Chapter 1

Building a Content Creation Framework

Why Does Your Business Need a Framework for Creating Content?

Content marketing, like project or product management, can take a lot of work and time to do right. From creating long-term content plans to analyzing the results, it can be challenging to keep track of all the moving pieces and make sure your work is driving you toward your team and company’s goals.

Going through those steps—from the first long-term plan to analyzing the results—can feel laborious and complicated, but it doesn’t have to. Having a framework in place that’s repeatable, organized, and agile can make the process of creating content much smoother and more rewarding.

When you’re creating content on a large scale, you shouldn’t have to reinvent the wheel with each piece. Instead, have a clear and repeatable process in place that allows you to produce blog posts, e-books, webinars, and more, all in an efficient manner.

Most content marketers wear a lot of hats, leaving them strapped for time. Having a clear action plan that can be

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reused saves time and keeps you and your initiatives moving forward.

A major component of any action plan is organization. When looking at your long-term content plan, it’s important to break up the large goals into digestible chunks that can be completed on a short-term basis. This way, you can make more sense of your content creation needs by listing out the details of what goes into them. For example, if your goal is to create an ebook, focus on the content needed to bring it to life. This can paint a better picture of your weekly content tasks (i.e., blogging, posting on your social channels, etc.).

In addition to being repeatable and organized, your framework should be agile. Business needs and context change over time. When you’re planning your initiatives up to a year in advance, it’s important to remain flexible to account for the changes that will inevitably arise during the coming months. Sometimes campaigns, timelines, and goals will need to be adjusted.

Now that we’ve talked about the value of having a content creation framework, let’s move on to building that framework.

**How Do You Build a Framework for Creating Content?**
Here are eight steps to building a content creation framework of your own.

1. Conceptualize your content.
2. Plan and set timelines.
3. Create a content workflow.
4. Review and edit your content.
5. Publish and promote.
6. Organize your content internally.
7. Analyze the results.
8. Evolve your process.

START BY CONCEPTUALIZING YOUR CONTENT

Coming up with ideas may sound like an easy task. But turning an idea into a piece of content is a different story.

The first step your framework should include is the process of coming up with appropriate ideas. If you’re struggling to generate content ideas, check out online resources like the HubSpot Blog Ideas Generator and publications related to your industry.¹

Some other options include writing down frequently asked sales questions or important industry knowledge that might be helpful for your target market to know, or performing keyword research to identify top terms used by people searching for content relevant to your industry. These are topics we’ll dig into deeper in Chapter 3.

When creating content, it’s important to keep two things in mind:

♦ Your buyer personas
♦ The buyer’s journey

Buyer personas are semifictional representations of your ideal customer based on quantitative and qualitative analysis. What that means is you have a business you work for, and that business has products and services it’s trying to sell, and those products and services are meant to attract a specific audience (also known as your buyer personas).

Each buyer persona will experience the buyer’s journey, which is the active research process a potential buyer goes through leading up to making a buying decision.
The buyer’s journey is made up of three stages:

1. **Awareness stage:** The buyer identifies there’s a problem that’s happening. This person is performing research to learn more and find a possible solution.

2. **Consideration stage:** This person has found one or more solutions to their problem. Now they’re looking for the solution that best meets their needs.

3. **Decision stage:** This person is ready to make a well-informed decision, which is usually purchasing a specific product or service.

Following is an example of how a buyer persona might progress through the buyer’s journey:

**Awareness stage:** I have a lot of unstructured text data and need to make sense of it. What should I do?

**Consideration stage:** Aha! There’s an automated solution to categorize comments and detect emotions in real time in multiple languages.

**Decision stage:** I can receive a free consultation of my business’s customer feedback data.

We’ll review buyer personas and the buyer’s journey in more detail in Chapter 4. For now, keep in mind that content should always support both. If it doesn’t, you need to ask yourself why you’re creating it in the first place.

**Next, Plan and Set Timelines for Content Creation**

Once you’ve established some ideas for content offers, *start planning your timeline, which shouldn’t extend more than three months out.* By not planning more than one quarter ahead, you’ll be able to maintain agility—things may change over time—while still having time to execute on your initiatives.
We’ll discuss content frequency and how extensive your timeline should be in Chapter 4.

