:

- Friendship
- Sharing is caring
- Spreading smiles.

These pillars are then used as the basis on which to develop content ideas.

Figure 4. *Coca-Cola express their brand essence in all of their communications, as demonstrated in the Tweet above.*

In the above tweet, we can see how a particular content pillar was translated into a question that is focused on relationships and family. It also encourages engagement from the audience by asking for their input.

Another example which demonstrates this is how Corona brought their brand essence to life through an interactive documentary. The documentary depicted the first encounter that people from Bulin in China, 7 500km from the coast, had with the beach. You can view it here: http://www.coronaextra.eu.

Figure 5. *Corona created an interactive documentary that tied their brand essence to a powerful human story (http://www.coronaextra.eu/china/).*

4.4.4 Matching content formats to objectives

Information can be presented through any number of mediums, which is both an opportunity and a challenge faced by content marketers. Digital distribution allows for videos, images, interactive infographics and any number of other formats. To gain and keep the attention of consumers/users, it's sometimes not enough to rely simply on text-based forms of content. The role of the content marketer is to select the right medium based on overall objectives, production capabilities, and the needs of the audience. Consider the illustration below.

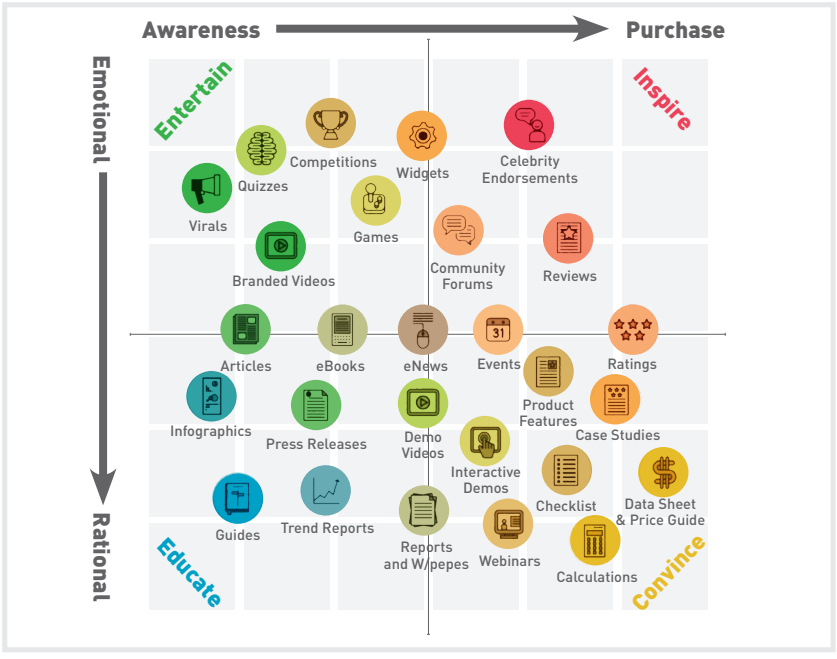

Figure 6. *Different forms of content will support different objectives. (Adapted from Bosomworth, 2012)*

As discussed in the *Digital Marketing Strategy* chapter, determining your objectives is an essential part of your marketing planning, and should feed into your content marketing strategy. Understanding the journey your consumers go through as they approach your ultimate sales goal will enable you to match content formats to their needs. A humorous video may be successful in initially making potential customers aware of your brand. Once you have their attention, however, a research paper or useful case study could be more effective in convincing them that you are the best choice in the market.

There are many examples of online journalism using multimedia to convey information most effectively to their readers. *The New York Times* has presented a number of different methods for conveying complex information in an engaging manner. 'Snow Fall' by John Branch is one example (http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-fall/#/?part=tunnel-creek).

