



ULTIMATE 11-STEP GUIDE

*To
Mastering
Your Digital
Content
Strategy*

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When you look into the window of your monitor, what kind of world do you see?

The landscape is a sprawl of websites, social media hubs, search engines, blogs, apps, and streaming platforms. Ordinary people from all around the globe, of every age and from every walk of life, congregate at these informational hubs — meeting and greeting one another, sharing pics, trading likes, making new friends, singing catchy songs, and soaking up the latest news, gossip, trends, and topics.

Every day, big brands thunder onto the scene, attracted by all the noise and activity. Some brands keep their distance, waiting for customers to come to them — while others rush straight in, roaring with sales pitches. The most clever of all, however, bide their time, scope out the crowd, zero in on likely prospects, and beckon those prospects toward them with alluring personalized content.

Where do you fit into this landscape?

This isn't a fuzzy question — or a rhetorical one. The more clearly you can explain your answer, the more precisely you can answer those big strategic questions that've been nagging at you:

“Who are my target customers — not the abstract personas, but the actual people?”

“Where do those people hang out, and what do they want from my brand?”

“Why aren't they responding to my content like I hoped?”

This guide gives you the tools to answer all those questions, and many more. But first, let's look at the root cause of the trouble:

You've been hoping for magic — when you really need to be doing science.

Most business owners roll onto the internet like they're shouting into a megaphone — tossing out articles, videos, infographics, and social media posts in the hope that some of that content will magically “click” with the right audience.

But of course, that “click” rarely happens — leaving these marketers dismayed to learn that all their hard work hasn't brought in the conversions they were hoping for.

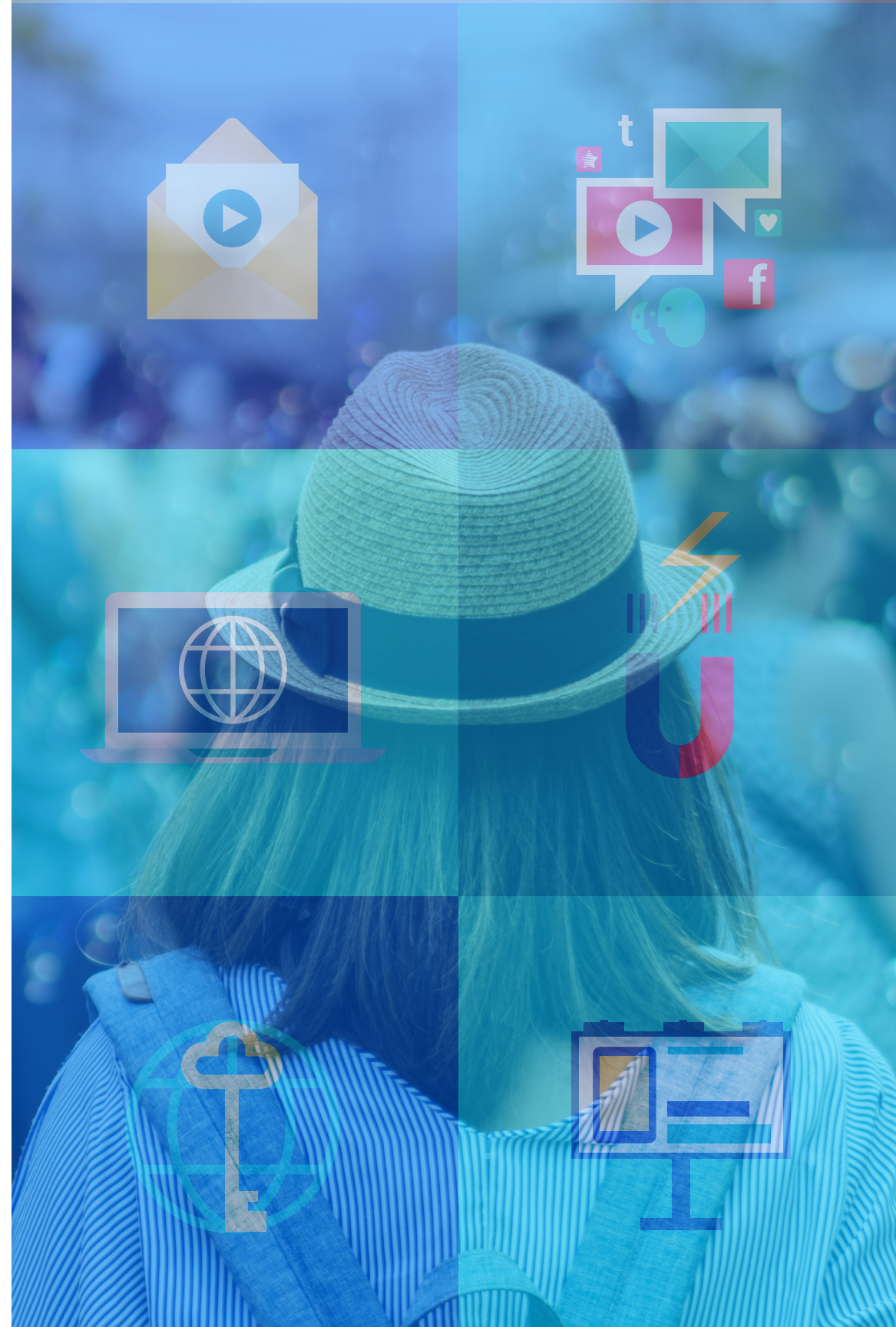
What are these marketers doing wrong?

It's pretty obvious.

Blasting out content at random is not a digital content strategy — any more than “throw the ball super hard and run so fast” is a strategy for a football team.

A strategy is a plan. A set of goals, steps to reach those goals, and meaningful metrics for tracking and improving upon past results.

This guide teaches you how to master your digital content strategy, from the ground up.



To do that, we've got to step back from the content and take a closer look at the people you're trying to reach.

Here's what we'll do together:

1. Build up a clear picture of your audience.
2. Establish why your audience needs your solutions.
3. Create a welcoming public persona that invites your audience to discover you.
4. Construct a solid framework for the actions you want your audience to take.
5. Generate content that inspires your audience to take those actions.
6. Set up a system for fueling the production of that content.
7. Design a lab that stockpiles and distributes that content consistently over time.
8. Analyze the data you get back from your audience's interactions with that content.
9. Use that data to build an even more impactful campaign for the next round.

When we're finished, you'll have a sleek, efficient digital marketing lab generating fresh content and reeling in conversions — 24 hours a day, all on its own.

Your journey to digital content mastery begins right now. Let's take the first step together.



STEP 1: BECOME YOUR AUDIENCE

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE WORLD YOU'RE CREATING CONTENT FOR

Are you hoping everybody in the world will see your content and love every word of it? If so, you'll notice that dream has limitations. Not everyone in the world speaks your language. Even fewer people are in the market for what you're selling, have the resources to pay for it, and live where you can deliver it to them.

Although these facts narrow your audience quite a bit, they don't tell you much about who, exactly, you'll be creating content for. That's the first thing you need to figure out, before you even think about putting together a content strategy. Who's your audience going to be?

Your target audience may not be the same as your customer base.

You may get bigger, better results by discovering new customer segments, and reaching out to those people. On the flipside, certain customers may not need or want content from you at all — or, much more likely, different customers will want different content on different screens, at different times of the day, week, month, and year.

In other words, there's no one-size-fits-all solution to audience targeting. But before you start creating content, you need to have a clear picture of the people who'll be consuming it.

You've probably heard about buyer personas — those bizarre imaginary people like “Harry Homeowner” and “Millennial Maya,” who business owners whip up to represent the audiences they say they'll be selling to.

But I've got news for you:

Buyer personas are artificial, annoying, and nowhere near as useful as marketers claim.

Look, I get it. Marketers use buyer personas to generalize about their audiences' traits, zero in on needs they want to meet, and differentiate groups of customers. But there are more efficient ways to figure out who you'll be targeting with your content — without having to talk about how “Maggie is a mom on the go.”

Reality check: “Maggie the mom” does not exist. Your audience really exists. Let's figure out who they are, and what they actually want.

Start by asking yourself this one simple question:

“Who is not buying from me right now, and should be?”

There's more than one answer to this question. Maybe you've got customers who bought from you once, then never came back. Other prospects considered your offer, but didn't actually buy. Still others have never heard of you at all. Your happiest customers have friends and family members who may be interested in what you're selling. And then there are the customers who made a deal with one of your competitors. All these people should have bought from you. Each of them should be buying from you right now. They should be planning to buy from you again in the future,

shouting from the rooftops, telling everyone in earshot how great you are, and how you can help them solve their problems.

These aren't abstract personas; they're real people — and when you start creating content that meets their needs, you'll begin to build relationships that will grow into more purchases, more referrals, and a better bottom line.

Zero in on your target audience by asking these four key questions:

1. Who's interested in what you have to say?

Interview people who might be interested in the things you create. Talk to your friends. Ask them where they go to meet other like-minded people. Shake the trees on your social networks. Before long, you'll start hearing about websites, apps, pages and groups where your well-connected friends get together. Take notes.

