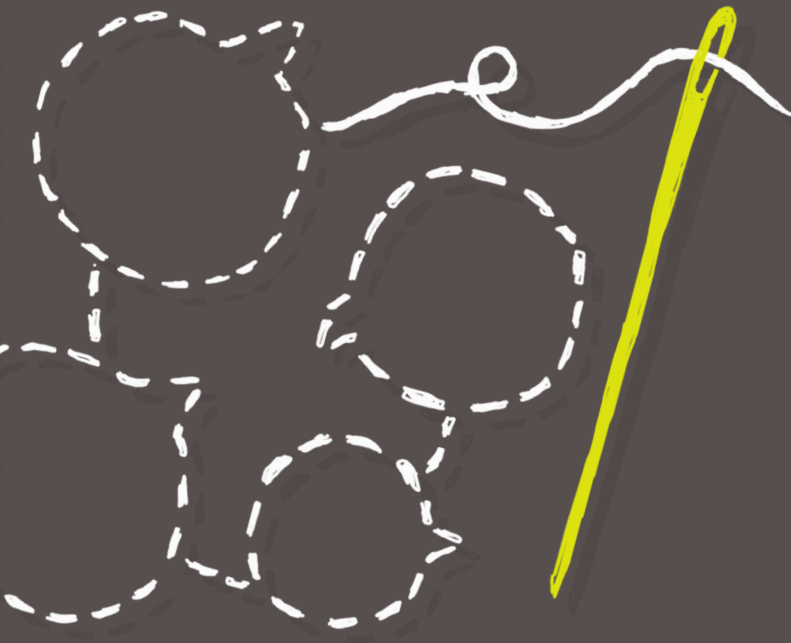


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HOW TO CRAFT A SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT MARKETING PLAN

How to Craft a Successful Social Media Content Marketing Plan

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Introduction / I'm Already Marketing! Why Do I Need Content Marketing?

Content marketing is driven by one big idea: if you produce and share fantastically useful content, your community will be more likely to become customers, remain customers, and send you more customers.

H&R Block's website doesn't just pitch their products and services. A prominent [Tax Answers](#) section invites users to [ask their own tax-related questions](#) and read answers to popular queries. [Their blog](#) includes insights from "CPAs, Enrolled Agents, attorneys and former IRS agents with years of combined experience in tax policy and research." Free tools allow visitors to [estimate their 2011 taxes](#) and [find out when to expect their refund from the IRS](#).

Contrast that with old-school interruption marketing: forcing your target audience to watch a commercial, read a billboard, or close a popup window. We all hate interruption marketing. That's why people buy TiVos, install ad-blockers, and subscribe to Netflix. Interruption marketing is expensive and diminishing in effectiveness as irritated consumers find ways to skip and hide ads.

The balance of power has shifted to the customer. Smart brands embrace that, focusing their marketing energies on producing content their community freely and gladly bookmarks, downloads and shares.

Here are some of the benefits you'll enjoy once you create and implement a content marketing plan:

- A stronger customer relationship with your brand once they see you are honestly trying to help them instead of just shilling your product
- A well-earned reputation as the thought leader in your industry
- Increased traffic to your website through higher SEO rankings, inbound links and social shares
- Educated and empowered repeat customers who become brand ambassadors
- Fewer customer service complaints and calls
- Opportunities to engage with prospects seeking to educate themselves about their buying decisions

Read on to learn how to craft a content marketing plan that will help you build a strong relationship with your community.

Chapter 1 / The Building Blocks of a Content Marketing Plan

1. Executive Summary

The executive summary answers a single question: What are the critical parts of the plan that management needs to know in order to make a decision? Your boss should be able to get the gist of your plan in 60 seconds. It introduces how your organization will benefit from content marketing, and highlights:

- Specific goals and objectives
- The types of content to be created and distributed
- The topics that content will be created around
- Which channels will be used to publish and share content
- The resources required to carry out the plan

2. Goals, Objectives and Success Metrics

Not every brand can be as prolific as [American Express's Open Forum](#) right away. Acknowledge your strengths and weakness, know your limits, set realistic goals, and identify what success looks like.

Your plan must start with a desired result in mind. What do you hope to accomplish? Whatever your organization's goal, state it clearly in your plan, and outline the specific objectives that will help your brand achieve it. Each of your goals and objectives should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Timed.

When goals and objectives are solidified, determine exactly which key performance indicators (KPIs) you'll use to measure success, and set a benchmark to start from.

For example:

Goals: To support our company's overarching revenue goal, we must attract new customers, foster stronger customer relationships, increase positive word of mouth, and increase inbound leads by <date>.