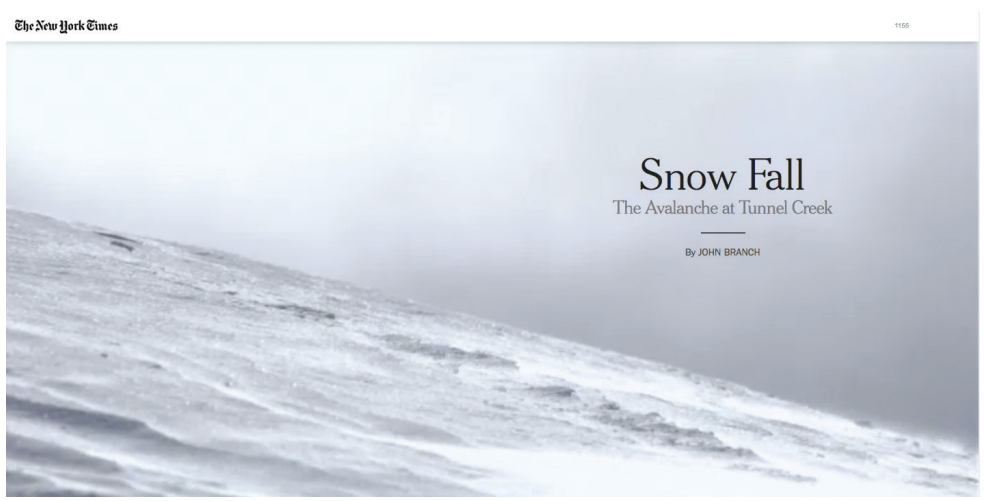

Figure 7. ***'The New York Times' is a media brand that has embraced interactive media features for presenting complex news stories. (Source: The New York Times)***

The New York Times also often publishes infographics that demonstrate this principle powerfully.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Section	Page	URL	Description	Keep/Edit/Delete	Notes
2	About Us					
3		Vision	about-us/vision	Company vision statement, drawn from main brochure (now outdated)	Edit, add info from Mission page, add annual reports.	
4		Mission	about-us/mission	Company value statements. Seems to replicate Vision page. Includes links to annual reports (PDFs)	Delete	
5		The team	about-us/team	Lists bios of key staff members. Missing some staff, other bios 3-5 years out of date, some bios very brief, some very long.	Edit: update bios, edit to make more consistent. Add email addresses.	Second most-visited page in section.
6		Contact details	about-us/contact	Contact details: physical, phone, email. Includes operational hour info.	Update with Google map. Operational hours needs more prominence.	Most visited page in section
7		News	about-us/news	News items, currently divided into press releases; news; announcements; 'from the boss'. 32 items over 3 years.	Keep, but suggest deleting most old articles & removing categories.	
8		Events	about-us/event	Mixture of business and external events. No events loaded this year. 13 events over past 3 years.	Delete. Suggest publishing event info as news items & promoting on homepage.	

Figure 8. ***A content audit conducted for a website. (Source: Liubarets)***

In order to take advantage of these various forms of content delivery, it is necessary to build the correct capabilities. But how do you determine what forms of content you need?

4.4.5 The content audit

Once you have established your marketing goals, your brand personality and a guiding understanding of who you are trying to reach, the content audit is a sometimes laborious but necessary next step. The content audit involves an audit of all the existing content supplied by the brand – the website, white papers, articles, videos and content shared on social media sites can all be considered. An assessment can then be made of how well these pieces of content match the strategic needs of the brand and its audience.

While you can either thoroughly immerse yourself in this process or attempt to get a more time-efficient overview, the goal is to map what is currently on offer with what is necessary in mind. It is important not just to understand what you have, but also how it is currently organised and accessed by your audience.

Many practitioners suggest the use of a spreadsheet to achieve this. Content can be found to be either mismatched to the goals of the organisation, or spot on. Most importantly, you can establish what is missing. Are your customer needs being addressed? Where do the opportunities lie?

4.5 Content creation

4.5.1 Learning from publishers

The term **brand as publisher** refers to repositioning the function of the marketer or brand manager. Rather than focusing on the immediate sale or conversion, a publisher focuses on value and interest for the reader, and building a relationship based on supplying information or entertainment that suits the customer's needs. Makeup.com by L'Oreal is an oft-cited example of a brand publishing useful tips and content that does not link to a product or sales directly, but demonstrates how the brand can give consumers the lifestyle they desire.

4.5.2 Resource planning – thinking like a publisher

Content marketing touches on a number of departments in an organisation. Marketing, sales, customer service, corporate communications, human resources and website management teams should all be aware of the content marketing strategy for a business. Co-ordinating content between these teams can be challenging if not impossible if turnaround times are tight. This is why it is important not only to look at where content production should live in your organisation, but also to map the workflow of content creation, an essential function. Are designers involved? Where does quality control take place? Where can a piece of content be adapted and reused on a different distribution channel?

Some organisations opt to have a central role for someone who oversees content; others build in-house departments. Whether you are outsourcing to a publishing house, or training a team in house, the decision must be made and planned for so that workflow can be mapped in order to facilitate your strategic needs.

4.5.3 Always on content planning

Given that a large part of the global population is constantly engaging with content via various digital devices and platforms, it is necessary to consider content creation in terms of not only short campaign bursts, but ongoing delivery and engagement. Consider the illustration below.