When planning short-term content tasks over the span of a quarter, try to have at least two or three major content offers you want to create, and organize them by stage of the buyer’s journey. Knowing which content offers to focus on each month will help you organize your weekly content tasks in support of your overall plan. For example, is this offer going to be a webinar or an ebook, and will it be targeted toward the Awareness or Decision stage?

In addition to the process of planning your content offers, you’ll want to identify any company-wide initiatives that will need support from content during the next three months. Examples of additional content you might want to include could be posts on trade shows you’ll be attending, rebranding information, new corporate partnerships, and various events. Many of these posts will be about sharing company updates, but they might not be about the problems your buyer persona has and the solutions your buyer persona needs.

**Next, Create a Workflow for Content Creation**

*Your workflow should clearly identify who’s going to be doing what tasks.* It should also mention any outside influencers who will be contributing and, if so, in what capacity. Your workflow should clearly break down the work to ensure everyone is on the same page. For example, instead of having “written,” “edited,” and “published” as the work stages for an ebook, you might have something similar to the following checklist:

- Outline completed
- First draft completed
- Editing completed
- Design and formatting completed
- Final draft completed
- Published

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Then Review and Edit Your Content

With the content you’ve now created, you’ll need a review system that double-checks if the content has been edited, ensuring search-engine optimization (SEO) best practices have been implemented and the voice, tone, and style of your writing matches your brand’s style guide.

Depending on your team and infrastructure, this review process could involve getting authorization to publicly release your content, getting an SEO specialist to format and update the content, or even working with your technical team to make the appropriate updates to your website. Anticipating who might be involved in the review process will help you avoid any unwanted delays as you make the best content possible.

To get started creating a process to review and edit content, there are six best practices to keep in mind:

1. Set clear expectations.
2. Allow for multiple rounds of edits.
3. Make suggestions by tracking changes.
4. Determine an editing timeline.
5. Use a document to track progress.
6. Clearly define the roles in the review process.

First, set clear expectations for every time someone reviews a piece of content. The goal is to ensure the reviewer knows what they’re looking for, whether it be grammatical errors, fact-checking, story gaps, choice of words, optimizing the content for search engines, or whatever else.

Second, make sure you allow for multiple rounds of edits. When it comes to editing content, you’ll want to have between two to four rounds of edits before publishing. Each round of edits should have clear expectations. For example, the first round of edits could focus on fact-checking and story gaps, the second round could focus on grammatical errors and
optimizing content for search engines, and the third round could be the final look to make sure everything is polished and ready to release into the world.

**Third, you should have your content reviewers make suggestions by tracking changes as opposed to making edits directly.** This way, the content writer knows where to make changes instead of having to figure out what was altered.

**Fourth, determine an editing timeline.** A timeline should account for multiple rounds of edits as well as the finished product. The goal of a timeline is to keep everything on schedule and pace so your content production is consistent.

**Fifth, use some sort of document, like a google sheet, to track progress.** It's important to understand where your content is in the review process. This document should reflect the editing rounds you've determined for your review process.

For example, let's say you're remodeling your kitchen, and you know you have a lot of work to do, from electrical to hanging drywall. Since there's a team of people working together on a final product, how would you know if all the tasks have been completed if you weren't tracking progress? The same goes for reviewing and editing content.

**Lastly, clearly define the roles in the review process.** This way, everyone knows who's doing what and when. This will help keep things running smoothly.

**PUBLISH AND PROMOTE YOUR CONTENT**

Now that your content has been created and reviewed, it's time to publish and promote it. Publishing your content is fairly simple—you just need to take the associated website, landing, or blog page(s) live. That being said, you'll want to determine a publishing schedule that accounts for content frequency. This
includes time of day, day of the week, and how often you publish content. Remember to keep your buyer personas in mind when determining a publishing schedule.

Promoting content, however, takes a little more forethought, because there are multiple channels like email, social media, and so on to consider. In addition to identifying what tone and messaging you want to communicate on each channel, you’ll need to identify how you want to drive people to your new content from the rest of your site. This means identifying key places on other relevant website pages that can be used to refer that page’s traffic to your new content.

*Your promotion strategy should change to reflect your business’s needs.* This might mean changing the conversion paths you’re most heavily promoting on a frequent basis. For example, promoting a content offer that’s directed toward a specific persona on your home page might be fully aligned with your business goals one quarter, but if your business’s target market shifts in the next, you’ll want to update the offer to reflect the changing needs.