Objectives: To accomplish our goals, we must increase social media engagement by 30%, and inbound website traffic by 50% by <date>. We'll do this by creating a comprehensive, customer-oriented online resource library. We will create and publish three blog posts per

week, publish one case study per month, host one webinar per month, publish one ebook per quarter and share all of the above through social media channels.

Metrics: Increase inbound visits by 3,000 per month, gain 20 inbound links per month, increase positive brand sentiment 20% by <date> , generate 1,000 monthly social shares of blog content, and increase ebook downloads to 100 per month.

3. Target Audience Personas

Content marketing without knowing whom you're trying to reach is like attempting to shoot a target in front of you by pointing your gun to the sky. The first step to identifying your target audience is uncovering the various demographics, lifestyles, interests, geographic location(s), education levels and values of your existing and potential customers.

The next step? Understanding them. Without knowing what keeps your customers and prospects up at night, you might as well tell your bedtime story to a pickle jar. Hopefully your marketing team already has information about your target audience(s). If not, you may have to do some research to craft the [personas](#) that represent the individuals you'll create content for. Want to learn more? [Read Matt Dickman's piece on persona development.](#)

Answering these questions about your audience will help uncover the answers you need to create compelling content:

- How do they seek information?
- How do they use social media? Which social networks do they favor?
- What are their job responsibilities and what decisions can they make?
- What challenges or problems are they trying to solve?
- What are their "dealbreakers" - the definitive circumstances that could repel them from doing business with you? Or, what's already keeping them from doing business with you?
- How do they measure success?
- What are they reading? Watching? Hearing?

Refer to Chapter 3 for more information on how to uncover audience characteristics and content topics.

4. Editorial Team Roles & Responsibilities

In order to produce great content, you'll need participation from many people within different departments of your organization. Depending on the resources available to you, your team might consist of only a few members. Nevertheless, you'll want to have a mixture of subject matter experts, engagement specialists, editors, and someone to manage the blog. These positions form the foundation for your editorial team. We'll explain their roles in detail in Chapter 2.

5. Editorial Themes, Topics and Types

When companies adopt social media as part of their communications strategy, they often hit a brick wall when faced with what to talk about. Or write. Or tweet. To prevent this, your plan will need to include the broad themes and specific topics you plan to produce content around. Identifying them involves finding the sweet spot between your brand's existing (or desired) expertise and audience interests. See Chapter 3 for ideas on how to discover the themes and topics your audience cares about.

- **Themes:** Themes are the subject categories you plan to discuss with your community. For workplace innovation company [Citrix](#), themes include improving productivity and telecommuting - two complementary focal points on their [Workshifting blog](#). At Radian6, ours include social media strategy, measurement, engagement and influence.
- **Topics:** Topics address your community's specific questions, concerns and curiosities. "How to monitor your competitors" is a topic that falls into our "social media monitoring" theme.
- **Types:** Will you be writing blog posts, producing videos, hosting webinars, writing ebooks, or giving presentations? See Chapter 4 for the definition and benefits of each content type.

Once you determine the theme, topics and types of media you'll be sharing, it's important to lay it all out in an easy-to-read editorial calendar. This will provide something tangible for your team to track what content is being launched daily, weekly and monthly, and where they fall into the equation.

6. Content Workflow, Optimization and Distribution

The most efficient way to produce a wealth of high-quality content is to re-imagine the same topic in different formats. Before you start creating and distributing content on the web, map out what content you will be creating and how you will repackage it for different mediums.

In the following chapters, we're going to dive deeper into the specific roles you'll need to fulfill to carry out a content marketing plan, how to uncover interesting topics to create content around, and how to determine where you should publish what you create.

Chapter 2 / Organize Your Editorial Team

To carry out a comprehensive content marketing plan, you'll need a team of enthusiastic writers and creators who ideally have some business background to boot. A larger organization may have an entire team of people to fulfill each role in the editorial team.

These are the roles that have worked well for us at Radian6. Robert Rose and Joe Pulizzi describe these roles in more detail in their helpful book [Managing Content Marketing](#).

Director of Content Marketing

A more senior person may have the title Chief Content Officer; a more junior title might be Content Marketing Manager. This person owns the content marketing initiative, writes the plan, measures results, and ensures all content is serving broader marketing and business objectives. For a job description, start with the sample Joe Pulizzi assembled [here](#).

Editor

The editor keeps things moving day-to-day. This person is responsible for meeting deadlines set in the editorial calendar, implementing a style guide, and ensuring all content is of high quality. Sloppy mistakes will reflect poorly on your brand; your editor should be proofreading and editing religiously. If content just doesn't cut it, the editor isn't afraid to reject it.

Content Creators

This is the one absolutely indispensable role, because there's no content marketing without content. These folk will write your blog posts, produce your ebooks, and record your podcast.

If you can afford it, bringing on a dedicated writer or two will provide you with a steady stream of high-quality content. Combine a good writer with a subject-matter expert (SME) for meaty and engaging content.