2. Where do those people hang out online?

Once you've found your target audience, immerse yourself in their scene. Expand beyond initial points of contact until you've got a complete picture of the digital platforms where your audience spends time. Move in, and learn to be a local.

3. What do they like to talk about?

After a while, you'll start to get a feel for the discussions your audience comes back to, the jokes they tell, and the memes they throw around. Along the way, you'll find out what tools, insights and resources they're looking for that you might be able to provide. That insight will become very important in the next few steps of this guide.

4. Where do they go for the latest info?

Aside from hangout spaces, where else does your audience go to keep up to date on what's happening in the world? Find out which websites and publications they respect, and which celebrities and influencers they check in with when they're on the lookout for new discoveries and recommendations.

Live and breathe your audience for a week or so, and I guarantee you'll have no problem coming up with kickass topics to talk about. Once you've got a sense of who your audience is, where they hang out online, what they like to talk about, and where they go to get the latest info, you're ready to start pinpointing the





STEP 1 CHECKLIST:

Who's interested in what I have to say?

1. _____

Where do those people hang out online?

2. _____

What do they like to talk about?

3. _____



STEP 2: FIND PLEASURE POINTS

FIGURE OUT HOW YOU'LL MAKE YOUR AUDIENCE HAPPY

WISH LIST



You've immersed yourself in the world of your audience. You speak their tongue; you feel their pain. Now you're fully equipped to focus in on pleasure points they want to experience. If you've followed Step 1 ("Become Your Audience") to the letter, you've know those desires firsthand, which means you understand exactly what it takes to gratify them.

pleasure point — a specific wish your audience wants fulfilled, which you're in a position to grant

The problem with **pleasure points**, however, is that there are just so many of them! If you're in the skydiving business, you can't help your customers buy their own airplanes — but you can certainly save them a lot of time picking out the best skydiving spots on earth. As you experience your customers' desires, keep asking yourself these two simple questions:

- 1) *Is this a wish I can help grant?*
- 2) *If so, how?*

Far too many digital marketers focus on supposed "content niches" and SEO keywords — instead of simply taking the time to get to know their audience, and understand what kinds of content will bring those people genuine joy.



How is the approach you're taking different? A good way to start is by making a list of the pleasures your audience wants to experience, which you're going to help deliver to them:

1. What do they want to spend more time doing?
2. What do they want to learn more about, or better understand?
3. What do they want to save money on?
4. What do they wish they could afford?
5. Which processes do they wish flowed more smoothly?
6. Which puzzles do they want to solve?
7. Where do they want to go?
8. What abilities and skills do they wish they had?
9. What groups do they want to join?

As you put together this list of pleasure points, think about how your expertise and resources can help grant those wishes for your audience. Maybe your solutions expand your customers' potential. Maybe you provide red-rope access to exclusive groups. Maybe your content helps clarify a confusing issue, or teaches a useful skill, or provides access to rare resources, or offers solutions to perplexing puzzles.

The more wishes you're able to grant for your audience, the more loyal customers you'll acquire. And the more solutions you offer generously, as a courtesy, the more you'll come across as a genius with access to a limitless fund of knowledge.

STEP 2 CHECKLIST

What are three wishes I can grant for my audience?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How will I provide each of those pleasures?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

STEP 3: FOCUS ON ACTION

PINPOINT
THE ACTIONS
YOU WANT
YOUR AUDIENCE
TO TAKE



Too many times, I've asked a business owner the simple question, "What action do you want people to take when they see this content?" —and they don't have an answer.

Mind boggling, I know.

Many business owners have a vague sense that they're supposed to generate high-powered streams of content, yet they have no clear idea of what they want that content to do. It's like filing a patent for an invention that has no specific purpose. The patent officer would probably be very confused, then laugh and throw your application in the trash. As well she should.

All right, so you want your content to drive sales. Don't we all?

Except, here's the thing:

*"Driving sales" is not an action.
Sales result from a series of actions
you need your customer to take.*

Before you start assembling content, you need to know exactly what you're going to ask your audience to do in response to that content — and that's probably not going to be just one action, but a whole sequence, each action depending on the one before it.

Yes, we're talking about the ever-popular **customer journey**. The roots of this idea run back to the anthropologist Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey," in

which mythological heroes from all around the world — from Hercules to Wonder Woman — get into very similar predicaments, and emerge from their struggles with very similar discoveries about themselves and the worlds around them.

What does this have to do with digital content? I'm glad you asked.

Every member of your audience sees themselves as the main character in a story — the story of their life.

To win their trust, you need to demonstrate that you, too, see them as the hero of that story.

customer journey — the series of decision points through which each prospective customer progresses on their way to a conversion

That means you need to take on the role of a character in their story — the helpful shopkeeper, perhaps; or the wise old ranger, or the faithful sidekick, or the proud mentor. By crafting a narrative featuring your customer as the hero, you guide each member of your audience toward purchases, referrals, and rave reviews.

Each customer's journey is unique — and every industry and organization offers a distinct set of possible pathways for those journeys.

A fast-food customer's journey is simple: he sees a commercial for a burger, drives to the restaurant, and satisfies his craving. A real estate customer's journey, on the other hand, involves many more steps — while

the journey of a smartphone user might begin with the initial purchase, and continue through a whole universe of apps and customizations.

In general, though, every customer journey follows these seven basic decision points:



1. What's this company selling?

With some prospective customers, you're really starting from zero — they may not have even heard of your company. Or maybe they've heard your name, but have very little idea what you provide. At this stage, you shouldn't even be thinking about making a sale. Your job is to get to know your potential customer, answer their questions, and learn how to fill the gaps in their knowledge base.

2. Why would I want what this company sells?

Now that your prospect knows what you've got to offer, it's time to cross the first big hurdle: awakening desire. This is where all that "Hero's Journey" magic really kicks in. Use exciting visuals to help your prospect envision themselves using your solution. Show them how, when they tap into the power you're offering, they'll become a heroic problem solver.

3. How does this company solve my problems?

At this point, it's natural for your prospect to wonder how, exactly, all this heroic problem solving will actually work. It's time to delve into the details, and lay out the step-by-step process by which you're going to transform your prospect into a hero. Don't be afraid to raise and address objections — because that demonstrates confidence.

4. Which of these solutions is best for me?

A lot of your hardest work is already finished. Your prospect has already envisioned themselves using your solution, and they understand how you're going to help them become a hero. Here's where you help them narrow down their options, guiding them toward the offering that perfectly fulfills their desires.

5. When should I invest in this — now, or some other time?

At this point in the journey, it's very common for your prospect to say, "This is amazing. I've made a note of it, and I'll come back to it when I can." Your job is to prevent that moment from happening — but a word of warning: *don't turn up the heat!* Aggressive tactics will work against you here. Instead of pressuring your prospect to buy now, gently talk them out of buying later.

6. Is it worth what I'd have to pay for it?

By now, your prospect already knows you can solve their problem. They know which of your options they want, and they've decided they've got the means to buy it right now. The only question left is whether you'll actually deliver the value you've promised. Now's a great time to offer a little something extra, just to tip 'em onto your side of the fence.

7. Who else do I know who'd enjoy this?

Everybody loves to be seen as an expert. When your solution delights your customer, they'll naturally want to impress their friends and family with an insider recommendation. But of course, sometimes the rest of life gets in the way, and your happy customer may get distracted — which is why it's your job to remind them to make that referral.

Between the sixth and seventh steps on this journey, of course, lies the moment when the customer finally decides to buy from you. That's the point we're trying to get to — but the route may not be direct, and getting there is rarely under your control.

Customers may encounter your brand in a store, on the TV, or on their phone. They may respond by clicking "Buy" — or, more likely, they'll ignore you, or make a note of your name. If you're lucky, they might talk about you to their friends. Maybe they'll buy later. Maybe one of their friends will.

But no matter where each shopper is on their individual journey...

Every piece of content you publish should recommend they take a specific action — and every action needs to point toward a purchase or referral.

At every step of this pinball machine of a journey, your content needs to move your customers one decision closer to that all-important click. If they've never been to your website, ask them to go take a look. If they haven't signed up for your email list, invite them to get in on all the juicy info you're dishing out. If they haven't seen your product in action, show them the demo. And mention that, oh, and by the way — if they'd like a little something extra, that's exactly what you're offering.

It's as simple as that. Whether you're inspiring your audience to visit your website, sign up for your email list, subscribe to your Facebook feed, schedule an appointment, visit your store, purchase your solution, or refer a friend to you, think about what you want them to do next — and nudge them toward that action.

STEP 3 CHECKLIST:

What are three actions my audience will take when they interact with my content?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

STEP 4: STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD

DEFINE THE FACTORS THAT WILL DIFFERENTIATE YOUR CONTENT



Have you noticed how packed the internet is with billions of articles, blogs, tweets, photos, videos, and other content — most of them ripping each other off?

All right, so that's not exactly a revelation. Every day, we're blasted with eye-catching imagery and clickbait headlines, beckoning us to sites that repeat the same facts and images we've already seen a million times.

