Content Supply Chain

A ComBlu e-book that lays out a game plan
for brands to optimize content investments

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Introduction

Today's knowledge society and service economy have made content a critical component of enterprise value. Content is a key point of distinction as consumers seek information throughout their decision journey and beyond. Content is a key differentiator for those brands that know how to source, create and distribute it effectively. The smart organizations recognize that they are "publishers" and must develop content that tells engaging stories that are shared and accessed through multiple gateways.

Yet few organizations apply the rigor of the supply chain discipline to the sourcing, creation, logistics, management, distribution and measurement of its content value. In fact, content needs to be sourced and managed like any other raw material. It needs to be transformed into an asset with defined value. Companies that source raw materials for products know how they will be used throughout the manufacturing process to create value for the company. They apply granular discipline at every point in the supply chain and constantly seek ways to improve logistics and workflow, cut costs, find new competitive advantage and get to market more effectively.

This same approach must be applied to the content supply chain, which McKinsey, a consulting firm, estimates has a sunk cost of tens of millions of dollars in CPC, OEMs and technology companies.

This e-book is designed to introduce the broad concepts of content equity and content supply chain with enough context to provide insights and a broad outline of a strategy and execution plan. By design, it is the "tip of the iceberg" and not an exhaustive playbook. Each organization will have unique cultures, content resources, supporting infrastructure and other elements that will drive the specific route for developing a content process that will deliver the highest value for its enterprise.

The steps in the content supply chain align with the fundamental processes in any supply chain model:

➔ **Insights:** Akin to the sourcing phase, this step applies comprehensive discipline to identifying the right topics and stories that reflect the organizations' legacy, points of distinction and vision.

➔ **Creation:** Aligned with the manufacturing process, creation applies a news-bureau approach to the development of content assets in multiple formats.

➔ **Management:** This step encompasses all of the controls and quality oversight needed to manage workflows, archive and curate content, and manage versioning and integration across all phases of the content life cycle.

➔ **Amplification and Socialization:** This defines the logistics of delivering content across multiple distribution channels.

➔ **Measurement:** This process measures return on content assets, tracks the performance of specific content stock-keeping units (SKUs) and provides the data points needed to control cost, quality and drive better performance.

Brands as Publishers

Content has always been more than words: Symbols, pictures, graphs, signs, animation, video and film can all tell a story with or without the written word. Throughout the ages, the distribution of content has been controlled by both church and state, as well as by commercial publishers. Budding authors unable to get their voices heard began self-publishing.

Today, more than ever, anyone can be a publisher. **Corporations and brands have jumped into the publishing world, many for the same reasons that gave rise to the self-publishing industry:** competition for space in the media, media bias or opposing agendas, cost and effectiveness of advertising channels, and the desire to tell their story directly to stakeholders.

In fact, **publishing has become a core marketing strategy:** The Custom Content Association estimates that corporations spend 25 percent of their marketing dollars on both content creation and distribution. Some knowingly and systematically jumped into the publishing pool, while others came to the realization that they were now, in fact, publishers.

25%

The Custom Content Association estimates that corporations spend 25 percent of their marketing dollars on both content creation and distribution.

Either way, corporations face many of the same issues that commercial publishers face every day:

Audience development

Content topic road map ("story budget in publishing terms")

Content mix and volume

Content development

Targeted content distribution across multiple genres and channels

Resource allocation and organizational structure

Brands as Publishers Continued

" "

Few companies have created the roles and systems needed to manage their content supply chain and create a coherent customer experience.

—Harvard Business Review

Over the past 18 months, we at ComBlu have had hundreds of conversations with brands about content strategy and amplification approach.

Four recurring themes have emerged:

1. We know we are a publisher, but what's the best way to organize the content creation and distribution process effectively and efficiently?

2. Once we organize to truly act like a publisher, will we be able to "feed the content beast" with content that resonates with stakeholders and delivers a great story for us?

3. How do we get the publication cycle right? Do we continuously push content, or is there a better, more cyclical rhythm we should adopt?

4. How do we know if our content is reaching the right people? Is our content working hard enough for the investment made?

One of our Fortune 50 clients calls these the **content pain points**. He is constantly struggling with how to best organize and staff this important function. He currently employs editors, taxonomists, app developers, video producers and content creators, as well as a mix of external resources to develop and distribute content.

Yet as his content vision grows, bandwidth issues creep in. For example, his team identified a group of partners as both content co-creators and distribution channels. A great strategy, but these partners are hungry for a steady stream of content.

Current resources may or may not be able to keep pace with the increased demand.

So the question arises:

Does this brand increase resource allocation for content creation or press *pause* and apply a different structure to their publishing process?

These challenges led ComBlu to develop a content model for organizations that are struggling to get the greatest impact and ROI from their content investments. According to *Harvard Business Review*, "Few companies have created the roles and systems needed to manage their content supply chain and create a coherent customer experience." **Managing the content supply chain starts with understanding that content has equity, and proceeds to a systematic structure and process for effectively managing content as an asset.**

Content equity measures and tracks how well your content is delivering against business objectives and content key performance indicators (KPIs).

Brands as Publishers

To achieve the highest equity, a systematic approach needs to be applied to the creation, management and distribution of the content (the content supply chain) that will help achieve those objectives.

Building content equity requires discipline and a deliberate process. The task can seem daunting, but in reality it is a series of common-sense steps that can be parsed into doable actions. The resulting efficiencies will not only take cost out of the content supply chain, but also deliver higher content equity.

Most thought leadership on this topic concentrates on the content creation discipline, but current thinking is switching focus to content activation. Many people know what needs to be done, but are searching for a process that actually completes the content job.

In the following chapters, we present a deeper overview of both content equity and building an efficient content supply chain. This process addresses the content pain points of brands and deals with the dynamics of content socialization.

The benefits are enormous

- **Directly drives revenue growth**

- **Establishes content consumption relationships with a broader customer and consumer base**

- **Generates powerful word-of-mouth and expands the social graph of content**

- **Optimizes staffing around content ideation and creation, leveraging company staff, partner relationships and community experts**

- **Aligns the content team cross-functionally across the business unit**

- **Centralizes core process that frees the local or business unit staff for high-value activities**

- **Ensures relevance and timeliness of new content**

- **Creates higher-value content that is distributed at the appropriate points along the decision journey in the right format and voice for each segment**

Content Equity

As brands embrace the role of content publisher, a few pioneers treat content as a performing asset with both value and equity. This is crucial to maximizing content ROI. Similar to brand equity, content equity refers to the marketing value that accrues to the brand, compared to other brands trying to own similar messages or thought leadership. Just as brand equity can yield premium pricing or deeper affinity, content equity provides positioning leverage that can impact both consideration and preference over time. At the root of these marketing effects is the stakeholder's knowledge that pairs the brand with the particular message or story. Ultimately, content equity differentiates the brand and achieves specific business or marketing objectives.