Although you can contract out your content, we find there's such a wealth of knowledge within Radian6 we have no need to. You'll probably find the same thing if you dig around enough.

Content Producers

These specialists add aesthetic pizzazz to everything your team creates. They know how to shoot video, edit podcasts, design a presentation, or spruce up an ebook.

If you don't have this talent in your organization, it's worthwhile bringing on a contractor who can pull it all together in a fraction of the time you could.

You'll also need to intersect with some other roles within your company:

- Web manager for posting material to the site
- SEO and web analytics specialists to measure how visible your content is in search engines, and to suggest improvements
- Social media or community manager(s) to promote your content and manage the subsequent questions and comments

Chapter 3 /

10 Ways to Find the Right Words to Say to Your Community

When brainstorming about what to share in social media, you might not have to look any further for inspiration than social media channels themselves. Colleagues who communicate with customers every day basis can also provide excellent insight.

Let's take a closer look at how to uncover the important issues your community is ready and willing to discuss with you.

1. Ask Your Customers Directly

Your customers are your best source of intelligence. Valuing customer opinions will help you better connect with them and bring you closer to like-minded prospects. Ask them what problems they're having trouble solving. Ask them whether they watch videos on YouTube more than they read industry blog posts. Ask them to point you to their favorite online resources. This doesn't have to be a formal survey. Pick 10 to 20 customers that you have a good relationship with to call, email, or even tweet.

2. Ask Your Sales Team

Your sales team spends their time talking to customers and prospects. They are building relationships around business issues that your company can solve. Any sales person worth their salt can tell you the kind of information that closes deals. They can tell you what competitors are doing right. This can easily translate into content. Ask them what kind of ebook can help build a relationship with a prospect.

3. Ask Your Customer Service Reps

Customer service and technical support reps know what the weak points are in your products and marketing materials. They get asked questions from customers and prospects about things that don't work and things they don't understand. Which questions always resurface? Write a blog post with the top troubleshooting tips. Shoot videos with the support team answering actual customer questions.

4. Follow Your Customers on Twitter

While asking your customers direct questions is one way to get information from them, following them on Twitter and other social media platforms is a way to find out what's on their mind. They could share concerns online that they wouldn't share with you directly. And make sure you follow individual customer contact accounts and corporate to benefit from different perspectives.

5. Join Industry LinkedIn Groups

LinkedIn Groups can be a great source of content ideas. Join groups in your targeted industries to see what the conversation is about. What kinds of blog posts are shared? What gets the most discussion? These can guide your own content creation. You can ask questions and use the answers given as the basis for a blog post or part of an ebook.

6. Follow Industry News Sources

Even though many of us now get our news through social media channels, there are still traditional news sources providing perspective into many industries. This could be in the form of print, web, or social media updates, but they still reflect the issues that are important to your customers and prospects in those industries. Use these ideas as jumping off points for your own content.

7. Discover Keywords in Web Analytics

Search still drives significant traffic to many websites, and yours is not likely to be the exception. Get access to your web analytics and see what search terms are bringing visitors to your site. Create content around the search terms that are already driving traffic to boost traffic further.

8. Listen for Prospective Customers

What kinds of questions are people asking online in your industry? Are they looking for recommendations in your product space? Can you create content that responds to their expressed need?

9. Monitor Industry Conversations

Whether you use a paid social media monitoring solutions or free tools, you should follow key industry terms. These are terms that you can glean from all of the other sources above, and by following them on a regular basis, you can get a sense of how people talk about these key issues. Many companies use their own version of industry terms in much of their content, but this can be a way to make sure that your content is in sync with your audience.

10. Monitor Competitors

We learn a lot by observation. This doesn't mean you should copy everything competitors do, or let their inactivity postpone your progress. This doesn't mean you should copy everything competitors do, or let their inactivity postpone your progress.

Chapter 4 / Choose the Best Content Types for Your Audience

What's the best content format? That depends on several factors:

- **Resources.** If you're blessed with deep pockets and a large team, advance on multiple fronts with all these formats. If you're a one-person show, pick one format and dominate it.
- **Industry.** If you're selling a complex supply-chain management solution, your customers will be looking for detailed white papers. But if you're manufacturing blenders, then a YouTube series of your CEO blending golf balls, chickens, and iPhones may be in order.
- **Trial and Error.** Experiment a little to see which formats generate the best response with the least effort.

A [survey of 1,092 B2B marketers](#) found the average organization was using 8 different content marketing tactics. Unless you have severe resource constraints, don't limit yourself to just one.

One piece of advice: no matter what format you choose, eradicate anything that remotely sounds like a sales pitch. Visitors will leave as soon as they realize you're shilling. Concentrate on what your community cares about, and the resulting affinity toward your brand will drive business results.