To establish your brand as an authority, you're going to have to break the cycle of boring, repetitive content.

That means you'll need to find unexpected topics to talk about. Your content will have to approach those topics in unorthodox ways, and present them in unusual formats. And that's going to take some digging, because groundbreaking ideas don't exactly grow on trees.

The first step in creating a unique brand voice is to zero in on your content's **key differentiators**. These are the attributes of your content that just can't be duplicated.

For example, Marvel is the only company that makes blockbuster movies about Marvel-brand superheroes. *The New York Times* became the go-to source for daily news in NYC — and built itself into one of the most trusted news brands in the world.

key differentiator — a quality or ability that creates a meaningful distinction between your brand and the “next best thing”

Stephen King dreamed up dozens of bestselling horror novels, which made him synonymous with modern mass-market fright.

Equally compelling examples abound in the world of digital marketing. In 2017, rental brand AirBnb won [thousands](#) of loyal new customers by taking a vocal stand for renter equality. Investment company Morgan Stanley multiplied their followers by creating [a blog](#) of personal finance success stories. On a more oddball note, the American diner chain Denny's hired a social media manager who appears to be [on drugs](#) — which turned out to be the perfect fit for that brand's audience.



Before you start putting together a content plan, you need to know how, precisely, your content will be different from the next best thing.

Here's a list of 12 possible ways your brand's content can differentiate itself:

1. Share tips from the inside



Everybody loves friends who can get them smart investment tips, reserve a great table or a ringside seat, or offer a forbidden glimpse of some backroom wheeling and dealing. Initiate your audience into the inside track, and they'll be proud to keep you in their pocket as a source of hard-to-find info.

2. Take a stand for the planet



You've probably seen those reports about millennials jumping ship from brands they perceive as wasteful to side loyally with brands that stand up for eco-friendliness. You might not know, though, that baby boomers also value brands on a surprisingly similar basis. After all, it's easy to love a company that cares for the earth.

3. Be the first-class upgrade

Did you know that Grey Goose vodka rarely scores any better than mid-price brands in taste tests? That's because it is, in fact, a mid-range vodka — brilliantly branded as a favorite of the world's elite. There's a little bit of snob in all of us, and many brands have carved out successful niches for themselves by playing to that part of the human psyche.



4. Defend the defenseless



No matter what industry you're in, somebody connected with that industry is probably getting the short end of the stick. Become a proactive advocate for victims of unfair and unethical practices, and celebrate the systems you've put in place to protect those who've been exploited. When people do business with you, they'll know you're on the right side.

5. Provide peace and calm

We all need a break from our daily routine. Sometimes that just means watching a video of an adorable puppy, while at other times it might mean taking a walk in the woods, or sipping a beer, or savoring a bubble bath. Provide that refuge when your audience needs it most, and they'll reward you with special place in their hearts.



6. Say what everyone else is afraid to

As your industry grows, the jargon piles up, until it starts to feel like any real insight is drowning in a tsunami of meaningless insider-speak. Cut through the



crap and say what needs to be said. Speak the thoughts that have been on everyone's mind. Don't hold back, and your audience will come to respect your fearless honesty.

7. Empower the little guy

Huge organizations tend to get access to solutions that smaller companies — let alone private individuals — can hardly dream of. But doesn't everybody deserve a shot at greatness? Put the power in the hands of everyone who asks for it. Give the agile new players some potent tools for their arsenals, then turn 'em loose on the marketplace.



8. Bring weirdness down to earth

Some fields just seem out of reach for the average person on the street. But that's only because nobody's come along and explained how those fields work, in



clear, user-friendly terms. Think about how you first learned the ropes — then make it easier for others. Strip away the jargon, and make learning a joy for your audience.

9. Assemble the dream team

You've got a real treat behind the curtain: the most brilliant minds in your field, in conference for the first time in history. What will they talk about? What new insights will be unveiled? Will conflicting views strike sparks? With such vast experience and intellect gathered here in one room, it's impossible to predict what surprises may unfold.



10. Explore unknown wonders

Just about everybody longs for an adventure now and then — but only a few are brave enough to take the plunge and venture into the unknown. Your audience



yearns to hear your stories; to see the world through your eyes, and learn about all the mind-blowing discoveries you've picked up on your journeys. Bring 'em along!

11. Talk nerdy to 'em

You'd be hard-pressed to find a single person on earth who doesn't geek out about something. When we find ourselves in a room full of people who share our passion, our guard can finally drop, and suddenly we're talking shop like there's no tomorrow. Give your audience that place where they can truly be themselves, and let their geek flag fly.




12. Act locally

There's nothing quite like a friend who grew up in your hometown. When you demonstrate your intimate understanding of your area's realities on the ground, your audience will respect you as an expert who gets what's really going on in the community — and before long, they'll be coming to you for advice on the problems that non-locals just don't seem to understand.



Which of these approaches — or which combination of them — is right for your brand? The answer depends on what audiences you want to reach, how you plan to reach them, and what actions you want them to take in response to your content.



Other brands in your industry may already be differentiating themselves along these lines. On the other hand, some content creators who take on these personas may not even be your direct competitors — they may be companies in completely different industries who had the same idea, or they may be independent bloggers who just happen to fill the exact spot you wanted for yourself. The only way to find out is to scout the territory.

As you plan your strategy for differentiating your content, glance back over your checklist from Step 2, “Find Pleasure Points,” where you pinpointed three problems your content will help your audience solve. Whatever differentiation strategy you use, make sure it fits hand-and-glove into the solutions you’ll provide for your audience’s problems.

Of course, this is just the beginning. I’m sure you came up with some variations of your own list as you read through ours. I hope you wrote those ideas down! You’ll want to refer back to them as you assemble the nuts and bolts of your own unique content strategy.

STEP 4 CHECKLIST:

What are three tactics I’ll use to differentiate my content from the next best thing?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

STEP 5: STOCK UP ON INSPIRATION

GATHER ALL THE USEFUL
RESOURCES YOU'VE GOT



You've chosen an audience, figured out which wishes you'll grant for them, pinpointed the actions you want them to take, and decided how to differentiate your brand's content.

Now you're almost ready to start assembling the machinery of your unstoppable content strategy.

But before you actually put the pieces together, collect a full set of equipment and materials for your content lab.

Any content creator you hire should be brilliant at conducting original research, and compiling resources from all across the web into unique, informative content.

All the same, you'll make your collaborators' jobs a whole lot easier — and ensure they're able to quickly generate content in perfect alignment with your brand's voice — by giving them the same in-depth data and analyses you yourself devoured as you learned to be an expert in your field.

If you regularly train new team members, you may already have a lot of this information compiled into neat little onboarding folders. That'll give you a fantastic head start — but you may still need to digitize a lot of this info to share it with collaborators who can't physically drop by your office.

Another approach is just to put together a list of all the essentials, and track down rough-equivalent articles, papers, and databases online.

While you were working through the earlier steps of this guide, you may have come across articles and videos you'd like to adapt into themes and concepts that fit your brand's unique voice.

Create a centralized, shareable online spreadsheet (or set of folders) where you can drop all those ideas, along with documents, presentations, datasets, and other resources that'll help your collaborators create exactly the content you're aiming for.

This is essential preparation — because once your content lab kicks into high gear, you're going to have other things on your mind.

"Proper preparation prevents poor performance." This corny slogan is especially relevant in this step, because I see far too many business owners skip over it entirely in their rush to get to the content-creation stage. I understand that rush. You've heard that a steady stream of digital content is necessary for effective marketing, and your competitors are already putting out lots of media.

But there's another crucial piece to this puzzle: the more effort you put into preparation now, the more impactful content your team will be equipped to assemble, right from day one. Gather this fuel today, and you'll be blazing to the top of the charts before you know it.

By compiling these resources now, you're also gaining a clearer picture of the content you want to produce, and of the elements that content will need to contain to drive your audience to take the actions you want them

to take. The clarity you'll gain in this step will save you mountains of time and effort over the long term.

Here are nine types of resources you'll want to compile in preparation for creating content:

1. Your industry's "must reads"

Every industry has its clichés: the stories everybody's heard a million times; the articles and books everyone had to read in their beginner days. But your content creators may never have heard of those clichés, because they're brand new to your field. Put together a list of all the books and papers you read back when you were first learning the ropes.



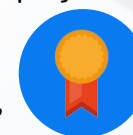
2. Technical manuals

Although your content creators may not need to be able to operate your equipment and software, they'll still need a working knowledge of the tools you use daily. Give them as much information as possible on the practical operation and troubleshooting of the solutions you sell, the machinery you use, and any other nuts and bolts relevant to day-to-day work in your field.



3. Award-winning projects

Which companies and projects set the gold standard in your industry? On what attributes are those projects judged? Make sure your content creators have clear documentation of award-winning successes, including images (where relevant), names of experts, reasons for success, and analyses of those projects' impact on your field.



4. Influential pieces

The word “influencer” gets thrown around a lot these days, but it really just means a person who’s respected as a voice of your industry. Your field’s influencers may be columnists in trade publications, speakers at key events, founders of organizations, and other veterans who are talented at putting your industry’s thoughts into words. Make note of their greatest hits.