**Organize Your Content Internally**

Once you’ve reached the point where you’ve finished some content, you’ll likely have additional landing pages, images, and other associated content that you’re storing in your content management system, also known as a CMS.

Whether you’re using a traditional CMS like WordPress or HubSpot or using a document storage system like Dropbox or Google Drive, organizing those files in a way that’s easy to understand will be critical for successfully repurposing, reusing, and even simply finding that content down the line. One easy way to organize your content is by developing a clear nomenclature system. A sample system could include:

- Content format
- Buyer’s journey stage
Let’s say you created an awareness-stage ebook in 2016 to support a campaign for a new product launch on rock climbing gear. The nomenclature for hosting this piece of content could look like this: ebook-awareness-rockclimbinggear-2016.

Although you can choose a specific naming convention formula for hosting your files, the goal should be to easily access files when you need to.

**ANALYZE YOUR CONTENT’S RESULTS**

Now that you’ve planned, created, edited, published, promoted, and organized your content, you need to measure the results to see what insights you can learn.

We’ll spend more time talking about how to effectively analyze your content marketing results later, but the basic points are that you’ll want to know if your content successfully captured new leads and if those leads went on to continue through the inbound methodology to become customers.

Knowing the answers to those questions will help you determine if your content offers are compelling to visitors and if they successfully create engagement that drives sales.

**EVOLVE YOUR PROCESS**

The final element of your content creation framework is that it should always be evolving.

Your business’s content and goals will vary from quarter to quarter and from year to year, so your content creation process should reflect your organization’s processes. Furthermore, content marketing is always changing, so it’ll be important to keep on top of industry trends and best practices so that you can incorporate them into your framework appropriately. The following is a list of brands to monitor to stay up to date on the latest content marketing trends:
What Resources Do You Need to Build a Content Creation Framework?

You’ll need to use two types of resources to create great content.

1. Your team
2. Your tools

**Start with Your Team**

There are five primary types of responsibilities covered in content creation:

1. Content management and strategy
2. Writing
3. Editing
4. Designing
5. Publishing and promoting

**Content management and strategy is the foundational responsibility.** This role involves creating a long-term content plan, mapping it to meet the needs of the business, ensuring the other four responsibilities are met, and analyzing
performance reports. Most businesses hire a content marketing manager or content marketing strategist to fill this roll.

The second responsibility is actually creating the content, which is typically done by a content marketer or content writer/producer. Although many businesses have niche and/or technical markets, the people writing your content don’t always have to be subject matter experts. Instead, much like a journalist, they can work with internal and external subject-matter experts to create compelling and useful content. Although many companies choose to write their content in-house, many elect to outsource that work. There are a lot of agencies like Scripted, WriterAccess, and BlogMutt that can help create tailored content for your needs.

Once the content has been planned and created, it will need to be edited to align with your business’s messaging, your readers’ needs, and the goals the content is working toward. Just because a piece of content has been created doesn’t mean it’s ready to be published. Before publishing content, make sure it meets your quality standards, is grammatically correct, and communicates your message clearly and concisely.

Once the content has been created, it needs to be packaged in a way that is appealing to readers. Having an attractive, fluid format and design can make all the difference in getting someone to fill out a form for your content and invest time in reading it.

Think about it: Can you remember a time when you looked at a website or flyer and decided not to read it because the format was challenging to understand or didn’t visually make sense? In marketing, we call that the blink test. The average site visitor spends about three to five seconds scanning a website before deciding if they want to spend time looking through it.²
Okay, so now that we’ve covered the responsibilities of content management and strategy, writing, editing, and designing, we need to coordinate the publishing and promotion of that content. When promoting content on social media channels like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, the marketing coordinator or social media manager is in charge of listening to and engaging with the audience. This role is also responsible for publishing new content, whether to the blog, website, or social media platforms.

Depending on your team and business’s context, you might have one person fulfill multiple roles. A good example of this is when a content creator who serves as an editor also has a background in basic design. However, it’s important to ensure this person isn’t strapped with too much responsibility. As a rule of thumb, one person should not take on more than two to three responsibilities at a time. It’s important to have a checks and balances system spread among multiple teammates.