Here are the main online media you should consider adding to your mix. For a more detailed look at these, we highly recommend you read through [Content Rules](#) by our good friends Ann Handley and C.C. Chapman.

Blog Post

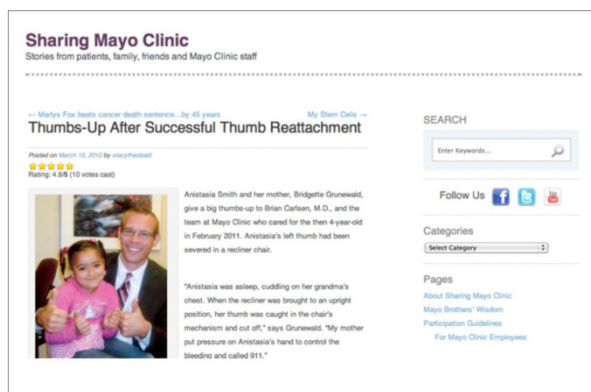
A blog post consists of commentary or news hosted on either a regularly-updated standalone website or section of a website.

Benefits

- Can incorporate various forms of multimedia to supplement text: embedded videos, photos, sound clips, documents, presentations and more
- Allows for frequent publishing of fresh content to increase brand visibility in search engines
- Generates discussion and engagement
- Posts each have a unique URL that can easily be shared across the web to drive inbound traffic

Tips

- Commit to posting regularly - start out with at least one post per week, every week.
- Find people in all levels of your company who can provide interesting and well-written content. The CEO and the customer service representative can both be interesting for different reasons.
- Invite well-known people in your industry to guest post.
- Provide variety on post lengths, types and topics. Use this excellent list of [21 types of viral posts](#) from *Search Engine Land* for inspiration.
- Don't be afraid to take a stand and have a little personality.
- Link to previously written blog posts and either embed or link to meatier ebooks and webinars to keep visitors on your site longer.
- Craft your headlines carefully to attract interest, promote social media sharing, and match the intent behind a user's Google search (SEO).



What good looks like: The Mayo Clinic runs [eight different blogs](#), including blogs for patients to share their stories, for physicians to learn about patient care innovations, and for the research community to share new findings.

Note: While we're on the topic of blogging, you might find our ebook on [The Art of Corporate Blogging](#) helpful.

E-Newsletter

An e-newsletter is a regular email from your brand that subscribers receive because they signed up for it.

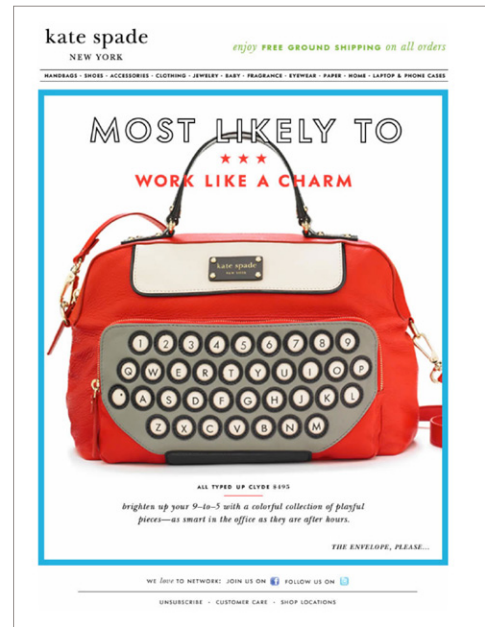
Benefits

- Subscribers are voluntarily giving your brand permission to message them
- Email addresses can be used (with care) to further engage with subscribers
- Subscriptions are all handled by the system, freeing you up to write content
- Links within email messages can drive traffic back to your site

Tips

- Add a prominent signup form to your website. The fewer fields in the form, the more signups you'll get.
- Create an email template you can reuse. It'll save you time.
- Keep it short so people can glance through and click on what intrigues them.
- Try some [A/B tests](#) to tweak headlines, copy and layout.
- Don't spam. Make sure you and abide by the [CAN-SPAM Act](#).

What good looks like: Fashion company kate spade lets brief, playful copy and alluring product imagery do the talking in its email campaigns.



Webinars

A webinar is an online live or recorded presentation which participants attend remotely via phone or computer.

Benefits

- Helps establish your brand as an authority in your industry
- Registration can provide detailed information about attendees when they register
- Potentially more lively, engaging and interactive than other media

Tips

- Rehearse the webinar multiple times beforehand. Iron out any technical kinks. With live events, you have only one chance to do it right.
- Find presenters from within your organization who are enthusiastic, professional and enjoyable to listen to.
- Interview the big names from your industry in a guest webinar.
- A moderator (not the speaker!) should handle questions and keep the conversation moving along.
- Don't be dismayed if only a fraction of people who register actually show up. That is typical.
- Record the webinar to share later.
- Follow up with attendees afterward.