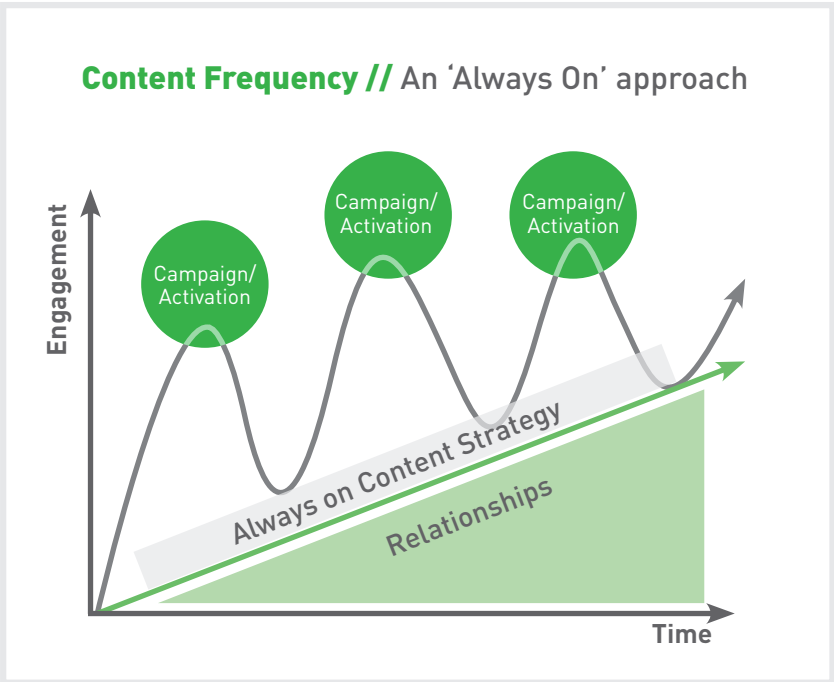

Figure 9. ***An always-on-content strategy approach builds relationships and engagement.***

By constantly engaging with audiences, something which is well suited to social media, for example, it is possible to build and maintain a relationship with customers/readers. Consider the image above, where constant engagement builds on the peaks of engagement that shorter term campaigns can offer.

4.5.4 Content models

Your organisation's content requirements and objectives should determine the structure of your content teams. Do you have a need for ongoing content creation, or are there less frequent high-input forms of content that will benefit your organisation? There are many models which are constantly evolving, so do invest in some research around what will suit your organisation. We have outlined two approaches below.

Stock and flow

Stock content refers to bigger, beautiful assets that require more investment and age well, meaning that they will be interesting in six months as well as today. 'The Dewarists', by Dewars, is an example of this. A high-production value TV show was created and sponsored by the brand in order to achieve awareness across its target market.

Figure 10. *'The Dewarists' was a TV show sponsored by alcohol brand, Dewars.*

Flow content has a lower production value and a quicker production and publishing time frame. Images depicting what is going on at a business on any given day, for example, freshly baked goods at a bakery, can be placed in this category.

Figure 11. *Cake Boss posts images depicting their preparations on their Facebook page.*

Both types of content should be considered for balancing out a content strategy.

Destination and distributed thinking

It can also be useful to consider destination and distributed content. Content which you are either sending out to the world through various platforms and networks, or which pulls your reader towards a page on your website or an article on your blog. Rather than focusing solely on driving readers to your owned media spaces, such as your website, consider how to create content that engages with your target audience in the spaces where they are active.

4.6 Content channel distribution

4.6.1 Algorithmic curation

Algorithmic curation is a term that refers to the algorithms platforms have created for dealing with information overload. Various platforms, like Facebook and the search engine Google, use algorithms to filter out the amount of information that is delivered to users. Each algorithm will use a number of factors to determine what is actually relevant and interesting to the person doing a search, or looking at their news feed. One of the factors that influences whether a piece of content is considered relevant is how much an individual engages with the brand's presence on that platform over time. Posts shared by a Facebook page, for example, may reach only users who have previously engaged with posts from that page through commenting or liking. It is therefore important to create content that encourages engagement and sharing.

4.6.2 Understanding your channels

Understanding the channels through which you share content is as important as the crafting of that content itself. Reaching people effectively will only be achieved if the medium supports the message and vice versa. Social media, email marketing, mobile marketing and video marketing are just some disciplines that will form part of your content creation arsenal. The rest of this book is dedicated to best practice in communicating effectively through the various digital disciplines available to you.