5. Dependable news sources



When you want to check that you’re up to date about the latest developments in your field, which publications do you instinctively reach for? These news sources will give you a limitless well of story ideas — but even more important, they’ll help your content creators find gaps in the discussion, which your content can fill.

6. Lists of key terms

Sooner or later, your content creators are going to run up against industry terms they’re not familiar with. Save yourself the hassle of correcting inaccuracies, by making sure your content creation team has access to a reliable repository of industry terminology, complete with precise explanations of each term’s correct usage.



7. Essential databases



Many industries have centralized hubs of information where the pros go to look up model numbers, verify technical details, check for safety warnings, and investigate changes in legislation. Give your content creators access to these databases, and they’ll have a place to search for fine-grained data to include in your content.

8. Hot topics

What’s your field buzzing about right now? What are the big debates? One main goal of your content strategy will be to jump into your industry’s conversation with both feet — so put together a list of exciting news events, controversial ideas, big revelations, and other happenings that are generating a lot of chatter these days.



9. Content you think is cool



This stuff doesn’t have to be from your industry — in fact, it doesn’t even have to discuss the topics you’ll be creating content about. All that matters is that when you read or watch it, a little voice inside you says, “This is awesome.” Listen to that voice, and bookmark every piece of content that speaks to you. Your content creation team will thank you for it.

As you think through the categories on this list, you’ll probably remember other essential resources that don’t fit neatly into any of these categories. Make a note of each of them. Try to zero in on five or six absolutely essential resources about your industry. A few steps down the road, you’ll recommend each of these resources to your content team.

Along the way, you’ll also notice you’re gaining a clearer view of the overall shape of your industry’s conversation — the continual exchange of ideas across, print, web, and other media, which everyone in your field is tapped into, at least to some degree.

Keep the structure of that conversation in mind, because over the next few steps in this guide, you’ll be using your content strategy to claim your own starring role in it.

A man and a woman are sitting at a wooden table in a modern, industrial-style setting with brick walls and large windows. The man, with a beard and wearing a grey sweater, is looking at a laptop. The woman, with long blonde hair and wearing a white shirt, is holding a green coffee cup. On the table are various items: a laptop, a notebook, a pen, a smartphone, a small blue sticky note, and a small grey notebook. The background shows a brick wall and a white metal lattice structure.

STEP 5 CHECKLIST:

What are the top five resources my collaborators will use in creating content?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

STEP 6: CHOOSE YOUR CHANNELS

SELECT A SET OF CHANNELS AND CONTENT TYPES



The prep work is done. You're armed with a clear picture of your audience, your brand's voice, and your industry's conversation. Now you need a practical content strategy.

Your first step is to choose your distribution channels and content. You'll be using them to address your audience's problems, present your solutions, and drive audience members to take actions that lead to meaningful results.

Thirty years ago, your list of options would've been limited to TV, print, direct mail, telemarketing, and a few other analog channels.

Modern digital marketing, by contrast, gives you access to a whole universe of unique channels and content types — from blog posts and website articles to video and social networks, search advertising, apps, ebooks, podcasts, and brand-new platforms that burst onto the scene every month.

All these choices can feel overwhelming at first — but now that you're equipped with precise notes on your audience and brand voice, you'll have no problem picking out the treasures in this maze.

When in doubt, refer back to your notes from ("Become Your Audience") and Step 2 ("Find Pleasure Points"):

Your primary goal is to reach your audience in places they already hang out, with content that offers solutions to the problems they face.

Keeping that goal in mind, break your audience's media consumption down into general categories, and put together a list of **digital channels** — websites, social networks, apps, and so on — where you think your content will be particularly effective at driving meaningful actions.

Make note of the content that perform particularly well on each of those channels, and you're already on your way to building a comprehensive digital content strategy.

digital channel —
an information medium
through which you
interact with your
audience online

Here are seven digital channels where you may want to connect with your audience:

1. Your own blog

Your own website can be one of the most high-impact channels on the web. Every time you publish content under some other company's URL, you're increasing that other site's search ranking — but when you publish content on your own website, you boost your domain's SEO. Keep your very best content on your site, where you're in full control.



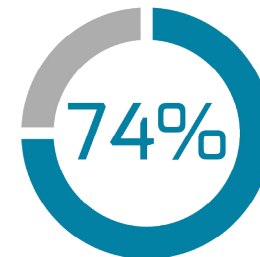
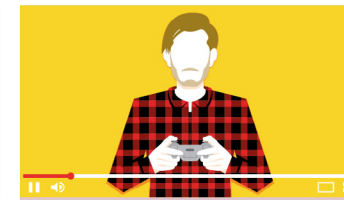
2. Social media

By the time you read this, the coolest social networks will probably have changed. Even so, you'll definitely want to have a presence

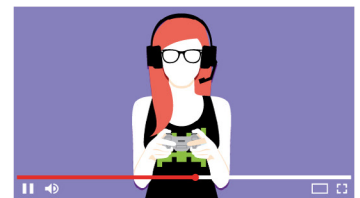
on Facebook and Twitter, along with Pinterest and Instagram if you're in a visual industry. Beyond that, your audience's subculture almost certainly has its own dedicated social hubs. Find out what they are, and be there regularly.

3. Video sites

Sometimes the line between social media and video gets blurry — in fact, almost all social media feeds now include at least some video content. A full [74 percent](#) of all traffic on the web is streaming video, and it's getting [more popular](#) every year. Whether you post 30-second "explainer" videos, lengthy tutorials, or live feeds of your team in action, make sure your content strategy includes moving images.



**of all traffic on the web
is streaming video, and it's getting more
popular every year.**



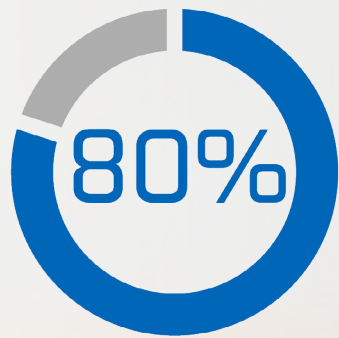


4. Streaming platforms

Depending on the content your audience loves most, you may want to consider connecting with them on an audio-streaming platform like Spotify or SoundCloud, or a video-sharing platform like Vimeo or Musical.ly. As with social media, these streaming apps tend to appear suddenly, rapidly gain popularity, then die out quickly — or sometimes stick around for a while, depending on how trends flow.

5. Email

I can already hear you: “Email marketing? Seriously?” Oh yeah. Emails get [47 percent](#) more clicks than any other form of content — including social media. Customers who receive email offers spend [138 percent](#) more than those who don’t. A full [80 percent](#) of retailers say email is their number-one driver of customer retention. Your campaign needs to include email outreach. Period.

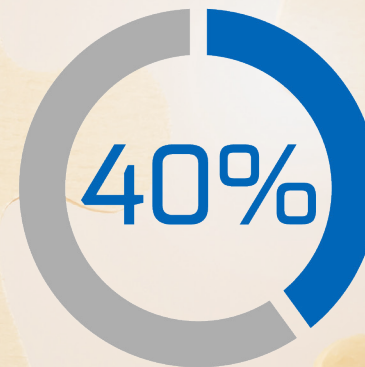


of retailers say email is their number-one driver of customer retention.



6. Display advertising

Many websites still display visual ads — despite the fact that [40 percent](#) of internet users now use ad-blocking software. And sometimes those visual ads do connect: a growing number of websites ask visitors to turn off their ad blockers to view certain pieces of content, and many of those visitors comply if they feel the content is worth their while. So depending on your audience, and the content they value, display advertising could be an effective channel for connecting with them.



of internet users now use ad-blocking software.



.....a growing number of websites ask visitors to turn off their ad blockers to view certain pieces of content, and many of those visitors comply if they feel the content is worth their while.



7. Pay-per-click (PPC) advertising

PPC ads are those text ads that show up in the margins of Google search results — if you don't have an ad blocker installed. Instead of paying a flat rate for these ads, like for display advertising, PPC marketers bid on specific search keywords, and only pay when people who searched for those keywords actually click on their links. This isn't the most effective form of advertising, but it's often affordable enough to be worth the investment.



Your digital content strategy probably won't use all these channels. Some of them are heavily dependent on the audience you want to reach, while others may simply not be worth your investment.

Whatever array of channels you end up choosing, though, you'll definitely want to publish content on your own website, on social media, and via email (more on those channels in Step 8, "Craft Your Content"). Use your own judgment when it comes to the others.

Once you start putting together your list of channels, you'll get a sense of the content that performs best on each of them. Here are 12 types of content you may want to publish:



1. Blog posts on your own website

Every high-quality original post you publish on your own URL will drive your site's search ranking higher. Publishing on your own site brings other advantages, too — one being that you'll control every post's formatting and comments. Plus, you can run your own analytics (more on that in Step 10, "Crunch the Numbers") to check exactly which content your visitors are clicking on, how long they're spending on each of those pages, and which actions they're taking as a result. That's a whole lot more insight than you're going to get publishing on somebody else's website.