What good looks like: One of the many industries accounting firm Baker Tilly serves is construction. They run regular, multi-part [construction audit webinars](#) to help current and potential clients manage and control a complex financial process.

Note: *Speaking of content and webinars, check out our webinar with Lee Odden on how to [Socialize and Optimize Your Content Strategy](#).*

Ebooks

An ebook is an electronic booklet around 10 to 30 pages long.

Benefits

- Provides your customers with useful information that solves problems rather than solely promoting your products or services
- Serves as a substantial content centerpiece you can advertise and promote heavily
- Can remain evergreen longer than blog posts or webinars
- Can be used as a lead-generation tool

Tips



- Keep the tone informal and conversational. The nitty-gritty can be tackled in a separate white paper.
- Design the ebook to be easily skimmed. Liberally employ images, illustrations, diagrams, callouts, headings, and bullet points.
- Longer is not necessarily better. If you are able to say it in 10 pages instead of 20, that's probably better for your readers.
- Repurpose excerpts or entire blog posts to save yourself time.

What good looks like: Email marketing automation company Silverpop conducted a survey of their clients and turned [their findings into an ebook](#) with a best practices guide.

White Papers

A definitive, data-driven report that explains how to solve a problem.

Benefits

- Helps potential customers make (favorable) B2B purchase decisions, especially those with a longer sales cycle
- Can establish your brand's authority as an industry expert
- Capitalizes on the wealth of knowledge that already exists within your organization

Tips

- Give yourself lots of time. You're not going to bang one of these out in an afternoon.
- Try conducting a survey of people in your industry.
- Highlight the unexpected. Proving what we all already know has limited utility.
- Back up all the claims you make with hard data.
- Conclude with recommendations for readers to put into action.

What good looks like: Not all of 3M's products are as easy to describe as their Post-It Notes. [This white paper](#) is for the engineers who need to understand the technical benefits of a rubber process additive they sell.

Case Studies

Tells the story of how an organization (often a customer) faced and solved a problem.

Benefits

- Highlights your customers, services and products
- Establishes your credibility and provides evidence for your marketing claims
- Tells a compelling story about proven results
- Measurable data really helps sell those results

Tips

- Work in the colorful details that make stories interesting.
- State the problem in a way the reader can identify with
- Explain how your company fixed the problem.
- Prove the lasting results of your solution, e.g. "Since Acme Corp installed our solution, sales have risen 21%."

What good looks like: Dassault Systèmes offers a substantial library of over 350 “customer stories” showing how clients like MIT, Under Armour and Rolls-Royce have used their 3D design software to solve pressing innovation problems.

Video

Benefits

- Google’s Universal Search and ownership of YouTube makes your videos much more likely to appear on first page of search results
- A well-executed video piece can generate many, many views
- Allows you to tell a story in an audiovisual way

Tips

- If you have a casual brand, it’s okay to keep your videography casual. A decent camera, tripod and microphone will go a long way.
- Craft your story before shooting to maximize your time.
- Consider documentaries, interviews, product tours, and behind-the-scenes footage.
- If you’re going to be filmed, relax and be yourself.

What good looks like: Noodles & Company serves noodles, salads and sandwiches from around the world — but they’re also generous enough to teach their community how to make their own tasty lunches. Their [YouTube channel](#) offers video on how to cook asparagus and lemon linguine, Bangkok Curry, and even a better sandwich.

Podcasts

A regular audio show or a series of audio recordings to which users can subscribe. Episodes are downloaded via iTunes or other software.

Benefits

- Podcasts are mobile - subscribers can listen during their commute or at the gym
- People can stumble across your podcast on iTunes
- Provides a more lively experience than text

Tips

- Keep it short to begin with. A regular 20-minute podcast is better than a 90-minute episode every 6 months.

- Plan out each episode before you begin. No need to write down every word; you'll sound more natural speaking off the cuff.
- Export the audio from video recordings to make use of what you already have on hand.
- Invite coworkers and others in the industry to join you for an interview or conversation. Dialogue is always more lively than monologue. Friendly debates are even better.

What good looks like: Clemson University keeps students informed with audio recordings of various lectures and happenings from their different departments.



Presentations

Benefits

- It's easy to recycle existing content (especially ebooks) into presentations
- Uploading to Slideshare can garner immense brand exposure
- You can communicate your message succinctly
- They can often times be reused during workshops or industry events

Tips

- Keep it simple — one big idea per slide. Pare away everything that is not essential.
- Avoid the temptation to squeeze in as many graphs and bullet points as possible.
- Design each slide to be delightful to the eye. Ask a designer in your organization for some help.
- Find a handful of more tips [here](#).

