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Four Steps to Creating Content for a Social Media Community



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INTRODUCTION:

Content, Sharing and
Community

STEP 1:

Build a Content Strategy

STEP 2:

Go Beyond Text

STEP 3:

Organize and Share Content
With Your Community

STEP 4:

Build Community Relationships
Through Content

CONCLUSION:

Pulling It All Together



INTRODUCTION:

Content, Sharing and Community

We'd make a bet that you have great insights and ideas to share with your customers, colleagues and community. You're likely experienced in your field with a few tricks up your sleeve and ideas in your hat that you're excited to share. After all, these tips and ideas establish you as a credible resource and could deepen relationships with your customers and community. That's an exciting concept! But where do you begin? Do you just start writing a blog? What about those infographics you've heard so much about? Is video an option?

This month's eBook, *Four Steps to Creating Content for a Social Media Community*, will combine your expertise and excitement to create content with the strategy, best practices and tactical approaches to make that content meaningful and sharable. This content will spread through your community, building and enhancing relationships, empowering your community to talk about it and perhaps inviting them to share content of their own. Ultimately, this content experience could turn prospects into customers that stick around.

STEP 1:

Build a Content Strategy

This is where it all begins. Much like in preparing to run a print ad you would know your message, budget, call to action, media placement and launch timing, content needs some preliminary, upfront thinking to be effective. Content strategy plays a vital role in the curation and creation of useful, applicable content.

Start off with this question: Why are we creating this content? This question needs to be answered and agreed upon by your company before putting any pens to paper (or fingers to keys). Perhaps your immediate answers are:

- Establish industry credibility for your brand, or
- Increase traffic to your website, or
- Drive leads to your sales funnel

But we need to think bigger. With social media, your community will be stewards of your brand and content, so they should be considered when determining content goals. Do you carefully choose your newspapers when your print ad is ready to go? Your community is similar to your medium. They are passing along or "publishing" your content so consider them before putting your message out there.

You want to ensure that you think about their interests when writing your content. When taking this all into consideration your answers might take things a step further:

- To create sharable, meaningful content for my community, or
- To deepen community relationships with engaging content, or
- To build relationships that will increase customer retention and acquisition

Now we're talking, right? This second set of bullet points opens up many opportunities for your content. Of course the prior bullets are incredibly important, and they are likely a result of creating and sharing meaningful content and deepening community relationships.

Now that we've answered our big question, let's look at the top 3 areas of your content strategy; Big Idea, Community, Tone/Voice.

Big Idea

Your big idea, or what you're writing about, will play out in everything you write and all the tactics you execute. It's a big decision and it should be broad enough to work for a long time. That could be years. Your big idea will attract readers interested in that subject and changing it up could deter them. When considering a big idea:

- Be broad - it should have legs and longevity
- Be unique - your brand needs to stand out
- Be relevant - content should sync up with your area of expertise

For example, our (Radian6) big idea is [social media strategy](#). This includes a number of areas such as [social media monitoring](#), which is what we do as a company. In addition, this topic is broad enough to last a long time (since 2006!) and appeals to a wide variety of community members.

Community

Your brand has an established target audience whom you reach out to via traditional media, business contacts and even the social web. Take a deeper look at this group and determine who would be interested in your content. Consider why and how they would be engaged as well. What is keeping them awake at night? What problems can you solve that will help them do their jobs better or make their lives easier?

Perhaps you are a bank with a younger target audience segment - what would they like to hear about and why? Perhaps they tend to bank online and you have some great insights as to how to save money by banking that way. Now, there are other audience segments and topics to consider, but this could be one aspect of your content. Often it can be good to determine who your community is as a first step, because if you are struggling to find your big idea, sometimes looking at your community can give you the "Ah ha" moment you're craving and help point you towards the right big idea.

There is one more aspect to your community. It's not just your target audience. Layer in existing customers, employees, competitors, brand advocates, brand detractors and prospects. Now you have your community of content recipients. They may or may not be on the same wavelength as your target audience, so consider them when developing your strategy as well. While they may never be paying customers, they are an avenue for sharing your content and establishing your brand as a credible source.