Growing content equity starts by translating the content mission into KPIs that are aligned with overall business objectives. A few examples follow.

Support Decision Journey

KPI 1: Drive SEO

KPI 2: Increase brand consideration

KPI 3: Increase brand preference

KPI 4: Drive support around government affairs or issue management

Uncover Sales-ready Leads

KPI 5: Generate leads

Generate Revenue

KPI 6: Monetize content assets

Content Equity Continued

Performance against KPIs is tracked across the four key building blocks of content equity: content quality, targeted amplification, network effect and inbound interest.

Content quality: Much has been written about the traditional definition of quality content: encompassing unique point of view (POV) or information, engaging style and usefulness. In today's dynamic environment, content quality takes on additional dimensions, including:

➔ Shareability: Answering a few key questions will gauge how shareable your content is: Does the content spark interest and conversation? How does it contribute to overall share of voice on the topic, and are people moved to share it? Is it relevant to the influential stakeholders who will pay it forward to others with similar interests or needs?

➔ Freshness: Content does not necessarily need a sell-by date, but studies have shown that new content is more readily passed along. Once content becomes widely shared, its value decreases over time. While evergreen content has a place in the content road map, fresh content stimulates consumption and drives engagement. For certain types of content, such as product reviews, the most recent reviews are considered more valuable. Your KPIs and overall business objectives will dictate the mix of new versus evergreen content.

➔ Unique: Value is built when content is perceived to be unique, proprietary or exclusive. This is an important aspect of building content equity and establishing a brand as an industry or thought leader. It differentiates the brand and creates more sharing opportunities.

➔ Linkable: Content today needs to be "link worthy." Link juice is the energy that drives brand interaction and brings new people to your content. Content that is "linked to" also takes on the halo effect of the person who is linking. It can be a de facto endorsement of both the content and the brand. Conversely, the context in which the link appears can also have negative impact. It behooves the brand to track inbound traffic from content links and understand if the context contributes or detracts from the brand's stories.

➔ Multimodal: Channel variety is broader than ever. Brands need to understand both traditional and social media to not only distribute content, but also create the right context for each type of channel. For example, a well-crafted tweet with a content link will be retweeted and shared broadly. The wrong 140 characters, however, can send your great content into oblivion.

Content Equity Continued

Targeted amplification: An accepted best practice today is to publish content across a mix of owned, earned, mass social, paid and partner properties. Effective content amplification has four key parts:

Segment strategy: Understanding the consumption and conversation patterns of target stakeholder segments drives content distribution strategy. A systematic review of venues can start with your listening program, but also needs to include other data points. Using a scorecard to review venues identified through listening is a valuable exercise.

But as good as many listening platforms are, they don't tell you everything you need to know. For example, most only capture activity that is public; influential LinkedIn Groups, Facebook Pages and LISTSERVs will usually not be reflected. Listening tools provide a snapshot in time and may not give a comprehensive view of what venues are influential over the long haul.

Also, some listening platforms will not uncover emerging influential venues or small but targeted niche sites and blogs. It is important to augment your listening research with first-person interviews with your own subject matter experts (SMEs) and influencers with whom you have relationships. Ask them what they read and whom they follow.

Venues are the starting point, but time sensitivity will impact content equity too. A recent study by Microsoft about consumers' Web consumption habits gives insights into the time of day and most likely days of the week that various segments consume and interact with content.

Conversation hubs: By now everyone has heard the mantra, "Go where the conversations are already taking place." Again, a great starting point. It is also essential to align those conversations with the points on the decision journey and other KPI-related destinations and conversation topics. This will drive a microcontent strategy by segment, venue and decision point.

Influencer relations: Earned media delivers a powerful content halo effect. Today's consumers want personal relationships with brands, but do not trust marketing content. When content is distributed via trusted third-party properties, the content becomes more credible. Knowing how to build relationships with influencers is powerful on multiple levels:

- Trust built over time makes it easier to be covered in influencer-owned media, including the embedding links to appropriate brand value-added content.
- Periodic conversations with multiple influencers helps hone the brand's content strategy, adding to its value and quality.
- Reaching out to vet ideas and concepts brings insights from the perspective of a thought leader.

Partner relationships: Building partnerships with companies or organizations that have similar interests or relationships with your high-value segments creates a trusted content distribution channel. Often, a co-halo effect emerges from alignment with the right partners.

Content Equity Continued

Taken by themselves, the individual steps of the entire content equity process can seem obvious or basic. In reality, systematically aligning all sides of this content Rubik's Cube presents deep challenges to many organizations.
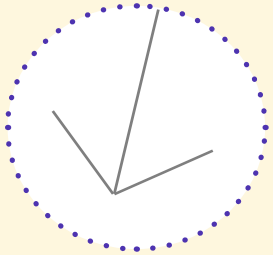
Content silos, uneven use of tracking and reporting mechanisms, ad hoc content road map creation and fear of user comments are just a few of the drags on content equity. Adopting a content supply chain approach can help systematize and align all of the moving parts of a dynamic content strategy.

Network effect: Today's dynamic content distribution environment brings both benefits and challenges. As people consume content, they comment on it, rate it and add personal context to it. Managing content in this dynamic environment requires a process that can track its journey and allow the original creator (the brand) to jump into the conversation and be part of its content's evolution. This process serves to make the content more approachable and reflect a powerful voice of the customer, rendering it more authentic and credible. Optimizing this network effect requires:

Advocate and user amplification: Today the definition of earned media has expanded to include the social assets of consumers and other stakeholders. Winning real estate on the Facebook Pages of customer advocates or scoring a tweet that includes a link to a brand's content carries the implied endorsement of the sender. In addition to creating content that people want to share, it is important to include content amplification requests when engaging customer and employee advocates or ambassadors. Tools like SocialToaster facilitate this.

Optimized for sharing and media amplification: It is almost table stakes to optimize your content for sharing—yet many content creators fail to embed sharing functionality within the body of their content. This includes Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Digg, StumbleUpon and others. Only having share functionality on a Web page or microsite does not ensure optimized sharing as content is redistributed across the social metaverse.

Maximized for SEO and sharing tools: Often it's important to return to the basics. One legacy tenant is to make sure that headlines and content summaries contribute to content stickiness.

Inbound interest: Generating inbound interest to specific content and information is an essential aspect of content equity. Depending upon the organization's defined KPIs, this is a crucial metric.

Follow click: If people are not engaging with your content and show the desire to learn more by clicking through to other assets that tell them more, then you need to tweak your approach to the insights and creation process. The link juice generated by inbound links is indicative of reaching the right people with the right content at specific points of research or decision.

Lessons of content equity: Once people land on your content, following the click path, dwell time, interaction with lead gen assets and other engagement will paint the picture of how well the content is performing.