What good looks like: SimpliFlying trains and advises airlines and airports on how to engage travellers profitably. This [177-slide deck](#) offers 50 case studies of airlines who are excelling in social media.



Chapter 5 / Choose Your Social Media Channels for Distribution

Once you've chosen which content types are feasible for your organization to produce, determine which channels you will share to. Just because all of these networks exist doesn't mean you have to dominate all of them. It's better to do a few things well than too many things poorly.

Know Your Networks

You need to evaluate each of the following social networks, and any new ones, for your company based on these criteria:

- Are my customers and prospects there?
- Can my company join and participate in the network? Or does it have to happen at the employee level?
- Can my company provide value on the platform?
- Can we create the right kind of content for the network?
- Do we have the resources to post and engage on the network?
- Is the social platform optimal for the types of content I want to share?
- What do I want people to do with the content I share through social channels?

Let's look at some of the popular channels that might be suitable for sharing your company content.

Blog

A core component of any content plan is a self-hosted blog. A blog can exist as its very own entity separate from your website (e.g. Citrix's WorkShifting.com and American Express's OpenForum.com), or it can be incorporated into your site on a [subdomain or subfolder](#). However you choose to launch a blog if you don't have one already, we recommend the blog serve as the hub of your publishing plan. Publish to the blog first, and extract snippets to share on social networks with a link leading back to the full post so you can reach traffic goals and lead prospects to more information about your company.

Twitter

Twitter is all about sharing the digital breadcrumbs. These should be thought provoking, insightful or newsworthy tidbits that include links to longer-form content, like blog posts. Many social platforms integrate with Twitter, so these tweets can help build an audience on other platforms.

Facebook

Facebook is the largest of the social networks, but seems to be one of the hardest social channels for businesses to master. Brands are challenged by Facebook's ongoing platform changes, news feed algorithm, and laser-pointed focus on users who are there to connect with close friends and family. Look to some of your favorite brands for how they post photos and videos, ask questions of their fans, run contests, and drive traffic back to their blogs and websites. Facebook has recently shared that the best way to guarantee your fans will see your updates is to buy advertising.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn can be great for building a personal network and sharing content, but you need to do so in a business-oriented way. Let others know how the content you share, whether on your personal profile or on your company page, will help connections succeed in their business. Keep in mind that prospects don't care about your products. They care about solutions to their business problems.

YouTube

Uploading your videos on YouTube can lead to additional views since videos rank well in Google's Search. It's also super easy to embed YouTube videos on your website or blog, as well as share them on other social channels like Twitter and Facebook.

Google+

This is the newest of the major platforms and really seems to benefit visual content like photos and videos. Make sure blog posts that you share have compelling images to help attract prospects and customers to your content. Google+ can boost your personal and brand visibility in search results, so it's a good idea to grow your "Circles" and share content there.

Tumblr

Tumblr is the largest of the instant blogging platforms, and its greatest benefit is the ability for other Tumblr users to easily share, or Tumble, your posts on their own Tumblogs. Many publications have used this platform to augment their regular websites with featured content that is easily shared. Here's a great [list of brands using Tumblr](#).

Pinterest

On Pinterest, users pin their favorite things to virtual pinboards along with their own comments. The pinned objects include a URL back to the source of the item. Notable things about Pinterest are its demographics (women 35-44), its growing user base and its ability to drive traffic.

Instagram

Instagram is a mobile app that lets users edit and share photos taken on their iPhones. Brands have used it to share the behind-the-scenes of their companies in very creative ways.

Slideshare

Every time you give a public presentation or webinar, make sure you post your presentation on Slideshare. Ebooks can also be published on Slideshare and embedded on your site just like YouTube videos. You can even create short slide decks based on blog posts as another way to share ideas. Slideshare even has a lead generation function, so you can capture leads no matter where the presentations are posted.