Tone/Voice

We discussed being unique when developing your big idea. One way your uniqueness plays out is through your content tone of voice. It's all about personality! If you work in an industry inundated with content, your personality is one great way to break through. Establishing a voice moves you away from "corporate speak" and into a place that's more distinct to your brand. This is more appealing to your community because it speaks to them in terms they understand. If you have an existing, overarching brand personality, extend it into your content.

Consider some brands with distinct voices. Starbucks. Dell. Best Buy. Why do they come to mind?

- These brands know what makes them interesting
- As consumers, we know what they do
- Most importantly they are original and consistent - their voice is distinct and spreads through everything they say and do

Perhaps the easiest way to move away from corporate speak and into a more consumable, community-friendly tone is to consider what is similar about the tone of these brands. While they are knowledgeable in their industries, they speak in the consumer's language. Many of us may not completely understand the process behind [coffee distribution](#), [computer manufacturing](#) or [3D TVs](#), yet we do comprehend what these brands are all about. That is, in large part, due to their brand voice.

Now that you have a strategy in place consisting of your big idea, tone and audience, it's time to get tactical. There are many different types of content, so which ones do you pick and why? We agree - that's a big question. In the next chapter, we will look at the many mediums to explore when it comes to developing content and focus on some the latest and greatest mediums.

STEP 2: Go Beyond Text

What comes to mind when you think about content? Do thoughts of blog posts, eBooks, case studies and white papers spring to mind? That is what many of us focus on when we think about content. However, in this chapter, let's think about content outside of copy. We are going to focus on some other great ideas for content that can be included on your website and on the other places you have a social presence.

If you'd like to learn more about blogging, check out our eBook [here](#).

Podcasts

Podcasts are digital audio or video files or recordings, usually part of a themed series, which can be downloaded from a website to a media player (such as an iPod) or a computer.

You may feel that video would be much more appealing. However, consider all the places your community might enjoy accessing your content, like at the office, during their morning commute or while working out at the gym. As wonderful as video content is, there are times that it may not be as easily consumed as audio. Including a podcast as a part of your content is like having your very own radio show. It is a fantastic opportunity to share audio content with your community.

The topics you cover in your podcasts can be as specific as you like or as wide ranging, and there are podcasts for just about every subject under the sun. Therefore, it is important to look for ways to make your podcast unique so it stands out from the rest.

For a few ideas on how wide ranging or niche podcasts can be, check out Chris Penn and John J. Wall's podcast, "[Marketing Over Coffee](#)", which covers both new and classic marketing, and [National Public Radio](#) (NPR) which hosts a variety of podcasts on topics from News of the Day to Car Talk. There's also [The Moth podcast](#) which features people telling true, engaging, funny, touching and eye-opening stories from their lives. Don't forget business podcasts as well, such as the [BMC podcasts](#).

[Incorporate podcasts into your content](#) by publishing them on your blog or website. You will want to check your blog publishing platform for specific details. You can also check out the Podcasting for Dummies podcast, book or a number of other resource to help get you up and running..

Finally, you can submit your podcasts to a number of podcast directories for wider consumption, but [iTunes](#) is the preferred choice for showcasing podcasts.

Photographs

Photos can be a nice addition and add a little variety and freshness to your content. One great reason to begin using photos as a part of your content is that sharing your photos can help personalize and humanize your business. Photos can help show your community that you are more than just a logo or a product. They can help you express your company's tone and personality.

Photos with appropriate keywords in the filename ([social-media-listening.jpg](#)) can also help your content appear more prominently in search results. And the Facebook algorithm that determines what content shows to your company's fans has been shown to be very friendly to photos.

If you're looking for another reason to start adding photos in as a part of your content mix, consider this, research has found that [business-oriented web pages with images performed 91% better than those pages without images](#).

Your photos don't have to solely show your product line or be limited to a corporate photo of your team. You can take and share photos from life in the office, volunteer events, holidays, corporate events, trade shows and even the company canoe outing last summer.

If you are concerned about cost, keep in mind your photos do not always have to be professionally taken, which can be helpful in keeping costs down. You may also wish to consider taking photos of people in action, interacting with your brand. Another possibility is having the members of your community do the same by submitting photos with your product. Get creative!

Naturally, you can post your photos to your Facebook page and share them on Twitter - and you should. Attending an industry conference? Post and tag your photos to a photo sharing site like [Flickr](#) at the end of each day. But don't stop there, use fun, photo sharing social networks like [Instagram](#) to share your photos as they happen.