Content Equity Work Plan

Leadership Team:

- **Agree upon business mission for content**

- **Translate business mission into measurable KPIs**

- **Add content KPIs to dashboard and review performance at least monthly**

- **Request full audit of all costs associated with current content supply chain**

- **Take time to learn how content is currently being created and amplified**

- **Review resource allocation model for content supply chain**

Content Team:

- Use information in this chapter to audit your content processes and optimize them for generating content equity

- Review each of the four building blocks of content equity and create a scorecard to gauge your current approach against a defined future state

Sample Scorecard Approach:

Building Block	Current State	Scale 1-5, 5 being best practice
Content Quality: Shareability	Process to ensure xx percent of content represents a unique topic or differentiated point of view	1 2 3 4 5
Content Quality: Freshness	Audit cycle in place to archive, sunset and refresh existing content	1 2 3 4 5
	Method for date stamping all new content and putting into refresh cycle	1 2 3 4 5

Once you score your current state, use results to start defining how you can calibrate your approach to get to the next level.

Supply Chain Overview

Just because content is not on your balance sheet doesn't mean its financial impact is negligible. According to McKinsey & Company, embedded costs alone for a content supply chain can range from $50 million to $75 million for a consumer products OEM to over $300 million for a global technology company.

Many elements comprise these costs, including: dedicated FTEs, creative resources, content management system licenses and maintenance, publishing platforms, owned media expense (custom magazines, websites and microsites, social media assets, newsletters), email distribution, content campaigns, distribution, software licenses, maintenance and hosting, video production, content creation, paid media partners and more.

A recent article in McKinsey Quarterly, "Four Ways to Get More Value From Digital Marketing," gives some insight into why costs can be so high: "Most marketers, failing to adopt the discipline of a multimedia publisher, don't realize that deep within their operations they are facing escalating production costs, unnecessary duplication, inconsistent quality of content and second-rate interactions with customers"—a recipe for low content equity and ROI.

This speaks directly to common content pain points: a lack of understanding of how to organize the content creation and distribution process and build the right mix of supporting resources.

ComBlu's content supply chain approach helps organizations:

Develop content based on market demand and business strategy

Establish processes for creating the right mix and volume of content

Manage the publication process

Understand and leverage distribution channels

Measure content equity and ROI

Most marketers, failing to adopt the discipline of a multimedia publisher, don't realize that deep within their operations they are facing escalating production costs, unnecessary duplication, inconsistent quality of content and second-rate interactions with customers.

—McKinsey Quarterly

Supply Chain Overview Continued

1. Insights

A replicable approach for overlaying multiple inputs to inform the content road map. This results in high content value and impacts amplification success.

2. Creation

Translating the insights process into a content strategy that drives creative briefs and content relevance by segment and organizes the content creation process.

3. Management

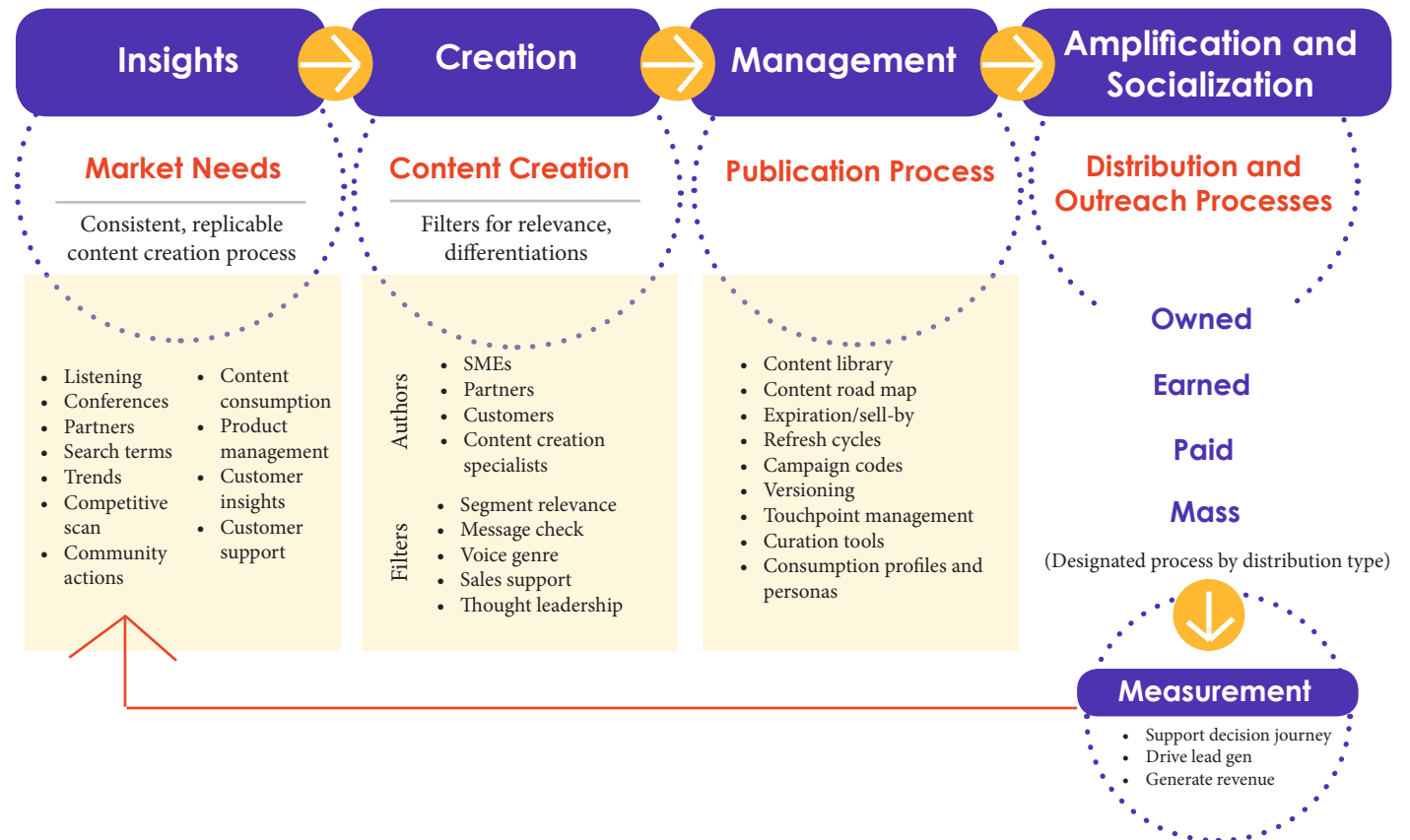Brings discipline to the ongoing publication process and manages content as an asset.

4. Amplification and Socialization

Determines the right mix of owned, earned, paid and mass outlets for content distribution.

5. Measurement

Tracks the return on content assets against specified KPIs.

