

GUIDE + TOOL

Mastering the Content Strategy

Professional Mastery Series

Step-by-step guide with expert advice and techniques for developing a strategy for content that supports marketing and business goals, with Niche Media's Chris Rennie.





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Read this first

This template enables you to determine how a content strategy flows from the overall business and marketing goals. It is not a tactical plan, or a template for creating specific types of content, but is an earlier step in the overall of process that's a crucial step towards a reasoned and efficient content marketing operation.

As you read through this expert advice from Chris Rennie, refer to the content strategy template on the following pages. Rennie is digital and content director at Niche Media, a specialist custom content firm and publisher of industry-leading magazine titles such as Marketing.

Where does content strategy sit in the marketing plan?

CR: It varies depending on the company and what you're trying to achieve. Some organisations won't have a content strategy and just standard marketing communications, but most companies are developing content strategy, often within their social media verticals.

Today, many companies are only involving their website or social channels in their content marketing, and not many are asking the question of how all these activities connect to the overall objectives of the business.

When I GM of digital communications and publishing at CPA Australia, I had an overall content strategy that basically went across all our 22 owned and earned channels.

Everything we did stemmed from the umbrella corporate objectives (for example: to be the leading member organisation globally, or to grow Asia-Pacific membership by XX%, etc).

Below that came the top-level marketing strategies (such as: APAC acquisition targets), and this is usually presented as a 12-month program.

Along the 12-month program program contium comes your marketing communication strategy.

Below that sits each of your various content channels (eg. website and social), and each channel will then have its individual strategic objectives.

Always check back that these individual strategic objectives marry up with the key marcomms strategy, and ultimately, the key corporate objectives.

Ask yourself: are there gaps between your channel strategy and what the marcomms is trying to achieve?

Remember that they don't all have to be aligned, necessarily, but they should all have underlying premises of having the same overarching objective and they have agreed target audiences.

Finally, study each channel's specific strategies, and whether they are reaching the right target audience.

Don't make the mistake that content strategy is only for digital channels, it works across all channels and all mediums, and 'content' could be an event, TV ad, social, print magazine, bloggers, networks of advocates, etcetera.

Aligning your content

CR: Once you've got your marcomms objectives, target audience and goals, it's time to do a content audit.

Go through all the content you've created, or content that is already available, and decide if it is still relevant or in line with your new/current strategy and goals over to new channels.or how it can be reused to align to the stated corporate objectives and the specific channel objectives.

Think about your plan and how you will transition this existing content over.

It could be a matter of repurposing for different distribution channels, so don't assume that you have to start from scratch. Any business that's been around for a while will have existing content assets, whether they're obvious or not.

Content audits not only allow you to assess you existing resource base but ensure you understand who the content creators in the business actually are.

Most larger companies are staggered by the amount of content that is being created on legacy platforms that no one is really managing strategically.

What is content?

CR: Standard content for an organisation would be articles or text, images, videos, events, TV ads, training or how-to videos, and internal training programs.

Content can also be internal and external. Take, for example, social media posts. Internal social media posts are content pieces that you create internally for your social channels, whereas external social posts would be occasions where your brand is being mentioned or featured in other channels.

It's important to think about you are going to use this external content – are you going to republish or reproduce them on your own sites? External content, or earned media, is very highly valued, and should be used as part of your credentials.

There are now many tools that can aggregate content from others that mention your brand and can be then fed into your owned channels.

Popular sources of external content includes sites like BuzzFeed, Upworthy, and even ecommerce sites where your products are featured.

Who is responsible for content and the content strategy?

CR: Depending on how your company is split, content can sit as its own vertical, can be part of corporate communications, community management – often it's not embedded in the marketing department.

Regardless of company structure though, it is crucial that content and marketing are actively in conversation, and that both departments are intertwined and on the same page.

I believe in the next 12 months, you will see a shift where the head of content will sit as part of the executive committee, whereas currently head of content generally reports to the head of marketing.

It is vital that marketing and content work towards common objectives, and there is regular checking between departments on whether content created is in alignment, suitable, and appealing to the target audience. How willing will they be to consuming your content, and is the content presented on the right platform?

This is where the importance of having a content strategy comes in – it ensures that all parties are on board with what is required, and what are aims and goals.

Outsource or in-house?

CR: The content landscape is ever changing. For some companies it's expanding, and for others it is contracting due to learned experience, and that will influence how and where content is being created.

Some businesses, such as ANZ, hire teams of journalists to create content in-house, including Walkey-award winning journalist Andrew Cornell, who is editor of its digital publishing site BlueNotes.

On the other spectrum, a company such as Flight Centre actively involved various agencies to create content on its behalf. Red Bull has formed its own Red Bull Media House, while Adidas uses a mixture of both internally and externally created content.

It is very dependent on the company's structure, and where its management sees value at the moment, and how convincingly does content and marketing sells the brand.

Figure out your content strategy

CR: Every brand has its own content, and it can be used to solve your sales issues.

For example, if you have a website with high abandonment rate, that could be because you have content on your homepage that isn't aligned to your brand, or what your audience is seeking for.

Marketers and content strategists need to understand what content is driving people to the site, and whether it is qualified traffic (justified audience that is landing on your site to seek information that you can offer), or is it accidental, unqualified traffic (real-world example for Marketingmag.com.au: an interview with a marketer from online business OKCupid, which was drawing in people who are actually looking for the dating site).

This is where SEO expertise becomes essential in content marketing.

It is an essential exercise to think about and create content that appeals to your audience.

The template

Corporate objective

You should also be able to answer:

- Why is the business establishing a content strategy?
- What business outcome/s is it driving towards?

Marketing objectives

What are the organisation's marketing activities trying to accomplish overall? This will enable you to know the role that a content strategy will play. Is your content marketing intended to support a brand's existing or change in positioning, increase conversions of an ecommerce site, or something else?

Timeline

Are the organisation's content marketing efforts an ongoing endeavor such as a company blog or a permanent content hub? Or is it to provide support during a specific campaign period?

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Channels

Notes:

- Each marcomms channel requires a specific objective be clearly identified.
- If relevant, include paid media that may not fall under 'content marketing', as this gives context to what you're doing.
- When thinking about the investment required for each channel, consider where the money will come from, e.g. the marketing budget?

		CHANNELS							
		Website	Social	Events	Ambassadors	Publications
CHANNEL OBJECTIVES	Target audience								
	Channel KPIs								
	Key messages								
	Methods of amplification								
	SEO alignment								
	Investment required (and source)								
	Unique channel measurements (eg pageviews, shares etc)								
	Alignment with marketing and company objectives								



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