[Burberry](#) did just that, in real-time, with the premiere of their Spring/Summer 2012 collection. Calling it "[Tweetwalk](#)", Burberry partnered with Instagram, Twitter and British photographer Mike Kus to share his exclusive images live from the show space. (Additionally, they leveraged Facebook, Chinese social networks [Sina](#) and [Youku](#), [YouTube](#) and an on demand live stream to distribute their content across the web simultaneously.

Video

Why write a story when you can show and tell a story? Because [71% of online Americans use video sharing sites](#) (Source: [Pew Internet](#)) and according to a [2009 Forrester report](#), [your video content is 50 times more likely to appear on the first page of search results than text based content](#).

Focus on the stories you want to share with your community and your consumers and create your own videos. You can use video as a way to spotlight a product or people in your organization. You can also use video as a way to be more in control of your brand. For example, rather than waiting for the media to interview your company spokesperson, why not create your own video interviews and upload them to video sharing sites like [YouTube](#) and [Vimeo](#)? In the process, you will have videos that you can embed in your blog posts, making them easier to share, and save visitors a trip away from your blog to view your content.

[Chris Brogan](#) suggests “[Shoot brief, shoot informative, shoot casual](#),” and offers [Zappos](#) as a great example of a company doing it right.

Don't be limited to just spotlighting products or services, though. Use videos to inform and educate as well - perhaps a video tutorial series sharing your industry expertise with your community. Consider a video case study. Sharing a challenge your company faced, how you handled it and what the outcome was can be very powerful.

Webinars

[Webinars](#) are live, online educational presentations during which participating viewers/listeners, typically, can submit questions and comments. Think web-based seminars. Hosting your own is something you should consider as another layer of content. Webinars, unlike many conferences and events, can be both convenient and affordable.

They are a great way to draw in and connect with your community. Webinars are interactive, unlike an eBook, white paper or even a video. Participants have the ability to ask specific questions, chat with the guests and moderator, and there are no geographical hindrances. There's certainly no jet lag for traveling to and from a webinar, either. Plus, participants who might feel awkward in a face-to-face setting may feel more comfortable participating from their private location.

Webinars may even snag you some new clients as well. According to a [2009 study by Business.com](#), 67% of small business decision-makers who use social media for business information seek out relevant webinars or podcasts. With stats like that, why not give webinars a try?

Extending social media reach and thus potentially extending the conversation is a great reason to add them to your content. During a webinar, participants can discuss and share information on other social media platforms like Twitter, using hashtags. This can increase the conversation around your brand and spread key points or take-aways. Plus, after the webinar, upload the information to your SlideShare account, re-purpose it as a podcast and write a blog post recap about it. They are like a gift that keeps on giving.

Infographics

Infographics are graphic visual representations of information, data or knowledge. These graphics present complex information quickly and clearly. When you think infographics, think visual communication. Therefore, if you want to convey information that contains numbers, dates, locations,

measurements or comparisons, you could probably move away from putting it in writing and format it as an infographic instead.

While this form of visual communication existed before the Internet (when cave walls were the popular medium), they are back by popular demand due to the massive amounts of data circling the web and the sharable nature of social media.

Infographics have an internal and an external appeal. Externally, they take data and information and put it into a format that's snackable and easy to digest. They bring value to consumers that is sharable. Internally, they have linking capabilities for search engine optimization and traffic generation.

The most successful infographics convey a story with a quick glance or read. Ragan's PR Daily offers these [five tips to help you when you're creating an infographic](#):

1. Find the most interesting data
2. Add scale to your data
3. Create Tweetable statements
4. Find a professional designer
5. Make it shareable

Now that we have a boatload of content options to try out, let's organize our thoughts a bit. We need to look at what type of content to use and when, both from a high-level view at 30,000 feet and a more granular look on the ground. In the next chapter, we will explore ways to create your content topics, organize them, share them and get people reading and consuming them!

STEP 3:

Organize and Share Content With Your Community

Now that we have our strategy and tactics in mind, we need to think about the actual content. What are we talking about and how often are we talking about it?

Choose Your Topics

Once your big idea is determined (from Chapter 1), it's time to look at how you'll break that out monthly. Consider these questions:

- Is the topic interesting right now?
- Is it popular right now?
- Is it timely?
- What is the competition doing or writing about?
- Will you have enough content for the month?