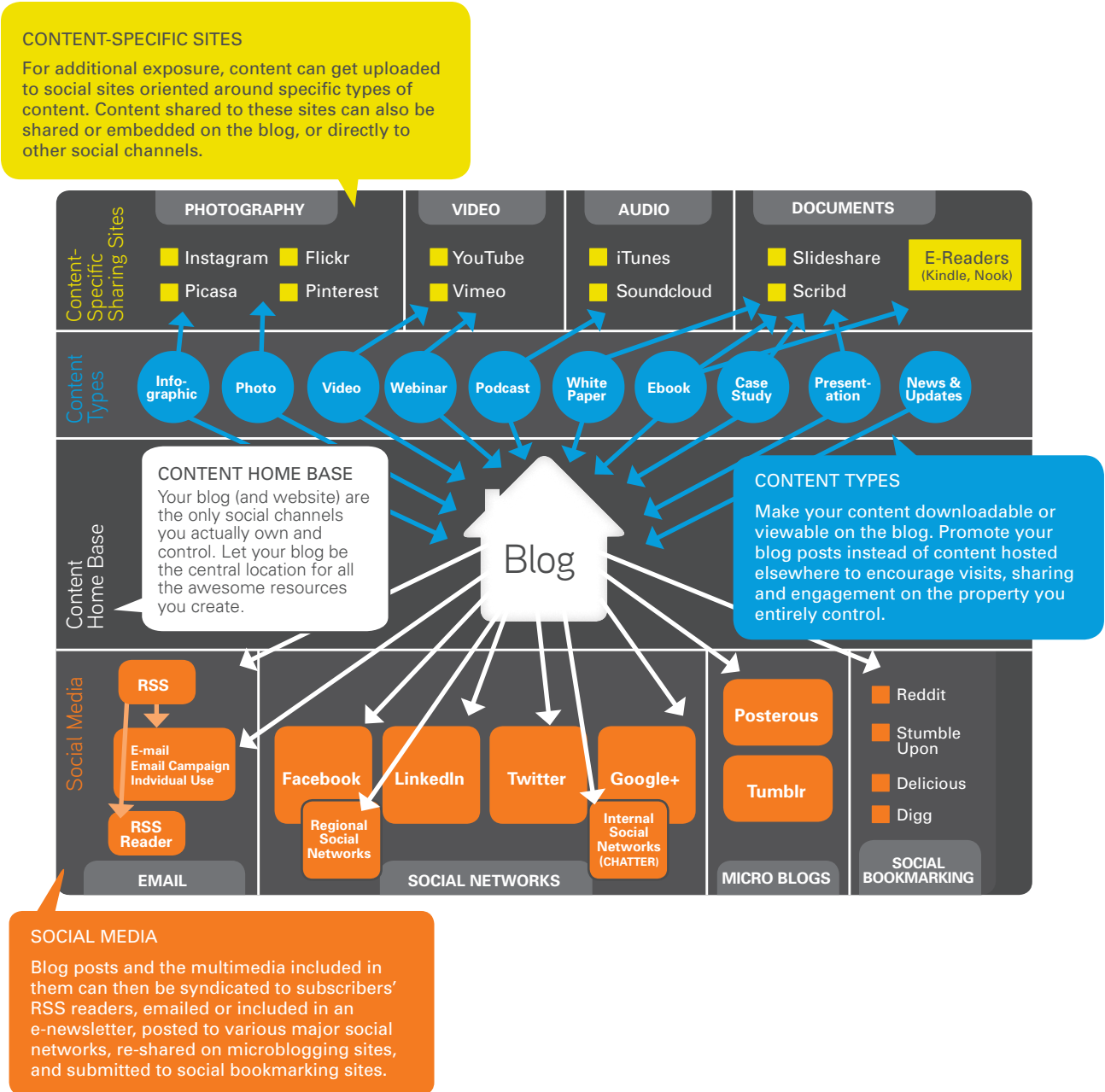
Publishing Workflow

When you know which channels make sense for your business, document the step-by-step processes around publishing and promoting each content type on its various destined channels. Here's a simplified example:

1. Start with an ebook. Publish to Slideshare.
2. Extract excerpts and images from the ebook to create a series of blog posts. Share blog posts to Twitter and LinkedIn.

3. Create a presentation for the next speaking engagement. Upload to SlideShare.
4. Take pictures at the speaking engagement and create a photo album. Share to Flickr and Facebook.
5. Host and record a webinar based on the ebook. Upload video to YouTube. Share on Facebook.

The distribution map below should help you visualize how content can get published systematically to different channels with the blog serving as the central hub.



Chapter 6 / Optimize Content for Search and Social Media

At this point you know what content you'll create and where you'll publish it. Now you just need to make it easy for your customers and prospects to find it. Let's explore what we mean.

Making Content Findable

Unfortunately, just because you uploaded a video or published a blog post doesn't mean anyone will ever see what you put out into the world. Here's why: In 2010, Google CEO [Eric Schmidt](#) stated that we create as much information in two days as we have since the dawn of man through to 2003.

- Nearly [6 million blog posts](#) are published every week on WordPress alone - one of many blogging platforms
- [200 million tweets](#) are published daily
- [340 million photos](#) are uploaded to Facebook every day
- [1 hour of video](#) is uploaded to YouTube every second

To sort through it all, Internet users type nearly [18 billion](#) queries into search engines every month and rely on their social networks to curate interesting information. Your content marketing plan will need to address how you'll maximize your visibility when people type queries related to your business into the search box or peruse their social network news feeds.

Search engines use a variety of factors to determine how websites and other content, like photos and videos, rank in their results pages. *Search Engine Optimization* (SEO) is the art of making your content easier to find based on these factors.