Our method for implementing a content supply chain strategy begins with this broad perspective and has five distinct modules:

Insights →	Creation →	Management →	Amplification and Socialization
Market Needs	**Content Creation**	**Publication Process**	**Distribution and Outreach Processes**
Consistent, replicable content creation process	Filters for relevance, differentiations		

Market Needs
- Listening
- Conferences
- Partners
- Search terms
- Trends
- Competitive scan
- Community actions
- Content consumption
- Product management
- Customer insights
- Customer support

Content Creation

Authors
- SMEs
- Partners
- Customers
- Content creation specialists

Filters
- Segment relevance
- Message check
- Voice genre
- Sales support
- Thought leadership

Publication Process
- Content library
- Content road map
- Expiration/sell-by
- Refresh cycles
- Campaign codes
- Versioning
- Touchpoint management
- Curation tools
- Consumption profiles and personas

Distribution and Outreach Processes

Owned

Earned

Paid

Mass

(Designated process by distribution type)

Measurement
- Support decision journey
- Drive lead gen
- Generate revenue

Chapter Four:
Insights

The insights process is critical for optimizing content value, understanding the right mix of topics and genres and providing ongoing data to inform and evolve the content road map. During the course of our 35 years as a content partner to major brands, we've observed a true lack of decision support when companies determine topic strategy. While there is no dearth of available background to inform story ideation and road map development, it is typically scattered throughout the organization with no systematic way to capture, analyze and apply it. The deep knowledge and expertise that's available never gets unleashed in a powerful or usable way.

Here's why:

Organizations have listening programs, send people to conferences, interact with customers, provide counsel to prospects, research customer buying habits and preferences, gather competitive intelligence, manage customer communities and so on. These same organizations employ content editors and creators, outside agencies and contractors to create and distribute content. The intersections between the first set of people and processes and the second are at best linear and at worst haphazard. It's not that content creators don't talk to sales people or don't read the reports from customer insights, **but few manage this as a dynamic set of inputs that, when overlaid in an interesting and innovative way, can take content quality from commodity to transformative.**

Designing the right process for each organization depends on content mission and KPIs. For example, if a content amplification program is designed to help drive SEO for a consumer products company, then the insights approach starts with understanding high-value segments and what information each is seeking. Several inputs need to be overlaid for each segment. Information would be extrapolated from customer insights reports, marketing documents, search term analyses and listening reports based on topic stacks driven by the search terms.

Another key data point is linkback analysis to understand what types of content currently stimulate inbound interest to both the brand and its competitors.

Overlaying these feeds provides a more integrated view of content topics and genres (e.g., white paper vs. video), syndication channels, potential partnerships, missed opportunities, etc. In addition, this process helps organizations create filters to vet current and future content. For example, the filters can be used to score content currently in the content library across several dimensions. The score of each piece of content will determine if it is refreshed and amplified, sunsetted or remain active in the content road map as evergreen. Since the insights process is a "rinse and repeat" activity, it will be reviewed periodically (at least quarterly) as part of the ongoing content management process.

Different KPIs have different inputs.

For example, if the KPIs were associated with driving consideration and preference for a technology brand, the insights process would still start with understanding high-value segments and their information needs, but the feeds might come from very different sources than those in the SEO KPI example. In the case of the tech brand, information gleaned from customer and prospect conversations is key. Content consumption and engagement behavior inside branded online communities provide deep, real-time insights. Questions asked of speakers at conferences are very interesting and can help tag pain points or emerging issues. Customer advisory boards that provide insights and feedback are another key feed. Listening reports, search intent modeling and customer insights reports all have a place in this scenario.

One solution is to establish the optimal insights sourcing for each content KPI and then set up the organization like a news bureau.

While this makes good sense, this type of integrated insights process is very difficult to execute.

Why?

It requires a horizontal cut through the functional silos of most organizations. This prevents efficiencies in gathering these valuable inputs and prevents multidimensional analysis that leads to content breakthroughs. In many organizations, information is not readily shared—reports were created for one specific reason, and value beyond original intent is not considered. Others who could leverage that same information for other purposes (like content analysis!) do not know to ask for things they don't know exist. Even getting integrated into the marketing road map is not always easy—campaigns may run from multiple areas, and the content area may or may not be in the loop in a timely fashion.

Insights Continued

Case Study:

For one client, we established a content amplification strategy and content mission. We identified all of the internal stakeholders who would benefit from better content distributed in a timely and strategic way. These same stakeholders in many cases were also potential sources for content inputs. The internal "pitch" focused on business results and achievement of the objectives of each stakeholder group. We identified two to three key ways each group could both contribute AND benefit. Creating a repetitive process made it easy for each group to participate. Here are a few examples of what we were looking for:

Group	How They Contributed	How They Benefited
Sales	• Schedule of conferences and attendees • Commitment to be interviewed within three days of returning • Pull of monthly report from CRM system that highlights key conversations and concerns • Copies of new sales materials, backgrounders, sales briefs, competitive analysis, etc.	• Access to content that was tagged for various points of the customer's decision journey by segment and product area • Private online room for each major prospect where curated content would be delivered to help the sales team educate and collapse the sales cycle
Customer Support	• Top 10 list of issues and challenges that customers are experiencing	• Great support content that can be easily shared • Highlighting content aligned with these issues in owned media • Tracking how content has diminished calls or inquiries about these specific issues
Community Managers	• Reports of most consumed content • Insights into top issues in forums and discussions • Questions and issues expressed during live chats • Feedback results	• Share insights from integrated process to drive deeper engagement in community • Make product support more efficient and lower overall cost

This chart is just a peek into the entire value chain developed to first gain senior buy-in to the process, which makes interaction with the "news bureau" a priority. With this commitment established, editors were assigned beats (sales, community and customer support) and scheduled regular meetings and procedures to gather information. Once the multiple inputs were sourced and received, the editorial team could overlay, prioritize and create filters, story budgets and content road maps by segment or business unit.

In addition, each beat invited a representative from the functional area to join an editorial board that meets cross-functionally every quarter. This helps break down entrenched, natural barriers for sharing and brainstorming. At each of these sessions, the editorial team presents interesting findings and insights gained from cross-sourcing content inputs.

This dynamic approach to gathering insights and applying them to the content road map and creation process contributes efficiently to building content equity. It keeps the brand in the forefront of thought leadership and reaching consumers with pertinent content at each point of the decision journey.