2. Guest posts on third-party sites

To be seen as an authority in your field, you're going to have to get published on authoritative websites. This is actually easier than it sounds, because quite a few popular websites — for example, Forbes and The Huffington Post — accept guest posts from all kinds of contributors, as long as they're verifiable experts. Search for an editor's contact info, present your credentials, and pitch them blog post ideas until they say "yes" to one. Just make sure your guest post links back to your website, and voila! You've got some powerful free advertising.



3. Landing pages

Most visitors who land on your website's homepage will immediately leave—unless you show them exactly what they're interested in. An easy way around this problem is to create landing pages focused exclusively on one particular solution you offer. People who search for relevant keywords will land on these pages instead of your homepage — which means they're much more likely to find the information they're looking for and take the actions you want them to take.



4. Emails

I've already explained why your campaign needs to include email — and now I'm going to explain what your emails should do. Instead of sending boring text-only emails, as you would to your friends, you'll want to invest in professional marketing emails that resemble pages on your website, complete with branding and colorful formatting. These emails should work like mini-articles, sharing exclusive info that subscribers won't find anywhere else. And every one of them should end with a **call to action (CTA)**, offering the opportunity to check out more of your content, make a purchase, or share your brand with a friend.

call to action (CTA) —
a prompt in a piece
of content that invites
your audience to take
a specific action

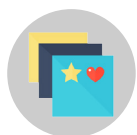
5. White papers

On the spectrum of complexity, a white paper falls about halfway between a detailed article and an academic journal paper. It's typically three to five times as long as an article, and is intended to be read by audiences in your industry. That means a white paper goes into much greater technical detail than an ordinary article would. It's usually formatted as a PDF document, with a crisp layout that includes illustrations, and sometimes even citations. White papers can serve a wide variety of useful functions. You might print them out and take them to tradeshow — or you can offer one as a lead magnet on your site, asking prospects to give you their email addresses in exchange for the free download.



6. Templates

Template content can be useful in a surprisingly wide range of industries. If your audience includes artists, you might want to share basic designs for logos or webpages. If you're in construction or architecture, you could offer ideas for house and room designs. Or if you're in the legal field, you might provide downloads of simple legal documents. Template content should be free to use — because its purpose is to hint that there's a lot more where that came from, for those who are willing to pay.



7. Tutorials

You're the expert, so teach the newbies how it's done! Offer step-by-step guides for the tasks your audiences most desperately want to learn. Again, this content should be free, because its purpose is to demonstrate that you've got a wealth of knowledge, and that you're great at



making complex concepts easy to understand. As your audiences learn from you, they'll come to rely on you as a guide — which means they'll be much more open to hearing about your premium solutions.

8. Ebooks



As your audience learns more about your brand, they'll want to take a deeper dive into your world — especially if you've got in-depth content ready to go. You may want to offer your ebooks for free, in exchange for a visitor's email address (hey, this one worked on you!), or you might choose to sell ebooks for a small fee on sites like Amazon. Either way, well-written ebooks will demonstrate that you've got an enormous library of knowledge about your field. Make sure they include links back to your site!

9. Press releases

Here's how this works: journalists subscribe to daily emails containing hundreds of press releases. Journalists scan through those emails over their morning coffee, looking for any juicy stories that might be worth covering. If your press release's headline doesn't happen to catch their interest, or if they just happen to skip over your story among the hundreds of headlines they're scanning, then your investment in a press release was a complete waste. The only exception is industry-specific publications, which can sometimes garner the right kind of attention.



10. Videos



You don't need an expensive crew to create engaging video content. For just a few hundred bucks, you can hire a

professional video creator, who'll put together some friendly animated shorts from images you've already got on hand. In fact, shorter videos — three minutes or less — tend to perform much better than longer ones, especially when they're shared in social media feeds. Use these quick "explainer" videos to introduce audiences to your brand, to announce new solutions you're offering, or just to share fun facts.



11. Infographics

With a bit of snazzy graphic design, even the driest data can be transformed into a symphony of thrilling revelations.

Infographics have undergone a huge spike in popularity since the rise of social media, and they remain some of the most shared images on the web. A graphic designer can whip one up in just a few days — and they're great tools for educating audiences about your industry and brand, while demonstrating that you know exactly what you're talking about.



12. Podcasts

A world-class podcast takes time and money to do properly. A professional mic will cost you a hundred bucks or so, and an audio production engineer will run you about that much per episode. But once you've bought the equipment and figured out your production process, you'll have a stream of entertaining audio content that'll make your brand impossible to ignore. Podcasts are one of the few types of content that audiences take everywhere, including in the car, and even to bed. Give it some thought.

You probably won't need to create every type of content on this list. Just make sure you're planning to publish regular posts on your own website, on third-party sites, and on social media, along with an email campaign for your subscribers.

I highly recommend including video content as well. The costs can add up quickly, though — so I'll just re-emphasize that video is very much worth investing in, if it's at all possible for you.

With your list of channels and content in place, you've got a clear picture of the range of talent you're going to need to hire. But before you go any further, put that list aside for a few hours, and come back and look at it with fresh eyes.

Is anything missing? Is every channel and content type necessary to drive the actions you want your audience to take? It's worth your time to double check now — because from this point on, you're going to be spending money.



STEP 6 CHECKLIST:

What are three channels I'll use to connect with my audience?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What are three types of content I'll publish on those channels?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

STEP 7: BUILD YOUR TEAM

VET AND HIRE YOUR CONTENT CREATORS



I've got good news — most of your hard work is done. You've figured out exactly who you'll be marketing to, how you'll be talking to them, where you're going to reach them, and what content you're going to use to drive results.

Believe it or not, you have successfully pre-planned a comprehensive digital content strategy! That's a lot further than most business owners ever get in this game.

But don't break out the champagne just yet. To put your plan into action, you're going to need actual content to work with.

And to make sure that content is created right the first time, with a minimum of back and forth, you're going to need to seek out talented content creators, and vet their abilities.

Depending on your budget, you may want to hire a full-service agency, which will guarantee a certain expertise and professionalism — or you may decide to hire one or more freelancers instead.

But in general, you've got three options when it comes to hiring content creators:

1. Hire a single freelancer


Pros: This is the cheapest option, by far. Some freelancers are experienced in writing a wide range of digital marketing content, from blog posts and news articles to emails and other textual media. If your top priority is to save as much money as possible, you may be able to achieve that



goal by focusing on text-based content – at least for now – and hiring one single freelancer to write all of it.

Cons: This approach will obviously limit the range of content you can produce. It'll also place severe restrictions on your **content velocity**.

The accuracy and helpfulness of content will be limited by your freelancer's expertise and self-teaching abilities. And if your freelancer quits or disappears (which happens more than you'd think), you're dead in the water until you find a new one.



content velocity – the rate at which you can consistently develop and produce fresh content, and publish it on each channel in your campaign



2. Hire a team of freelancers

Pros: You may be able to save some money by hiring one freelancer to write your blog posts, another one to edit your videos, and so on. When handled correctly, this approach can deliver excellent content velocity, because you'll have new content for each channel every day. Your freelancers may even pitch in to educate one another about your industry.

Cons: You're going to have to spend a lot of time vetting each freelancer – and even after you've hired your team, you'll be putting in quite a few hours on management. You'll need to give your freelancers very careful instructions to ensure they deliver content that's

up to your standards. And if one disappears for any reason, you'll have to track down someone to replace them.

3. Hire a full-service agency


Pros: This option gives you the highest likelihood of hiring a team of trained professionals who genuinely know what they're doing. Agencies typically have pipelines in place for assessing your exact needs, proposing step-by-step solutions, and adding value throughout the process – which means you'll be free to focus on your vision.



Cons: This is the most expensive option. Costs of agency work can easily run into the thousands of dollars. Agencies typically work on their own timetables, using their own project-management practices. You'll want to make sure your agency can deliver the type of content you expect, without having to be micromanaged. Otherwise they're not worth it.

Whether you decide to hire a single freelancer, several freelancers, or an agency, you're going to need to vet your talent to ensure they're capable of delivering the results you're looking for.

This is where you'll start to see the real value of all that "Five P's" preparation you did in Steps 1 through 5 of this guide. You know exactly what audience you want to reach, where they hang out, which actions you want them to take, and which kinds of content you want to deliver to them. Now it's time to find some content creators who understand what you're talking about.



Be aware that most freelancers are not operating on your level in terms of quality standards, focus, or attention to detail.

Most of them are self-taught — and while some may indeed have the gift of clever wordplay, they're learning the digital marketing industry as they go.

How do I know this? Because once upon a time, I too was one of those clueless freelancers — and in more recent years, I've viewed the issue from the other side, as an agency owner on a never-ending quest for talented content creators.

Many freelancers have picked up the right buzzwords, and will gleefully throw that jargon at you when they sense a paycheck in the making. They'll assure you they know all about SEO, and are focused on your conversion rate, and will include plenty of CTAs in your content.