4.7 Tools of the trade

In order to support the ongoing production of interesting content, it is necessary to have some planning documents in place. Consider those outlined below.

- **Brand style guides**

  This document guides anyone creating content for a brand at any time. What is the tone of voice and brand personality? How is it best represented visually, and what are the brand colours and fonts? This can be a challenging document to put together, and it usually isn't the content marketer who is tasked with doing so, but is essential to aligning brand communications. It is also a document that tends to be 'live' – it is constantly updated as the brand and content landscapes evolve and new conventions need to come into play.

- ### Content calendars

  Content calendars assist the content marketer in planning the content they will be sharing, across which platforms, and when. The more advance planning is undertaken, the easier it is to react quickly to tactical opportunities.

- ### Workflow map

  A workflow map documents the path a piece of content takes when it is created. What are the steps in approval, how is it optimised for digital publishing, who has final sign off? Is it a duplicate of existing content, and where else can it be used? A workflow map assists you in streamlining this process.

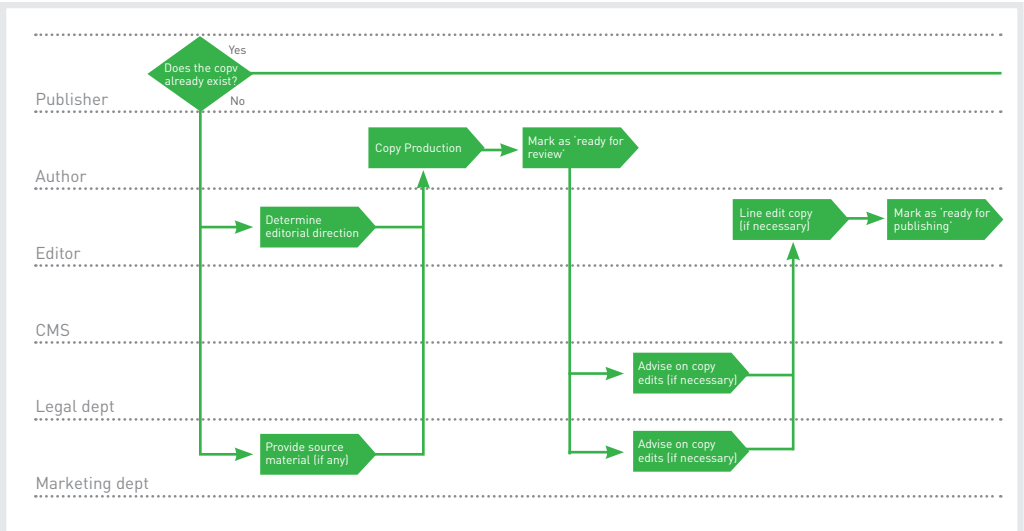

Figure 12. *An example of a workflow map for an article. (Adapted from: Ingserv)*

NOTE

See an example of a content calendar in the *Social Media Strategy* chapter, and an example of a persona in the *Writing for Digital* chapter.

- ### Persona map

  As discussed, the persona map assists content creators in focusing on those for whom they are in fact creating content, and what the motivations of consumers would be.

4.8 Advantages and challenges

Content marketing can position your brand as an expert through the sharing of useful content in your specific field. It also enables you to reach the customer who has a fragmented attention span spread across many devices and content touchpoints.

One of the more powerful benefits, however, is that you can learn a lot about your target consumer through the content with which they do or do not engage. The more targeted and ongoing your content, the more data you can gather about how effectively you are reaching those you need to.

One of the great challenges in content marketing is providing content that is truly interesting and engaging to the right people – the right mix of subject matter and brand. Matching content to the required outcome for your strategic purposes takes dedication and focus. In the context of ongoing content production, it can also be a challenge to maintain levels of quality over time, which is why process and quality assurance steps must be put in place. Consider that the goal is not to create as much content as possible, rather it is to focus on relevance and content that matches strategic outcomes.

4.9 Case study – Coca-Cola Company

4.9.1 One-line summary

Coca-Cola develops a content strategy in order to double sales by 2020 and redefine their business.

4.9.2 The problem

The Coca-Cola Company is a global beverage producer. Even though the brand is globally known and extremely successful, it has set its sights on doubling its business by 2020. It also noted two key changes in the market: consumers were creating an ever-increasing amount of brand content, and technology had empowered them as never before to shape the brand.

Coca-Cola decided that it needed to harness the power of content marketing in order to engage consumers.