Content Insights Work Plan

List Potential Resources for Topic Identification

Sample Resource Checklist:

Resource	Owner	High-Value Input
Listening		Weekly report against defined topic stack
SEO		Search intent modeling
Customer Care		Trend analysis of challenge needs
Sales Reports		Emerging trend

Coalesce Owners of These Sources

Sample Checklist:

- ☐ Create business case for participation
- ☐ Gain senior leader buy-in
- ☐ Present needs/value to target participants
- ☐ Establish participation guidelines

Create News Bureau that Regularly Taps Resources

Sample Checklist:

- ☐ Create cross-functional structure
- ☐ Develop job description for each role
- ☐ Establish performance criteria
- ☐ Develop tool kit to systematize insights process

Leadership Team:

- Understand the role of your function in the content development cycle
- Allocate time for specified SMEs to participate
- Require performance tracking for sub-KPIs
- Contribute content or insights as a SME
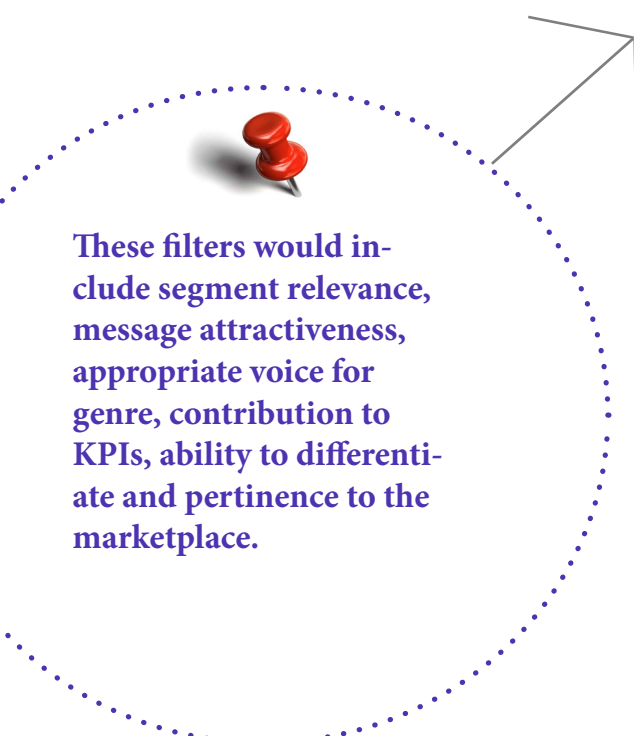
Creation

The insights process makes content creation more direct, effective and timely. **The challenge is finding the right mix of internal and external resources, as well as the right rhythm for "feeding the content beast."** This is a huge issue for brands as they think about resource allocation, bandwidth of their current team and volume and frequency of content creation.

The news bureau structure described in the previous chapter that assigns editors beats is a good organizational structure for the content creation process. The next step is recognizing that each beat will need a group of reporters who will actually create net-new content based on the content insights approach. **Authors can include professional staff writers, organizational SMEs, customer SMEs, outside content contractors, paid media networks and partner organizations (e.g., customers, vendors, NGOs, trade associations, special interest groups, etc.).** In addition, specialty skills such as video producers, app developers and data analysts may be needed. It is up to each editor to manage, direct and edit the work of each of their assigned resources.

Beat editors may also consider a content aggregation strategy as another content source. The editors would work hand in hand with the content management team (see next chapter) to curate and distribute this content. The editor needs to understand how the aggregated content impacts the content insights process and the topics the brand will ultimately develop.

One outcome of the insights process is the creation of filters that can be incorporated into a checklist or scorecard to gauge overall effectiveness of each content asset. This tool will focus authors and give editors a process to ensure the growth of content equity. And if the content is both emergent and engaging, it will have a longer shelf life, which can result in the need for fewer pieces of content.

It also can take cost out of the content supply chain and make resources more effective and efficient. For example, an internal SME can only carve out so much bandwidth to create a POV or white paper. If the topic is honed in partnership with the beat editor using multiple inputs from the insights process, time is saved and the resulting product performs better.

These filters would include segment relevance, message attractiveness, appropriate voice for genre, contribution to KPIs, ability to differentiate and pertinence to the marketplace.

It also can take cost out of the content supply chain and make resources more effective and efficient.

Creation Continued

Many brands still fall into the trap of thinking they need to produce content because they have a publishing cycle that dictates "x" pieces of content per week or month. They used traditional time-stamped publishing models to schedule content.

An emerging best practice is to monitor the content amplification process to uncover the natural rhythms and life cycle of your content. This will probably vary for each distribution channel and can be impacted if you publish content that regularly goes viral. However, if the nature and quality of your content is optimized, you may be able to publish less frequently with better effect.

As the content supply chain model is adopted, it's best to establish pilots to determine the impact and appeal of specific authors, calibrate publication schedules, adjust topic selection approach and understand the right mix of resources needed. This more strategic approach to content road map development will reduce costs, improve overall content equity and attract consumer or customer participation.

If the nature and quality of your content is optimized, you may be able to publish less frequently with better effect.

Content Creation Work Plan

Determine how each beat will be defined:
- Business unit
- Product group
- Overarching topics

Organize creation process for each beat

Beat Planning:

Frequency	Content Type	Beat Reporter	Resources	Status	Planning
Daily	Parse along timeline	Specific assignments	Determine mix and touch-base process	Determine reporting cycle	Touch base with editor
Weekly					Meet with subset of SMEs
Biweekly					Meet with subset of SMEs
Monthly					Beat meeting and reporting
Quarterly					Trend analysis for road map refine-ment

Beat Editor:

Assign → **Review** → **Edit** → **Approve** → **Hand off to logistics team**
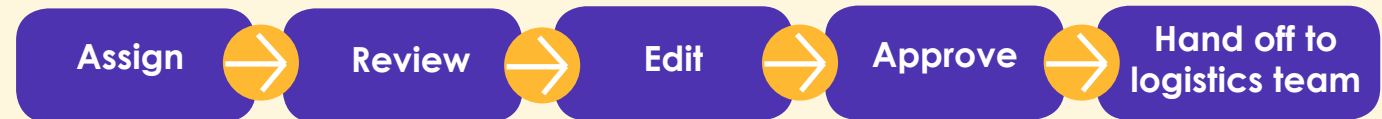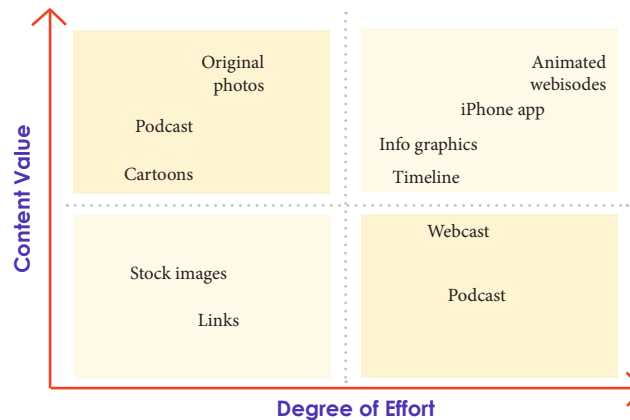
Chapter Six:
Management

The content management process is one of the most critical elements of the content supply chain. It's a process that cuts horizontally across all of the other nodes of the supply chain and requires leadership that brings both strategy and executional excellence to the task.

If you ask many organizations about the content management process, they most often reply, "I have a content management platform for that." In reality, content management is less about technology and more about strategically managing each piece of content as an asset. While the logistics of managing content remain, the management process encompasses many other elements, including taxonomy and tagging, touchpoint management, versioning, curation and distribution and program measurement.