Here are the basics you'll need to consider.

First Things First: Adding Value and Optimizing for Humans

Above all else, your content has to provide value to people. Search engines are getting better at knowing which content was created to game the ever-changing algorithm versus what content humans actually trust. In order for content to get downloaded, linked to, bookmarked or shared, it has to satisfy a human need. It must entertain or educate your audience.

And with so much content demanding user attention online, you need to make your content as easy for humans to consume as possible. This means:

- Writing fascinating titles, descriptions and headers
- Keeping videos short
- Using lists and bullet points
- Bolding or italicizing key points
- Using visuals to demonstrate a point
- Creating content appropriate for prospects at each stage of the buying cycle
- Including clear calls to action

What will be your editorial team's standard for quality? What standards must each piece of content meet in order to get published? Document the essential guidelines to ensure your editorial team is collectively focused on providing value to people.

Onsite Optimization

Keywords

You'll need to develop a list of keywords - words and phrases - that your customers and prospects search for to find information about your industry, your company and your products or services. You can gather this data from customer interviews, reviewing the key terms people use to reach your site using web analytics, or using the [Google Keyword Tool](#).

These keywords should reflect your editorial themes and topics, and you'll need to use them in the content you create - in the headlines; the opening paragraphs; in the titles, headers, descriptions and tags; and in the social media posts sharing the content. But beware of keyword stuffing, which is the practice of overusing your keywords without adding value. Search engines don't fall for that, and neither do readers.

Want to know more? [Check out this helpful post](#) from *CopyBlogger* about creating better content with semantic keyword research.

Titles, Descriptions and Headers

The title of your content is the most important aspect. Ensure titles are unique and no more than 60 characters in length, and that titles, descriptions and headers:

- Accurately describe the topic
- Include a keyword phrase
- Convey value to the potential reader or viewer

Architecture

The way your website or blog is technically structured will play a major role in whether search engines can “see” and index your content. Your plan should outline best practices for:

- Including titles and keywords in website and blog URLs
- Linking to other posts or content on your site
- Tagging, categorizing, and marking-up content with metadata

Freshness

Publishing content regularly isn't just a good idea to keep your audience engaged. Search engines favor sites that are frequently updated with fresh content. This is where an ongoing editorial calendar and publishing plan come into place. Set a publishing schedule you know you can stick to.

Offsite Optimization

External Linking and Social Shareability

Social sharing is one of the easiest ways to garner the attention that results in external links. When other sites link to your content or when other reputable sources share it in social media, that tells search engines that your pages or posts are trustworthy and valuable, which increases your rankings and overall visibility. Publishing to multiple social media channels will help increase reach, but the ultimate goal is to get others sharing your content for you. Your plan should identify the different ways your publishing strategy will encourage readers and viewers to share to their social graphs.

Maximizing Content Reach by Understanding Publishing Considerations

Each publishing destination has different types of content requirements that need to be considered before publishing. To illustrate:

- YouTube and Flickr allow you to tag and categorize videos and photos.
- [After about three hours](#), few click on links shared on Twitter.
- Facebook uses an algorithm called EdgeRank to determine which posts and stories get included into each user's unique news feed.
- Users and pages are alerted when tagged in Facebook or Google+ posts.
- Tumblr will create a thumbnail to preview an image you include in a post that expands when a user clicks on it.

Knowing these details, you might specify the targeted SEO keywords to use when uploading videos to YouTube and photos to Flickr. You might tweet a link several times per day. You might include a photo along with your status update for 100-180% more engagement on Facebook. When sharing photos to Tumblr, you might reduce the size of the image before uploading to result in a better thumbnail preview.

The key to content optimization is testing out how each platform works, setting goals and benchmarks, and revising your approach based on what works for your audience.

Conclusion / Craft Your Plan and Get Creating!

Now that you have the know-how to start your content marketing endeavor, it's time to craft your plan and get creating. But before you do that, we leave you with three last thoughts.

Start Small. Then Grow.

We covered a lot of ground in the previous chapters, and it's easy to become overwhelmed with all the publishing possibilities and considerations. Don't worry about having a presence on every social channel or trying to tackle every content medium. Only take on what you and your team can manage, and allow for expansions as you become more efficient.

Create an Editorial Calendar

After the content marketing plan has been created, reviewed and approved, create an editorial calendar to keep your team on track. We recommend planning what content will be created when and by whom at least six months in advance so your team has plenty of time to make it happen. Without it, it's too easy to become digital dust.

Don't Forget to Measure, But Don't Measure Everything

Just because you can measure the minutiae in the digital space doesn't mean you should. Stick the KPIs you outlined in your plan and work on incrementally improving on a monthly basis.

And last but not least, have fun.

Questions, comments or feedback for us? Please get in touch. We'd love to hear from you.

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