It's improbable that your selected topic will be interesting, popular, unique when compared to the competition or provide you with unlimited content. However, finding a topic that you love, that's timely, and is low on competition is a great find.

Topics/Content Calendar

An editorial calendar will keep you on track for consistency, relevancy and ensure everyone on your team is on the same page. You can have a simple calendar tracking your daily or weekly blog posts or you can go bigger and have a more holistic view of your plans. Consider a mixture of the two since both are equally important.

To pull this off, consider two things:

Master calendar. This outlines the types of content you're using (blog posts, webinars, eBooks, white papers, etc.) and looks at the calendar from a monthly perspective. Why it works:

- See all your content at a glance
- Add in key holidays, marketing campaigns, trade shows, business dates, etc. for tracking and content creation purposes
- Create synergy or compatible topics between all of your content by seeing them from a topline view - this is where you become a content curator!

Detailed calendar. This shows the content on a daily or weekly basis (depending on how often you publish) so you get a more granular look at your content plans. Why it works:

- It's the nuts and bolts of your day-to-day content planning so you always have a great, detailed reference document
- It can include helpful information such as authors, SEO keywords, calls to action, current status, etc.
- It's an idea engine - seeing all your content details here may spark ideas for new content and can help you identify future topics

Now that we know what we're writing about and when, we need to ensure that when we hit publish, people find it. One way to do this is to share your content across your social networks or outposts.

Maximizing What You Have

You might be wondering at this point how you'll find the time to create all this content. One of the most common concerns expressed by marketers is not having enough resources, to create new material to feed all the social networks. But take a step back and look at all the content you already have.

Does your company already create white papers? If so, then you've already done the hard work of creating the intellectual property. The next step is maximizing it for each channel.

Imagine you have a five-page white paper talking about trends in your industry, or the features of your new product. You've posted it to your website. What do you do to get the most out of it?

- Turn that five-page white paper into five blog posts
- Make it into a presentation and post it to SlideShare, tagged with the appropriate keywords
- Interview the writer about the topic and post that (tagged) video to YouTube
- Take the audio from the interview and turn it into a podcast
- Create an infographic from the key data
- Promote each piece of new content through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+

Once you start looking for content, you'll find you have more than you think. The rest is just logistics.

Sharing Content

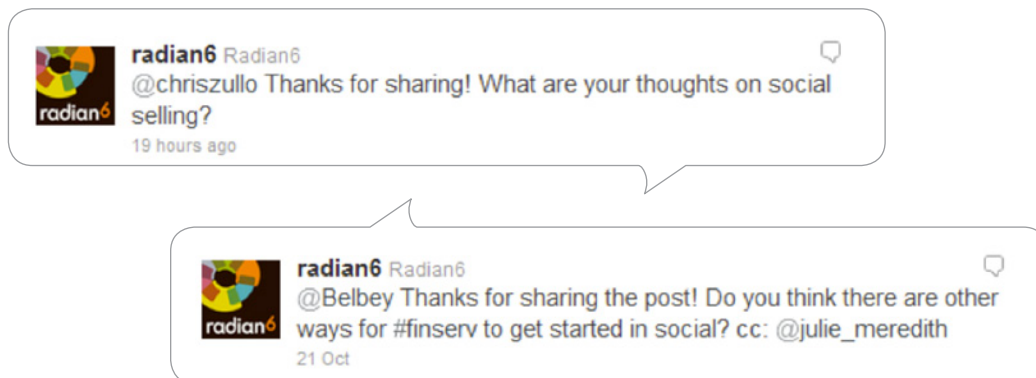
You've got all this great content and you're dying to share it. Before you do, remember that no matter how much more interaction or engagement you receive across your social outposts, there's no place like home. Home being your blog, your site, or wherever your URL is. Your social networks are a great place to connect, but should the people you engage with along the way wish to dig a little deeper, they will be looking for more where you hang your hat.

With so many social networks to participate in and share content with, we couldn't cover them all in this chapter so we've given you four to focus on and get you started in the right direction.

Google+ is the latest addition to the social networking scene. It's a great place to share content with individuals, specific lists, which Google+ calls circles, the general public or a combination of all of the above. Just like other social sharing sites, you can post status updates, links, photos and more. Your community has the ability to give you a +1 if they like your content, share your content with others and comment.