One of the key strategic asks is creating a content strategy for each point in the decision journey that is driven by segment preferences for content type against effort and cost required to deliver. This graph gives one way to analyze content value against effort by segment.
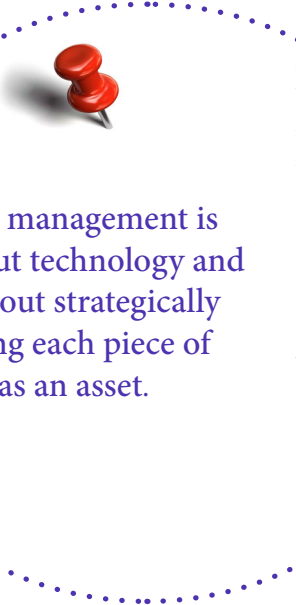
> Content management is less about technology and more about strategically managing each piece of content as an asset.

Chart with vertical axis "Content Value" and horizontal axis "Degree of Effort":
- Top-left quadrant: Original photos, Podcast, Cartoons
- Top-right quadrant: Animated webisodes, iPhone app, Info graphics, Timeline
- Bottom-left quadrant: Stock images, Links
- Bottom-right quadrant: Webcast, Podcast

Keith, Steven. "Tools of Engagement," 2011.

The right technology can do a lot of the heavy lifting and facilitate the logistics associated with content distribution and management. Basic functionality of a content management system (CMS) should provide ways to manage content workflows and mitigate associated risks, position an organization for better engagement, build content taxonomies, improve search and targeting efforts, manage content update cycles and enable discovery through regular content archiving.

Newer generation CMSes support rich, contextual, cross-channel engagement. They have added functionality that supports content tagging, mobile distribution and social interaction and can manage emerging media types such as video, rich Internet applications and audio. They also make it easy to support cross-channel interactions and provide a publishing platform that helps the content management team adapt the core content for multiple channels such as Web assets, mass social media, mobile apps, email, etc.

The content management process begins when creative passes off a new piece of content to the management team. Each piece of content should be assigned a SKU as a unique identifier, which incorporates information such as topic category, author, target audience segment, expiration date and other pertinent data. This will expedite the refresh and versioning tasks associated with managing the content library and road maps for each segment.

Management Continued

The goal is to expedite core functions that require tight rigor for execution success and where cross-channel consistency is desired to maintain an excellent customer or prospect experience.

It's crucial to embed campaign codes and unique hashtags into the links in each piece of content in order to track volume of linkbacks, identify referring URLs, monitor network effect and map the amplification footprint. Omniture or Webtrends campaign codes are good sources for these tags, depending on which service you use. **It's important to include both Omniture-type codes AND hashtags, or you will limit your ability to track the journey of a specific piece of content using a listening platform.** Some CMSes integrate with both Omniture and Webtrends—if yours doesn't, you can assign a campaign code manually. Once content is tagged and coded, it is put into the content library and distributed to established channels.

It's also critical to have capabilities to curate content. Some CMSes offer support for implicit and explicit rules-based targeting, recommendation engines and, increasingly, geolocation. Some capture the click path, content consumption or page dwell times of a content consumer once they land on a page via an inbound link and then dump that info directly into a CRM system. This in turn feeds the recommendation engine and can be an important source for the content insights process, which makes curation more granular and effective.

Some organizations augment the capabilities of their CMS with niche tools for curation and other functions. Curata and Percolate are both interesting content curation services. Other tools enable amplification across the social networks of customer advocates or simplify sharing and interaction with the brand—Gigya and Janrain are good examples.

While the insights and content creation nodes of the supply chain are best performed at the business unit or "local" level, management is typically an enterprise function. This prevents channel confusion and adoption of competing technologies, while facilitating oversight of outreach and administration of software and hardware licenses. **Many organizations are adopting the same type of hub-and-spoke structure that they've implemented for their centers of excellence.** Here they centralize technology implementation and migration, governance, best practice research and review and management of specific tasks. In some cases, they maintain partner and influencer relations, but that can easily be a local activity. The goal is to expedite core functions that require tight rigor for execution success and where cross-channel consistency is desired to maintain an excellent customer or prospect experience. Those tasks that require subject matter expertise, product knowledge, segment expertise and flexibility to create new content based on emerging dynamics are best left to local resources.

Some organizations also centralize the listening process that is so important to gaining insights, identifying potential partners and influencers and tracking content along its journey. This last point is very important, since content morphs into multiple new units as it travels. **Rating, commenting and sharing with context can either enhance or fundamentally change the original content asset. Brands need to have a system to monitor and jump in with their own comments and context when appropriate.** Again, most often the monitoring is done on the enterprise level, but the interaction with the evolved content should be handled locally.

Content Management Work Plan

Strategy:

- ☐ Create process for "bar coding" content
  - Content asset
  - Campaign
- ☐ Keep content business requirements updated
- ☐ Analyze reports and translate to actions
- ☐ Create content curation strategy
- ☐ Determine mix of centralized vs. local functions

Technology:

- ☐ Review supporting tech infrastructure
- ☐ Identify gaps against content business requirements
- ☐ Incorporate tools to match capabilities to business requirements
- ☐ Maintain and manage technology base (often in partnership with IT)

Reporting:

- ☐ Generate dashboards according to agreed upon reporting cycle

Ongoing Actions:

- ☐ Code content
- ☐ Maintain content library
- ☐ Develop and maintain partnerships
- ☐ Manage refresh cycle
- ☐ Curate content
- ☐ Match content assets to conversations in the cloud
- ☐ Manage amplification process

Whether the brand is trying to drive consideration and preference along the purchase decision journey or gain support for an issue or idea, understanding the content consumption patterns and behaviors of a brand's high-value segments is key to developing a strategic media plan for content distribution. Different channels and content are aligned with each point of the decision journey.

Several recent studies have touted the growing importance of the post-purchase life cycle of a customer. The new-purchase journey schematic is one where post-purchase activity, particularly word-of-mouth and peer reviews, loop back to influence the pre-decision experience of new or repeat buyers.
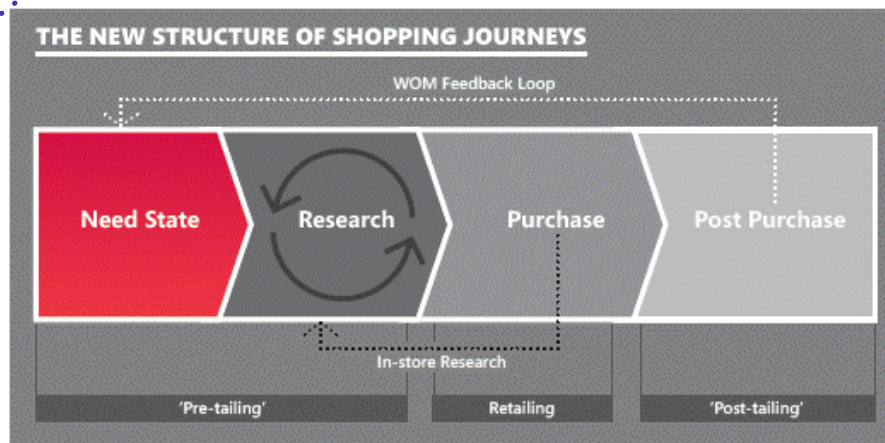
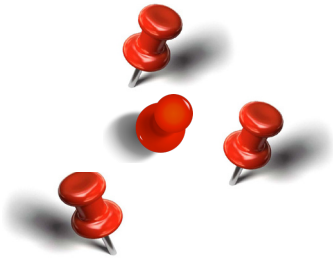"The New Structure of Shopping Journeys," 2011. *New Shopper Journeys,* Microsoft Advertising, Carat.