But all this, of course, is just “talking the talk,” as any savvy salesperson would do. The question of whether a freelancer can deliver on those promises is a separate issue altogether. In other words —

Freelancers will happily tell you everything you want to hear. Be skeptical. Make them prove their abilities to you — right now, up front.

In light of all this snake-oil salesmanship, you may be thinking, perhaps it's better to just bite the bullet and hire a full-service agency. But unfortunately, it's not quite that simple.

Although agencies are generally more skilled and reliable than individual freelancers, the agency hierarchy runs along a broad spectrum, from small-scale boutiques all the way up to enterprise-level titans that work with Fortune 500 brands. You'll need to spend some time zeroing in on an agency that fits your budget, style, and approach to content creation.

Choosing an agency can take a while. For one thing, very few agencies post their pricing structure on their website, which means it can be tricky to tell whether they're even operating in your budget range.

Once you've found an agency you're interested in, you'll typically start by scheduling an initial call with their sales team, where you'll get a feel for each other, and lay out the general sense of your project. Then they'll send over a proposal — which is usually the first time you'll see concrete costs. From that point on, the discovery and content creation stages can sometimes consume weeks or even months.

On one hand, you don't want to hire a clueless freelancer, no matter how fast they turn content around — and on the other, you might not have the time or budget to work with some massive Madison Avenue marketing agency.

Ideally, you'll want to shoot for a sweet spot between these two extremes.

Look for content creation teams who have years of experience in the digital marketing space, yet are still agile enough to deliver solutions quickly, adapt to new trends, and recommend tactical pivots in response to shifts in your market.

Once you've put together a list of freelancers and/or agencies you may want to work with, it's time to begin the vetting process. Here are eight key steps you'll want to take:

1. Pinpoint the key qualifications your talent needs to have

Certain expectations go without saying. You want to hire content creators who meet deadlines, communicate clearly, and deliver high-quality work. But take a few minutes to get a little more fine grained, and think about "must-have" qualities. Does your talent need to have a background in your industry? Do they need to be based in your geographical region? Should they be self-starters who don't need to be micromanaged? Put together a short list of qualifications, along with a few "dealbreakers."



2. Look over portfolios

Any freelancer or agency worth their salt will have a sizeable online portfolio of their best work. This is their chance to show off — so if any work on the portfolio doesn't measure up to your standards, that's a major red flag. Remember, these are just the greatest successes; you haven't even seen the failures yet! Ideally, at least one work on the portfolio should resemble the product you're looking for. At the very least, you should get the sense that this freelancer or agency shares your taste.

3. Schedule initial calls

If you're vetting an agency, this call gives you and the sales rep a chance to get to know each other and get on the same page about



your overall strategy. If you're vetting a freelancer, here's your chance to verify that they actually have a firm grasp of English grammar, idioms, aphorisms, tech terms, and slang — yes, quite a few freelancers straight-out lie about this on their profiles — and get an overall sense of their intelligence, interests, and dedication to their work.



4. Explain your business

You're the one with the money, which means you've got the right to take center stage for a minute. Brief the agency or freelancer on the work you do, along with the basics of your industry. But don't make the mistake of rambling on and on about yourself the way many business owners do on these initial calls. You'll achieve far more by sharing just a few key details, then prompting for relevant insights. This is where the testing begins.

5. Discuss your goals

Now it's time to delve into the nuts and bolts, and explain the results you want this agency or freelancer to accomplish for you. Remember the warning above: freelancers and other salespeople will tell you absolutely anything you want to hear, including all the buzzwords they've picked up. Now is not the time to offer the benefit of the doubt. Now is the time to ask pointed questions and find out whether this person knows more than you do.



6. Ask for relevant samples

Although the freelancer's or agency's portfolio will give you a sense of their best work, it's still worthwhile to ask whether

they've completed any projects for others in your industry. Experience in your field means a much shorter learning curve, not to mention clearer communication. If they haven't done any work in your exact industry, ask them to show you the closest thing they've got.

7. Perform a work test

This step is particularly crucial when vetting a freelancer, but in some cases it may be useful for agencies too. Send over a brief assignment, to make sure the freelancer or agency can deliver exactly the kind of work you're looking for, on demand. Standard practice is to pay a fee for test work — but it's well worth the cost. Think of it as insurance against the risk of useless content.



8. Ask any nagging questions

No matter how wonderfully your freelancer or agency has performed, you've probably got a few questions bouncing around in the back of your mind. Don't push those questions away! Ask them now, before anyone's signed on the dotted line. Trust your instincts, and never hire an agency or freelancer who makes you nervous — even if you can't pin down the exact reason why. Your subconscious mind knows what's up. Listen to it.

The exact dynamics of each of these steps will vary, depending on whether you're talking to freelancers or agencies. Where agency representatives will jump on a call with a detailed list of points to discuss, freelancers may look to you to guide the conversation. Where agencies send point-by-point proposals, freelancers may pitch you ideas more casually.

As you work through this vetting process, keep notes on which approaches feel like the right fit, and which vibes make you uncomfortable. Be on guard for red flags.

The more you talk with content creators, and listen to your instincts throughout each conversation, the more you'll begin to zero in on the talent you want to work with.

Once you're sure they're able to deliver on the promises they've made, go ahead and sign the contract(s), and get ready to produce a flood of compelling content.



STEP 7 CHECKLIST

What are three qualifications my talent absolutely needs to meet?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How will I make sure they meet those qualifications?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

STEP 8: CRAFT YOUR CONTENT

START COOKING IN YOUR CONTENT KITCHEN



Now that your carefully vetted freelancer(s) or agency are fully on board, it's time to tackle the business that all this prep work has been leading up to. That's right — it's time to start whipping up content! For the first time in this whole development process, you finally get to kick back and let someone else do the hard work for you.

The amount of time it'll take to create your first round of content will vary widely, depending on the content you commission, who you hire to create it, and how effectively your talent is able to meet your expectations on the first try.

If you've hired an agency, they may insist on going through a lengthy discovery process to zero in on your brand's exact voice, tone, and strategy. An efficient freelancer, on the other hand, may send over your first blog post as soon as tomorrow — while more complex content, such as videos and infographics, can take a few days to put together.

As you review the first round of content, remember:

This is a process.

Your talent won't nail every assignment on the first draft.

You're still getting a feel for each other.

This is why so many agencies go through the discovery process: the more they're able to find out about your

expectations, the more quickly and accurately they'll be able to anticipate your needs.

If you've got the patience to work through this process with your agency, you'll probably get a first round of content that not only meets your expectations, but surprises you with some added value.

Freelancers, by contrast, tend to require a lot of clear direction. Rather than trying to add value, they're typically more focused on following your instructions as closely as possible. And in the beginning, your freelancers are likely to send you first drafts that'll have you questioning whether you hired the right talent after all.

Stay calm, and give them feedback—the more specific, the better.

If your freelancers are professionals, they'll listen carefully to your critique, take it to heart, and refine their approach—one draft at a time.

Once you've got a fairly steady stream of content coming in, you'll want to double check it to make sure it meets all the criteria you so painstakingly put together in the earlier steps of this guide. Here's an eight-step checklist for your initial round of content:



1. Does it contain any misspellings or other typos?

Even the most experienced content creators have been known to misplace a period, misspell a technical term, or accidentally type words like “and” twice in a row. Although your freelancer or

agency should be checking for typos like these, that doesn't mean they'll catch every single error, every time. An extra pair of eyes always helps.

2. Is every sentence accurate?

Read through each sentence, checking for any phrasing that sounds a little “off.” Don't be shy about pointing out these mistakes to your content creators. While they should be self-teaching with every new assignment, they may need to complete a few rounds of content before they're knowledgeable enough to get all the facts right.



3. Is it the right length?

Here are a few general guidelines: a basic blog post should be around 500 to 800 words. A more in-depth article might be 1,000 to 1,500 words, while a white paper is typically between 1,500 and 3,000 words. An email should be no more than 400 words, a press release is about 500 words, and an explainer video should be about two minutes in length.

4. Do its look and feel measure up to your standards?

This aspect of quality can be hard to quantify — but the bottom line is, you know a well-made piece of content when you see it. Never let a content creator tell you a piece of content is of professional quality when your instincts are screaming that something's wrong with it. Nine times out of ten, you'll be right — and if you notice a shortcoming, then your audience will, too.





5. Is it original and unique?

Since you've hired a talented team of content creators, it's reasonable to expect them to develop unique content. Their work should never look like an obvious rip-off of any other source material, and it should be completely free of plagiarism. When in doubt, use a free online plagiarism checker.

6. Is it written with your audience in mind?

Remember, one surefire way to waste your time and money is to create content intended for no one in particular. To avoid that mistake, put yourself in your audience's shoes and ask yourself whether this content speaks to them, in their language, about their problems. If you're not feeling it, then insist on a rewrite.