However you choose to assemble your team, its primary focus should be on ensuring that whatever content you produce, regardless of quantity, is high-quality work.

GATHER YOUR TOOLS

Now that we’ve covered what—or, rather, who—goes into a content marketing team, let’s review the tools you’ll need to start managing your content.

First things first: You’ll need a content management system (CMS) to create, edit, and publish your content. There are different types of content systems, so you’ll need to identify which kind works best for your company’s needs.

HubSpot is a great example of a system you can use to build, edit, and host content files, and publish blog posts and landing pages. Additionally, HubSpot can host your entire website, making it a one-stop shop for managing your website, marketing, sales, and customer success efforts.

WordPress and Squarespace are also great content management systems to consider—they both help you build,
manage, and host your digital content. WordPress, specifically, offers various plugins that extend and expand the functionality of your website.

Whichever CMS you use, you’ll want the ability to edit your website, create and publish content on your blog and landing pages, and optimize your content for search engines. Every CMS offers different options, so research them well to make sure the one you choose meets your business’s needs.

The second requirement you’ll have for these tools is the ability to understand what’s happening on your website. Basically, you’ll need analytics tools that will show you the impact content has on your business and identify opportunities for improvement.

Both HubSpot and Google Analytics are strong choices for reporting. In fact, I generally recommend companies use both since the two platforms offer different kinds of insights that, combined, help to create a complete picture.

Let’s unpack that a bit.

Google Analytics is a great option for understanding exactly where leads are coming from, what kind of device they’re using, and how long they’re staying on your pages. You can also pull custom, granular reports on your site’s traffic, all of which can be used to manage a highly optimized site to give you the best chance of being found online and converting your leads.

HubSpot’s analytics really shine in helping you understand where that traffic is coming from and how it’s feeding your content marketing funnel. It helps you understand which sources are converting into leads or customers and their various conversion rates through the context of your sales and marketing funnel.

The good news: You can access both platforms for free.

Once you have your CMS and analytics ready to go, you’ll need something to help with your planning and internal communication. You’ll want to make sure your team can communicate easily, see any updates, avoid version- or draft-control issues, and clearly delineate their responsibilities and assignments.

Google Drive is a great example of a tool that can meet each of those needs with shared files, which include the ability
to comment, to see previous drafts and edits for version control, and to know who’s working on what from any computer with Internet access. Plus, if you live on the road as I do, and Wi-Fi connections can sometimes be limited, you can access and make updates to your files offline. Then, once you’re back online, it’ll update the files accordingly for all to see.

So, there you have it. We’ve now covered the importance of a content creation framework, what a framework could look like, and the resources required to create your new content from both a tool and team perspective. By following these steps, you should be able to create your own framework to plan, develop, and publish content campaigns for your business.

Chapter 1 Homework

Activity 1
It’s important to have a real-time, collaborative platform that hosts files in the cloud. Luckily, Google Drive can give you this for free.

1. If you don’t already have one, go create a Google Drive account by following this link: https://www.google.com/drive/.

2. If you’re new to Google Drive, then review this resource to get started: http://bit.ly/2GfOniC.

Activity 2
You might have created a piece of content, but that doesn’t mean it’s ready to be shared with the world—not just yet. Content needs a review system that double-checks if it’s been edited, if SEO best practices have been implemented, and if it matches your brand’s style guide.

A content review process should include the following:

♦ A defined content creation and approval roles to create accountability and ensure alignment of responsibilities (content creators, reviewers, editors, etc.).
A defined content creation and approval process before publishing content (rounds of approval with specific details for each round).

A document that tracks the content creation and approval process based on deadlines (helps organize content creation efforts, which keeps content production consistent and on time).

Open a new Google Sheet and outline a content review process for your business.

Figure 1.1 shows a sample outline of a content review process to get you started. Follow this link to access the template: bit.ly/2xa0zzC.

**Activity 3**

Having a clear nomenclature for your media is key to staying organized.

Here is a sample nomenclature for an awareness-stage ebook created in 2016 to support a campaign for a new product launch on rock climbing gear: ebook-awareness-rockclimbing-gear-2016.

Open a new Google Doc and create an example nomenclature for the next offer you plan to create and host on your website.