If you're not familiar with Google+ but looking to get started, check out the [Google+ 50](#), a great list to think about to help get you going. With [20,000,000 visitors world wide for Google+](#), you might want to get started today!

Twitter is another great place to share content and create conversations. Tweeting links to your latest post is fine, but do it in a way that invites conversation. For example, rather than dropping a link with the title of your article, create conversation starters. A handful of questions or points to help you kick off the conversation around your post is a great start. A couple simple examples can be seen below.



Facebook is an incredibly visual platform. Be sure to post plenty of pictures on your Facebook Page. Create photo albums and think about the stories you'd like to tell with your photos. As we mentioned earlier, if you're taking photos at events or snapping pictures in the office use them as content and share them across your social networks to draw people in to get to know your brand.

There are [five types of content you can post and Facebook values each of them differently](#). In order of significance, these are the types of content you might post to a page:

- Photos
- Videos
- Links
- Status updates
- Updates from application

Facebook can be fun! Give your community a chance to “name that photo” and inspire creativity around your pictures. It’s also a good platform for sparking discussions. Again, ask questions when you share your content to encourage conversations.

LinkedIn is a social network focused much more around professionals. If you’re curious about how active a network it is, [LinkedIn had 120,000,000 users](#) as of March 2011 and 7,432,307 job changes have been tracked by [LinkedIn](#) since 2009. Therefore, if your content is of the kind that can help business professionals, a LinkedIn group or page may be the perfect place to share it.

Since LinkedIn is currently used in over 200 countries and territories around the world, with more than half of its users coming from outside of the U.S., it’s an excellent place to share content if your community is global or you are looking to expand your community to a global level.

Much like other social networks, you can share links, create status updates, and include apps to help showcase your content. [Guy Kawasaki](#), author and co-founder of Alltop.com, suggests that when using LinkedIn you, “Convince potential customers of your expertise by sharing unique blog content.” He also adds that small businesses with unique content should link to it from their personal LinkedIn profiles. You can also take it a step further by advertising to promote featured blog content to LinkedIn members. This allows you to specify exactly who will see your ads (Executives or VPs) and include a link to your profile so they know who’s behind the content.

LinkedIn is also a wonderful place to create discussions and answer questions pertaining to your area of expertise which, of course, could lead to people seeking out your content as an additional resource.

The above are just a few examples of ways to spread your content. Don’t just limit yourself to our suggestions. There are many other ways to share content and you should always be looking for opportunities and new ways to do so. A great way to find more content sharing options that are applicable to your brand is by seeing where your community members are sharing your content and branch out appropriately. You can also use a little competitive intel and look into the social networks and communities where your competitors are active.

To learn more about how you can use social media to get a leg up on the competition download our [e-Book](#) on the subject.

Search Engine Optimization

We write content because we want people to read it. In order for consumers to see the goods, they need to be able to find it...easily. That’s where search engine optimization, or SEO, comes into play. By writing your copy, categorizing and tagging with specific keywords and phrases in mind, you’ll be more relevant to search engines and rank higher on their results pages making your content much easier to find.

SEO is a critical way to generate traffic to your content. Using specific keywords of your most important search terms (you can find this via services such as [Google Keyword Tool](#)) in your content copy and tags is the best way to speak to these search engines. For instance, if you sell electric toothbrushes, you want keywords that fit in the dental category.

Be strategic about how you use your keywords. There should be a balance between writing great content and writing for a search engine. After all, you don't want to write "electric toothbrush" 100 times on one page but you also don't want to completely forget it either.

Luckily there are some great tactics to use for strong SEO. Let's stick with our toothpaste friends through this exercise.

1. **Start with the headline.** Ensure the headlines for your blog posts, videos, white papers and any other forms of content include your key phrases. For example, a blog post that's both interesting to your community and search-engine friendly would be, "5 Things about an Electric Toothbrush that will Make you Smile."
2. **Move to the introduction or description paragraph.** Whether it's the first paragraph of your blog or the description of your video on YouTube, ensure your keywords are there. This further reinforces that these keywords are related to your content.
3. **Customize the URL.** If you have the opportunity to change the URL on your blog post or landing page for your presentations and white papers, take advantage! Changing the URL to include your keywords is another way to stand out in search results.
4. **Categorize and tag it.** Many blogs have the ability to group each post into categories. Create categories with your keywords but stay broad. This is the place for more broad, dental-related keywords such as "dental hygiene." Use tags to get specific, such as "electric toothbrush." You can also tag keywords on video sites such as YouTube and Vimeo. Look for tags when you're adding content to third party sites.