7. Will it actually be helpful to your audience?

Following through on the previous question, ask yourself whether this content is

genuinely going to make someone's life better, even if it's just in a small way. Every piece of content you publish should include at least one **value-add** — an unexpected revelation, an actionable insight, a shareable infographic, or some other surprise that delights your audience enough to bring 'em back for more.

value-add —
a pleasantly surprising
bonus benefit,
above and beyond the
basic purpose
of each piece
of content



8. Do you need to do anything else in order to publish it?

Now's the time to double-check that you've got all the machinery in place. Have you purchased a domain name, set up your hosting, and launched your website? Have you created accounts on all the social media channels you'll be using? Do you know how the upload features work? Be sure you're ready to rock 'n' roll when the time comes.

Quick tip: before you publish anything on your website, make sure you've got Google Analytics up and running.

As more content starts flowing in, you may be tempted to publish it as quickly as possible. After all, you've paid for the content, and it seems like a waste not to share it with the whole world.

But hold off on flipping the switch, just for a moment.

Before you publish a single piece of content, you need to set up a system for delivering it in the right place, at the right time, in a steady rhythm. That's exactly the test we'll be tackling in Step 9, "Set Your Rhythm."



STEP 8 CHECKLIST:

How many unique pieces of content do I have on deck right now? _____

(Should be at least 10 before you proceed to the next step.)

Have I triple-checked each piece of content for typos and other errors?

(Yes / No)

Does anything else need to be done on my end before I can publish this content (e.g., buying a domain, getting hosting, creating accounts, etc.)?

STEP 9: SET YOUR RHYTHM

SCHEDULE AND AUTOMATE PUBLICATION

Hang in there! You've come much too far to waste your world-class content on a sloppy publication strategy. You're so close to unleashing a steady stream of unique content, and picking up the followers and search rankings you've worked so hard to acquire. Just a couple steps left.

Your content creators have fallen into a steady rhythm of producing accurate, actionable content that lives up to your standards of quality. You've built up a storehouse of at least 10 pieces of unique content, ready for publication on multiple channels. Your website and social media accounts are up and running.

You're plugged in, powered on, and ready to share your brilliance with the world.

But before you start publishing content, you've got to put a framework in place.

Without a precise timetable and a clear sense of rhythm, your flood of thought-provoking content will soon slow to a drip-drip-drip: just one or two new pieces of content a month, on whatever channels happen to be convenient, whenever you happen to have time.

Publishing each piece of content manually is a huge drag anyway. Just staying on top of one single channel can take an hour or more out of your day — and when you're managing a digital strategy that spans your own website as well as third-party sites, email, video, and other channels, it's just flat-out inefficient (if not outright impossible) to handle all the publication work yourself, every single day.

But the reality is, if you aim to grow your audience and cultivate a warm, glowy feeling around your brand, then you need to be publishing fresh content on as many different channels as possible; if not every day, then at least every week.

When you publish content in a consistent rhythm, your brand becomes a steady, dependable part of your audience's life.

Your audience members have a sixth sense for caring. They're more sensitive than you might think about brands treating them like an afterthought — because they experience that treatment from other brands every day.

Your content's job is to prove that you care enough to show up for the moments that matter.

Every day, you should be showing your audience affirmation, understanding, support, generosity, and — yes, even the dreaded Ultimate Fuzzy Word: love. As long as your content maintains that sense of unflagging attention and respect, you'll keep picking up new subscribers — at a rate that'll soon start multiplying exponentially.

But the only way to actualize your dreams of stardom is to let machines do the heavy lifting for you.

Marketing automation platforms offer a wealth of features used to be exclusive to enterprise-level organizations. Now you've got that power at your fingertips.

With the right marketing automation software, you can organize audiences of thousands or even millions of individual people, automate the distribution of all your content to those audience members across every channel, and even track how your audiences respond to each piece of your content.

marketing automation platform — software that enables you to schedule content for automated publication on various channels

Meanwhile, your automation platform will gather hard data on your audiences and content, which will be immensely useful as you refine your strategy in Step 11, "Refine, Adapt and Improve." For now, though, our main goal is just to set up a steady cadence of publication.

The marketing automation industry is booming right now, which means you've got hundreds of options to choose from. Here are some of the most popular platform-specific automation tools:

WordPress

You may already be using this platform for your website and blog. What you might not know is that WordPress comes with built-in functionality for scheduling posts on future dates. Just edit the publication date on the right-hand side of your post, and queue up several months' worth of new content, instead of publishing it all at once.



MailChimp

This free platform provides a powerful range of tools for automating email campaigns. It's very user friendly — once your account is set up, one click will import your database of email subscribers, and then you're free to create marketing emails to your heart's delight. It's easy to create email campaigns based on attributes of your subscribers, and set up triggers that automatically send emails on certain dates, or in response to events.

HootSuite

When it comes to social media automation, this platform has everything you need, all in one place. This software makes it easy to schedule hundreds of posts in advance, to be posted on specific dates, or even in response to triggers. It's even got a social media calendar, which gives you a clear overview of all your scheduled content, along with tools for editing each post.



TweetDeck

As its name suggests, this platform is designed to schedule tweets. Twitter is one of the most dynamic, fast-moving social platforms on the web — which means you'll need to interact with your followers regularly if you want to keep them engaged. With this toolkit, you'll be able to manage multiple Twitter accounts, all in one place.

SocialDrift

This platform provides two different types of functionality: it enables you to automate posts on channels like Instagram and YouTube, and also comes with marketing tools for reaching new audiences and growing your followers. If you plan to use Instagram as a channel in your campaign, you'll want to take advantage of the automation component, at the very least.



Depending on the content you're publishing, and the channels you're using, you may not need all these tools — or you may need to Google around for additional platforms that'll help you automate publication on other channels, such as SoundCloud and Vimeo (if you're using those channels).

But the bottom line is this:

Set up a system so content will be automatically published to every single channel in your campaign, on a consistent schedule.

Once you've got your solution figured out, all that's left is to stock your automation software with all the top-quality content your creators have been cooking up, and let it go to work. At long last, you're free to let the robots take over the hard labor — while you get back to running the rest of your business.

Queue up at least a month's worth of content for every channel, then pour yourself a celebratory drink. Hell, invite the whole office down to the bar! You've just planned, orchestrated, and implemented a complete digital marketing campaign. You deserve a celebration.

Resist the urge to tinker for now. Let the machines hum along for a few weeks, delivering compelling content to your audiences on every channel. We'll check back in with your friendly little robots soon, and find out what insights they've brought us.





STEP 9 CHECKLIST:

Do I have an automation solution in place for every channel in my campaign?

(Yes / No)

Have I queued up at least a month's worth of content for each channel?

(Yes / No)

Do I have Google Analytics running on all pages of my website where I'll be publishing new content?

(Yes / No)

STEP 10: CRUNCH THE NUMBERS

GET SOME TOUGH LOVE FROM YOUR ANALYTICS

You've come a long way since the start of this guide. Every day, your content creators are producing a steady supply of blog posts, articles, and other media. Meanwhile, your automation tools are ticking along like clockwork, publishing content in a dependable rhythm, on a whole range of different channels.

You've built a top-notch content lab, and now that lab is working to build your brand.

But efficient content automation is just the tip of the iceberg. Ever since you started publishing blog posts, sending emails, posting social media comments, and serving up content on other channels, little robots on all your channels have been hard at work, gathering a huge repository of information about your audience.

Now you're ready to dive into these **content analytics** on each channel, and find out which components of your strategy are working as planned — and which tactics need to be improved, or dropped altogether.

content analytics — data and reports that provide insights about the performance of your digital content

Here are five analytics sources you may want to investigate:

1. Google Analytics

As long as you've followed all the [instructions](#) in the previous steps, Google's powerful analytics tool has been running on all pages of your website where you've published new content. Now you can check in with your Google Analytics dashboard, and get highly detailed breakdowns of your traffic on each page, demographics and locations of your audiences, links they clicked to arrive on your site, and all kinds of other cool insights.



2. MailChimp Campaign Reports

If you've been running an email campaign with MailChimp, you've got access to a handy reporting feature that'll tell you how many subscribers have opened each email, which links they've clicked, how much they're spending as a result of your email campaign, how each email's performance varies over time, and many more details.



3. Facebook Analytics

Once you've set up a Facebook page for your organization, you'll soon start to receive alerts about the platform's analytics features. A lot of these insights are built right into your organization's Facebook page, where views, clicks, shares, and other useful stats are displayed for you at the bottom of each post. But you can also [go deeper](#), and use Facebook's more insightful analytics tools to track your audience's growth, demographics, locations, and related attributes.



4. Twitter Analytics

Twitter's analytics run along the same general lines as Facebook's. You can check out views, clicks, and retweets of each of your tweets, and view quick charts of your overall impressions per month, profile visits, mentions, and followers. Twitter For Business also offers some more [in-depth analytics tools](#), which you'll have to pay for — but these can be handy if you're using Twitter as a primary selling tool.

5. YouTube Analytics

This platform makes it easy to view a wide range of essential stats about each video's performance.



From your channel's analytics dashboard, you can check up on views, subscriptions, playback type, audience demographics and locations, and a few other handy stats. If you need deeper insights on your audience's behavior, YouTube can also [generate reports](#) on earnings, video watch time, and interactions.