4.9.3 The solution

In order to meet their goal of doubling the size of their business by 2020, Coca-Cola created a multifaceted content strategy based on two key content pillars: liquid and linked.

'Liquid' embodies the notion that our networked and connected world enables ideas to spread rapidly – liquid ideas are those that capture the imagination and cannot be controlled once they are put out in the world.

While liquid ideas are creative, they are grounded in a linked strategy. 'Linked' makes sure that ideas are always centred on the core brand story and experience – in other words, liquid ideas must reflect positively on the Coca-Cola brand. It also means that all the brand channels should be coherent and unified.

4.9.4 The outcome

Rather than focusing on traditional advertising, Coca-Cola has thrown its weight behind a global content strategy to meet its rather ambitious goals. It identified that audiences are now largely in control of the brand, and that it is more important to have an open conversation with them than to broadcast advertising at them.

Coca-Cola's content marketing plan is based on three core elements:

1. **Storytelling**: As part of the liquid principle, Coca-Cola has recognised the power of storytelling. Stories create an emotional connection, connect people and spread ideas, which leads to conversations. In dynamic storytelling, a brand idea is released to the audience and picked up in various conversations and channels. One of Coca-Cola's key brand stories is 'living positively' and showing how the brand makes the world a better place. This content idea also forms part of the company values, showing the importance of aligning business and content objectives. Each sub-brand has a big-picture content plan that outlines key elements of the story and how they will be disseminated.

2. **Consumer-generated content**: Consumer-generated content forms a cornerstone of the content strategy. Brand stories encourage consumer reactions and engagement (and are often created by the consumers themselves). The worldwide distribution of creativity and technology means that consumers have greater power than ever before to create and drive brand stories, which leads to emotional connections. Coca-Cola actively encourages fans to 'act and react' to the stories.

3. **Unified brand experience**: Finally, Coca-Cola puts a lot of emphasis on creating a unified, coherent and accessible brand experience. While there are many stories to be told about the brand, it is still necessary to filter and edit these to ensure that they speak to the brand's key values. By focusing on content excellence, Coca-Cola is creating value and engagement, not merely noise. Maintaining this means that the brand must communicate effectively with staff around the world.

In keeping with the 'linked' principle, these ideas will always be linked to business data and business objectives to solve problems (TheCognitiveMedia, n.d.).

Content on the web will spread regardless of whether a brand is involved or not – but Coca-Cola has picked up that they can steer the story themselves. By engaging proactively, building powerful, viral brand stories and giving consumers some control over how the brand is expressed, they are able to steer the conversation to their benefit – this is the true power of content marketing.

4.10 The bigger picture

Content is a significant component of many digital marketing disciplines. When creating content, you should always keep the principles of writing for the web in mind.

- **Email marketing** relies on great content – since most people suffer from email fatigue, they will only stop to read emails that they know are of high quality and that provide excellent content.
- **Social media marketing** also depends on sharing relevant and valuable content with social fans. While your brand promise may get them to your social page, your ongoing stream of quality content will encourage them to interact and share, spreading the word about your company.
- **Search engine optimisation** is strongly influenced by the quality, frequency and value of content. Not only will search engines favour your site, but others will choose to link in to your content, creating a valuable referrer for your brand.
- **Video marketing** is a whole new approach to content, in which you create dynamic and shareable videos specifically tailored to the interests and needs of your audience.
- **Mobile marketing** also requires that you consider the unique requirements of your audiences across a series of devices. If you understand the role that each device plays in a user's life and buying cycle, you can tailor content to optimally address their needs.

4.11 Summary

Content marketing presents a pull mechanism for the marketer rather than a push one. Brands must consider their brand identity and the market they are trying to reach in order to create targeted and valuable brand content that delivers on strategic objectives.

It's about more than creating a piece of content – content marketing strategy looks at how you structure your organisation to create that content, and how you match specific types of content and methods of delivery for achieving strategic outcomes.

These ideas need to resonate with people rather than simply existing across an array of media with which they are presented.

4.12 Case study questions

1. What is Coca Cola's overarching goal? Why is this significant?
2. What is brand storytelling?
3. What do you think about the content audit? Is it a process you would undertake?

4.13 Chapter questions

1. What is content marketing strategy?
2. Why is the customer journey or buying cycle relevant to content marketing strategy?
3. How do you decide what new forms of content your brand needs?

4.14 Further reading

http://contentstrategy.com/ – Content strategy for the web.

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Group Marketing Knowledge Manager at SABMiller plc.

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ISBN 978-0-620-56515-8
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