Today's decision or shopping journey entails three main "destinations":

1. Pre-tailing or pre-decision, which is all about recognizing a need for a product or service or considering a new idea or issue and then researching it.

2. Retailing or decision time, which encompasses the actual purchase cycle, point of adoption or issue support.

3. Post-tailing or post-decision, which involves the post-purchase experience or evangelism around an idea or issue.
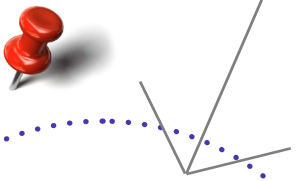
Multiple touchpoints by the brand, influencers, customers and the "buyers" or content consumers themselves all need to be part of the channel strategy.

Following is a peek at each type of media or channel to consider when building an amplification plan.

Owned	Earned	Paid	Mass Social
Owned media are all of the touchpoints that the brand controls and manages. These can include a wide variety of assets, including: • Websites • Microsites • Print publications • Blogs • Podcasts • Video channels • Communities • Branded social assets like LinkedIn Groups, YouTube Channels, Facebook Pages, Twitter accounts, etc. • Mobile apps	Earned media require the owner of the channel to provide "real estate" for your content, including: • Blogs • Communities • Partner assets • Commercial media (print, broadcast and online) • Websites and microsites • Social assets • Mobile apps	"Pay to play" is the business model of paid media, including: • Commercial media (advertorials, banner ads, etc.) • Blogger networks such as CafeMom or Federated Media • Partner assets	These are assets typically owned by the buyer or stakeholder: • Personal Facebook Page, Twitter account, YouTube Channel, etc. • Blog • Personal website or niche community

A mix of all media types is important to maximize impact of a content amplification program. **Determining the right media mix starts with understanding the media consumption habits for each of your high-value segments.** Further, it's crucial to match media consumption patterns, content type and topics to specific points along the decision journey. For example, reviews are important in the pre-tailing phases, while product specs and cost comparison tools impact the purchase phase. This process is refined as the content amplification process unfolds. And tracking content amplification, socialization and consumption yields analytics that can be used to refine partner strategy.

The easiest media to schedule, of course, are the brand's owned assets. Since all of them may not be under your local jurisdiction, you may need to do some outreach to get onto the content road map of key assets. If you create a value proposition in the insights process for each asset owner, the pitch will be easier.

You'll also want to research the owned assets of the potential partner to understand what you might ask for in a partnership. For example, if the partner owns a branded online community, there might be a possibility for guest blogger spots or to be featured on a live chat event. Do they publish a magazine or newsletter for which you could provide a regular column or infographics? Also know what you can offer them in return—they need a clear understanding of the benefit to them. This is a partnership, after all.

ComBlu uses a partner suitability scorecard with evaluation criteria such as reputation, relationships, internal influencers, audience match, reach, etc. **Criteria for the scorecard should be unique to your brand or organization and relate back to your business objectives and KPIs.** We score any potential partner before we decide if we want to pursue a relationship. Only those partners that meet minimal partnership thresholds are contacted. This saves both time and money, as you are only contacting those potential partners best aligned with your goals.

Other earned media opportunities could include periodic inclusion of your content on the assets of key influencers or on niche community sites. **Early conversations with media owners can gauge interest and uncover potential engagement opportunities.** Again, it may be more fruitful if you have guest blogger opportunities or other assets that you can offer to the influencer as a quid pro quo. Make sure you familiarize yourself with the earned outlet's personality, reach, voice and content style before approaching them.

> **It's crucial to match media consumption patterns, content type and topics to specific points along the decision journey.**

Earned media can be a bit trickier. Before you outreach to potential partners, you first need to know:

- What relationships already exist, and who in the enterprise owns that relationship?
- Has the relationship been fruitful for both parties, or is there any latent animosity or unrealized potential?
- Have previous attempts at partnership failed?

Amplification and Socialization Continued

When outreaching, remember that each media owner may have its own preference for how and when you interact with them. **You have to research and customize your outreach approach for each top tier target.** Don't forget to determine if someone in your organization has an existing relationship with an influencer that can smooth the way. If not, you should explore social networks to research a connection. For example, perhaps you can get introduced via LinkedIn.

Once you establish an earned media list, use your ongoing listening program to continuously enhance it. New outlets and partners will emerge, which need to be scrutinized using your scorecard before adding to your list. **In addition, watch the hops your content takes. Another influencer or blogger may include your content link in a story or post, and it might have better link juice than the original.** If so, add the new outlet and reach out to the new earned media owner.

You will go through a similar vetting process for paid media outlets. Most paid media networks organize a group of bloggers, like a news syndicate such as the Associated Press (AP). They work to match their authors to specific persona types that the brand is trying to reach. These blogger networks build an audience through placement of links and content on their blogger properties and provide analytics of results. It's a good strategy if you want to create a lot of content and reach quickly. These same paid networks can provide you external experts as bloggers on your branded platform.

You need to monitor FTC guidelines when using paid media and follow appropriate regulations for transparency. And you'll need good negotiation skills with paid media to net the best contract deal possible.

Finally, the mass social outlets of consumers and customers are one of the most powerful media channels. These spread word-of-mouth among family, friends and followers and drive the network effect that is so key to growing content equity. Making it "easy to care" and "easy to share" is the key to success when trying to tap the personal networks of your customers and brand advocates. There are tools that make the sharing easier, but the passion must be born out of positive experience or a wonderful and useful piece of content that just screams "share me."

For maximum impact, you need to consider the "gamification" trend in the sharing and rating of content. In essence, a points system is attached to various content consumption, sharing, commenting and rating actions. This helps recognize and reward people who are high content sharers and curators, as well as provides key data points for the insights and creation process. Several tools exist for cloud badging and recognition including Badgeville and ComBlu's LeaderBoard.

Once you establish an earned media list, use your ongoing listening program to continuously enhance it.

For maximum impact, you need to consider the "gamification" trend in the sharing and rating of content.