In addition to the analytics for these channels, you'll definitely want to check in on equivalent analytics dashboards for any other channels you may be using, such as Instagram, Spotify, Vimeo, Musical.ly, Pinterest, SoundCloud, and so on. Almost all popular channels provide some kind of dashboard with reports on traffic, clicks, downloads, and other key metrics. A few minutes on Google will get you to the tools you're looking for.

Look for patterns in your analytics.
Which pieces of content are performing particularly well? Which ones aren't doing as well as you'd hoped?

The more you start to notice these patterns, the more you'll begin to see a clear overall picture of your brand's customer journeys — not as you imagined them, but as they're actually playing out in the real world.

Some parts of your campaign won't be working the way you expected. Your most beloved content won't be performing like you'd hoped. Your greatest sales pitches won't be generating clicks. But shying away from those truths won't make them any less true.

To get better results, you're going to have to accept some tough love from your analytics.



STEP 10 CHECKLIST:

Which pieces of my content are performing best?

When and where am I getting the most traffic?

Which pieces of content are failing to attract attention?

Which pages on my website are failing to generate conversions?

STEP 11: REFINE, ADAPT AND IMPROVE

ACT ON THE INSIGHTS
THAT MATTER MOST
TO YOUR CAMPAIGN



As you've probably noticed by now, analytics can seem a bit overwhelming at first. Each time you check in on any channel, you're plunging into a hurricane of statistics and charts: visits, opens, clicks, signups, bounce rate, search terms — all looking very scientific, and very important.

But the truth is that only a few of these metrics are actually relevant to your strategy. In fact, the insights you really need may not even be immediately obvious.

Before you can act on your analytics, you need to figure out which metrics are important, and what you'll do with your data about each of them.

Different metrics matter to different strategies in different ways. The question is, which metrics are meaningful to your strategy? The answer depends on the results you're trying to achieve, how you're trying to achieve them, and what changes you're able to make.

It's like asking, "Which warning light on my car's dashboard is most important?" Well, it depends on how you're using the car, what kinds of problems you're experiencing, and which issues you're in a position to fix.

If you've ever spoken to a cut-rate marketing freelancer, you've probably noticed they're very focused on a few specific metrics, which they like to claim are all important. They tend to talk a lot about click-throughs and bounce rate — then jump straight to talking about conversions, as if improving those metrics will automatically lead to more sales.

Sadly, this is a straight-out lie. Any marketer who sings the praises of specific metrics, without knowing the details of your strategy, has absolutely no understanding of what analytics are for, or why they matter in the first place.

Just as you should never trust an SEO snake-oil salesman who's obsessed with keywords —

Never trust a self-proclaimed “digital marketing expert” who's obsessed with their favorite metrics. Different strategies hinge on different metrics — period.

But you've already got a head start on figuring out which metrics are relevant to your campaign. Back in Steps 1, 2, and 3 of this guide, you determined which audiences you're creating content for, which problems you're helping those people solve, and which actions you want them to take as a result of interacting with your content.

Now all you need to do is find out whether your audiences are actually taking the actions you want them to take — and where your tactics are falling short, you need to figure out why.

Start from the point in the customer journey where delighted customers (are supposed to) refer their friends to you. Then work backwards one step at a time, hunting down every weak point where potential customers are dropping out of the journey.

As you look over your analytics, ask these five key questions:



1. Do satisfied customers refer their friends to you?

A conversion is not the end of the customer journey — it's the beginning of a long-term relationship, in which your loyal followers joyfully bring in fresh leads for you to convert. To remind your customers to give referrals, incentivize the referral process with rewards, and give your followers easy-to-use referral tools, such as email and social media templates. Make sure you know which customers are bringing in referrals, and streamline the process as much as possible.

Metrics that can tell you about this:

- Referrers to your website and channel(s)
- Sources of incoming traffic
- Reviews and ratings of your brand on public platforms

Fix problems by:

- Cultivating stronger relationships with more referrers
- Contacting happy customers to request referrals and reviews
- Incentivizing and rewarding positive public feedback

2. Do prospects want to purchase your solution?

Are people buying more from you since you launched your marketing campaign? If so, that's great — but that isolated fact doesn't give you a clear chain of causality. Plus, you might not be making as many sales as you could be if you were to tighten up your pipeline a bit. By the time a visitor reaches the point of purchase, you should already have demonstrated value, responded to objections, and helped them find the right solution. If they're not converting at that point, then something's missing on your website.



Metrics that can tell you about this:

- Click-throughs from your emails and public posts
- Conversions on your landing and purchase pages
- Downloads and other interactions with your content

Fix problems by:

- Creating more segment-targeted purchase pages
- Posing leading questions to which the answer is always a “yes”
- Using CTAs that promise immediate tangible benefits (e.g., instead of saying “Find out more,” say, “Download your free guide now!”)



3. Do your website visitors get the answers they seek?

One of the main reasons prospects fail to convert is that your site fails to answer their questions and objections. This is precisely why you've set up all those specialized landing pages, and made sure your blog posts and other content link back to areas of your site that offer relevant answers. If visitors aren't spending much time on your site, that means you're not telling them what they want to know — which means they're not going to trust you enough to buy from you.

Metrics that can tell you about this:

- Bounce rate on your landing pages and blog
- Time spent on each page of your website
- Downloads and other interactions with your content on each visit
- “Exit pages” — the pages where visitors most often bounce

Fix problems by:

- Creating more segment-targeted landing pages
- Providing more deep-dive content that your audience finds useful
- Serving up stronger value propositions on your top exit pages

4. Are audiences engaged by your social media content?

Most prospects will end up on your website after they've interacted with your content on some other channel. For example, they might like one of your infographics, and drop by your site to get more; or they might follow an intriguing link from one of your videos. But none of that's going to happen if your content fails to engage your audience. Here's where those ever-famous social media metrics come into play. If your content is engaging, then people should be liking and sharing it.



Metrics that can tell you about this:

- Likes, shares, retweets and other social media interactions
- Reach and impressions on social media and public platforms
- Subscribes to (and unsubscribes from) your feeds and email list

Fix problems by:

- Putting in some serious time developing more unusual content
- Collaborating more tightly with your creators on each piece
- Researching your competitors' content and differentiating yours



5. Can people even find your content in the first place?


If you're looking at low numbers across the board, you've most likely got a content distribution problem. People just aren't seeing what you're putting out there. In that case, you need to take a closer look at your approach to publishing, and figure out why your content isn't reaching your audiences. You may need to consider different channels, or make your content easier to find on search engines — or you may just need to interact with your audience more, so they know who you are.

Metrics that can tell you about this:

- Views of each page on your website
- Opens and clicks from your email subscribers
- Search ranking for your website and public feeds
- Search terms that lead audiences to your content (or fail to do so)

Fix problems by:

- Doing an in-depth SEO review of your website and public feeds
- Focusing on mastering just one or two key channels for now
- Spending more time interacting with your audience on those channels



As you zero in on the answers to these questions, you'll probably notice that certain metrics stand out as particularly useful in giving you a clear picture of your problems. Those metrics are your

key performance indicators (KPIs).

You'll want to keep track of those particular stats as you continue to check in with your analytics, and work on fine-tuning your strategy.

key performance indicator (KPI) — a metric that correlates meaningfully with some aspect of your strategy's performance

Make a list of the KPIs that have proven most relevant to your campaign. Create a system of regular check-ins on those KPIs, and develop a plan for improving them.

By now, you can see why there's no set of universal metrics for every digital marketing strategy. Each strategy's success or failure hinges on different weak points — which means different metrics qualify as relevant KPIs for that particular campaign. The more you learn to read your KPIs, the more clearly you'll see the machinery of your campaign, and notice places where you can tweak it for better performance.

STEP 11 CHECKLIST:

What are three KPIs with high relevance to my campaign's performance?

KPI #1.

Why is this KPI meaningful to my campaign?

What steps will I take to improve it?

KPI #2.

Why is this KPI meaningful to my campaign?

What steps will I take to improve it?

KPI #3.

Why is this KPI meaningful to my campaign?

What steps will I take to improve it?



As you reach a nuts-and-bolts understanding of your most meaningful KPIs, you're finally zeroing in on the final piece of your content puzzle: not only who your audience is, what content they want to see, where they go to find it, and why they respond to some pieces of content more than others — but finally, how your content can guide them toward the next stage in their journey to a purchase, and toward long-term loyalty to your brand.

Constructing these journeys takes time, no question. It takes dedication, intense focus, an ability to zoom in and out between the big picture and the tiniest details — and most of all, it takes love. Yes, love — a genuine desire to see your customers succeed, and to provide solutions that'll really help them achieve those aspirations.

Audiences know when they're feeling that love from you, and when they're not. Don't just tell them you care — demonstrate your love in ways that make a tangible impact in their day-to-day lives. Deliver them a present every day, hand-crafted and tied with a neat little bow. Before you know it, they'll be beating a path to your door.

Have a question about a step in this guide?

Want someone to handle all this for you?

Let's talk.

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