There are many more ways to enhance your content with SEO including this free SEO kit from [Hubspot](#) and the "[Whiteboard Friday](#)" series by [SEOMoz](#).

Search isn't the only way people will find your content. It's up to you to spread it! Luckily the social web is a great place for sharing information that interests your community. As you share content with your community in an engaging and personable way, you'll soon start to develop relationships. How do you build, grow and leverage these relationships the best way possible? One great way is through continued valuable content. It's a wonderful circle.

STEP 4:

Build Community Relationships Through Content

One of the best parts of creating and sharing great content is connecting with your community. You can learn a lot from your community if you take the time to listen. Though the members of your community can give you a good indication of whether or not they find your content valuable, through various social options, (sharing your posts, comments, tweets and quoting your content) it is always a good idea to get direct feedback.

You can collect feedback from your community in a number of ways. Consider periodic [online surveys](#), feedback forms, attendee surveys at your next webinar or conference, or even building a questionnaire into your next email newsletter. If you plan on measuring and analyzing this information (and why

wouldn't you?) just be sure you are consistent and ask the same questions across your selected time period so you can measure any changes in awareness, sentiment, etc.

Categorizing your content to provide relevance to your community can be very helpful. For example, if you've categorized all of your content about your corporate events as "Events", someone visiting your website or this information would only have to select that category to see all the content you've shared on the subject.

You can also help build a strong relationship with your community by providing them with informational and educational content. In other words, content that will help them be more successful, do their jobs better or make them that much wiser in their field.

How will you know what type of content your community will find valuable or educational? It all goes back to asking the right questions. Take the responses you have received from your feedback forms, surveys, etc. and spend some time evaluating them to see if there are areas for improvement. Are you covering the topics your community is looking to learn more about? Are they asking for information you can provide? If so, and you plan to put their suggestions to good use, be sure to let your community know that you will be incorporating their suggestions. One way to acknowledge your community's contributions would be to thank them publicly on your site. Give them all the credit they deserve for helping you to continue to grow and improve. Keep an open line of communication between you and your community members. Let them know they are one of the most important, if not THE most important, driving force behind your brand.

Both your content and relationships are blooming. It's an exciting time and more opportunities await. We may be winding down, but we're not done yet! Our last chapter wraps it up and throws in a few more nuggets.

CONCLUSION: Pulling it all Together

There are always ways to enhance your content. So before we wrap up, let's stretch this content-about-content eBook a bit further with some final food for thought.

Put content at the center of your marketing strategy. The content you create will be a traffic-driver, conversation starter, information-enricher and an awareness-builder. It can even be a conversion-leader. What marketer wouldn't want that as part of their approach? Marketing can even allocate dollars to your content and help promote your eBooks and webinars.

To make that happen, ensure the entire team is on-board with your content strategy and make sure it aligns with marketing's goals as well. Communication and dialogue are key and it can only lead to great things for your brand.

Be in the know. We all know the social web is constantly changing and that means new ways to promote content and new content formats. Keep up on the latest news and information in this space to ensure you remain relevant. Attend conferences, follow content and social media experts on Twitter and read blog posts. You can even share your knowledge and be seen as an expert yourself!

It's okay to reach out. Remember when you had to sell cookies in school and you asked your Mom to buy some? If you're just starting out with your content, feel free to talk to close friends, colleagues, brand advocates (and why not Mom, especially if she's in your industry!) about your new venture. Share it with them, get their feedback and ask if they know anyone who would also enjoy it. We all have networks and it's a great way to get your feet off the ground.

In this eBook, we explored ways for your content to spread throughout social media, enabling you to build and enhance relationships and empower your community. We did this through the development of a successful content strategy, looking at the different types of content, how to share this great content with your community and how to build relationships as a result. We hope you will be able to take this information and begin to develop or refine your content strategy.

Are you feeling empowered to start your content strategy? Or if you have one in place, do you feel there are some updates that can be made to make it even stronger? Consider your community along with your brand goals and your content will go further than ever before.

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