Content Amplification Work Plan

Leadership Team:

- **Identify high-value segments**
- **Authorize customer advocates as amplification channel**
- **Allocate resources for tools to facilitate sharing**
- **Ensure "owned" assets cooperate**

Content Management Team Checklist:

- ☐ Create channel strategy for each beat
- ☐ Develop distribution schedule tied to content creation and other milestones
- ☐ Embed links to generate inbound traffic
- ☐ Develop and manage relationships with channel owners (internal and external)
- ☐ Regularly review suitability of channels and partnerships
- ☐ Use variety of tools to refine channel strategy
- ☐ Monitor cost/benefit equation of paid partnerships
- ☐ Make sure you comply with all FTC regulations when using paid partnerships or spokespeople

Measurement

The measurement process provides the datapoints needed for quality control, sourcing excellence and performance of specific assets at specific points in the decision journey.

Content equity begins by understanding what value you want your content to deliver. The resulting content mission helps to define KPIs that are the core of measuring the ROI of your content investments. Measuring the impact of your content program and understanding the equity that accrues requires the ability to capture metrics from multiple sources and display it in a single dashboard.

We use our proprietary Social Optics Service™ for this task, but you can also pull data points into a spreadsheet and analyze them that way. **Our measurement process starts with the creation of an index for each KPI that typically has five to eight metrics that together tell the performance story.** Each metric receives a weight that indicates its role in achieving the specific KPI. The performance is displayed on the measurement dashboard as an index, much like a stock ticker. We can view the contribution or drag a single or multiple metrics to the KPI index and use that information as a diagnostic to inform future strategy and tactics.

The important thing is to know which content is performing and which distribution channels provide the best positioning and consumption. The resulting data becomes another source for the insights process so that efficiencies and effectiveness evolve exponentially.

The measurement process provides the datapoints needed for quality control, sourcing excellence and performance of specific assets at specific points in the decision journey. This leads to better decision support across the entire content supply chain.
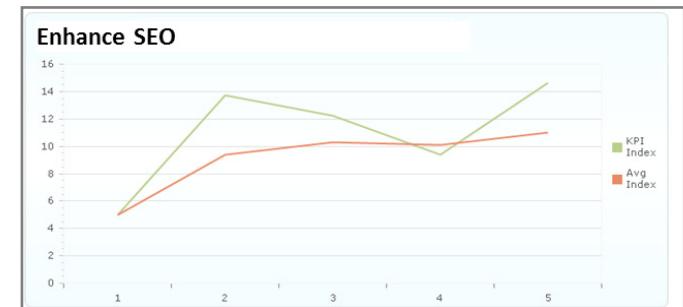
Enhance SEO

KPI 1: Enhance SEO				
Metric	Dec	Jan	Change	Trend
Number of total visitors	4,665	5,000	6.7%	▲
Percentage of new visits	50%	70%	28.6%	▲
Bounce/churn rate	50%	50%	0.0%	▪
Number of page views	999	800	-24.9%	▼
Number of referring campaign URLs	10	18	44.4%	▲
Number of link backs	13	13	0.0%	▪

Content Measurement Work Plan

Leadership Team:

- **Clearly define content KPIs**

- **Give direction for format and frequency of reporting**

- **Meet with content team to gain insights into performance**

- **Use as diagnostic to calibrate content ROI**

**Content Management
Team Checklist:**

- ☐ Define metrics associated with each KPI

- ☐ Identify source for each metric

- ☐ Determine owner of source and how to automate receipt on scheduled basis

- ☐ Roll up into dashboard

- ☐ Generate report, analyze and meet/share with stakeholders

Conclusion

This e-book started by defining content equity and continued with a detailed look at the content supply chain process, which is how you grow that equity. This brief book contains many complex concepts, any one of which can be overwhelming and, taken together, seem herculean. The trick is to segment each part of the content supply chain into discrete, logical steps that inform execution plans and stimulate cross-functional buy-in and commitment.

This Top 10 list summarizes key points in the content supply chain process and makes it more approachable.

INSISGHTS

1. Define content mission against business objectives and define aligned KPIs.

2. Assign topic beats with editors, reporters and sources that will drive a dynamic insights process that cuts horizontally across functional silos.

CREATION

3. Create content filters and scorecards to gauge content effectiveness.

4. Develop dynamic publishing cycles, not strict time-stamped models.

MANAGEMENT

5. Drive management process with content strategists; facilitate content logistics with the right mix of tools and technology.

6. Develop a tracking system by assigning each content asset a unique code.

7. Curate content to deliver the right type of content at specific points along the decision journey.

AMPLIFICATION

8. Include a mix of owned, earned, paid and mass social media in the amplification mix; evolve and grow the mix over time.

9. Develop a custom outreach approach for each channel type and venue.

MEASUREMENT

10. Measure and index performance against each content KPI to track ROI and calibrate content strategy.

Glossary

Content Amplification
The process of expanding the original footprint of a piece of content through the use of social media tools and networks of supporters and partners.

Content Curation
The human organizing and filtering of content that matches the interests and needs of the content consumer.

Content Equity
The growth of content value in direct relation to its contribution to business KPIs. Value accrues as stakeholders attribute higher share of voice to the brand and acknowledge its ownership of specific ideas, concepts, topics or stories compared to other brands trying to own similar messages or thought leadership. Content equity provides positioning leverage that impacts consideration and preference over time.

Content Supply Chain
The systematic adoption of core processes and disciplines that helps organizations source content topics; create content efficiently and effectively in multiple formats and genres; conduct resource planning to deliver content in a "just in time" fashion to the marketplace at the point of consideration, manage content delivery logistics; and track quality and performance against business KPIs.

Decision Journey
The path taken by a stakeholder when considering a purchase, support of an idea or adoption of new skills. The phases include: awareness, familiarity, consideration, preference and loyalty. The stakeholder seeks different types of information at each point in the decision journey.

Earned Media
Coverage or inclusion in the media outlets of publishers, organizations, influencers or partners without payment for the privilege.

Full-time Equivalents (FTEs)
Full-time employees or resources that equal the skills and time allocation of a full-time employee.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
A method to measure progress against specified performance goals. Choosing the right KPIs is reliant upon a deep understanding of what is important for the success of a business, department or project, and then systematically measuring improvement in those areas.

Owned Media
Assets owned and controlled by a brand or organization, including both branded and nonbranded assets such as websites, online communities, newsletters, magazines, blogs, podcasts, video channels and other formats.

Paid Media
Coverage or inclusion in various types of media outlets in return for payment. This includes advertising, banners, paid blogger networks, advertorials, etc.

Point of View (POV)
A brief declaration of an organization's or person's outlook about a topic, issue, product or idea. POVs typically are research-based and give an opinion about the facts and dynamics presented.

Social Media
The use of Web-based or mobile tools to turn communication into conversation and dialogue.

Stakeholders
A person or group with an interest of "stake" in an organization.

Contact Us

If you want help:

- Optimizing content ROI
- Organizing content supply chain
- Developing tools and scorecards for your content team
- Analyzing current approach against desired future state

Give us a shout. Or, we'll be happy to do a free webinar for your content leadership team.

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