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The Simple-Is-Best Content Plan

Use this straightforward plan to build a content strategy that gets big results.

Most marketing teams prioritize creating a large volume of content, including eBooks, webinars, videos, and more. But producing more content doesn't automatically translate into more leads and closed deals, and it's important to focus on quality before quantity. Your content must connect with the right audience, communicate the right messages, and inspire the right actions—and it must be deployed at the right stage of the buyer's journey.

A great content strategy can provide a unifying conceptual framework and business case that guides all your assets and even helps you attribute leads to each individual piece of content you produce. But this ideal strategy is not as well adopted as you'd think. In fact, nearly 80 percent of 1,200 marketers surveyed said their business had a content strategy, but a mere 9 percent said that strategy was an excellent one.[1]

Fortunately, we're here to help marketers implement better content strategies more easily. This short guide outlines the 10 essential steps to building a high-impact strategy for your content.

Step 1: Set goals.

Your content strategy should set specific goals for your content. Common content-adjacent goals include:

- Educate buyers
- Encourage buyers to take action
- Endear buyers to your brand

Your goals should inform the development of every content asset—and be front and center in every creative brief.

Step 2: Talk to stakeholders.

Your content strategy shouldn't emerge from a vacuum. Instead, it should reflect your marketing and sales organizations' most critical needs and objectives. To understand these priorities, you should have conversations with your CMO, your product marketing team, and your sales leadership before beginning to build your strategy.

Here are some questions to help start these discussions:

CMO

- What are this year's strategic priorities?
- What are this year's key messages?
- Which personas are we targeting?

Product marketing

- Which new products are we introducing and when?
- How will these new releases help our customers?
- What issues are our customers struggling with?

Sales

- What are common challenges you hear from customers and prospects?
- Why do customers choose us over our competitor?
- Why did our prospects choose our competitor over us?
- What kinds of content could make selling easier?
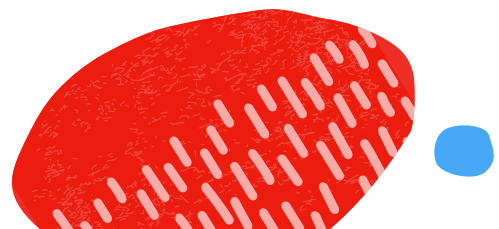
Step 3: Look at marketing attribution reports and customer data.

Two other great sources of insights are marketing attribution reports and customer data. Attribution reports can help you figure out which campaigns (featuring which content assets) have tended to deliver the most leads and sales.

Meanwhile, customer data from your CRM can help you zero in on the characteristics of your ideal buyer. For example, you can look at the overall characteristics of businesses that enter your pipeline—size, industry, and location—as well as key attributes of those most likely to make a purchase.

Together, this information can help reveal the types of content and subject matter that are most likely to generate high-quality leads.

Step 4: Define your audience.

The more specific and personalized your content is, the more likely it is to perform and generate revenue. However, you may not have the resources to craft bespoke content for 10 or 20 personas across many different industries.

Usually it makes sense to prioritize personas and industries for each product you're promoting, and plan to allocate content development resources accordingly.

Step 5: Identify your "big stories."

"Big stories" are the straightforward, key messages that can drive one or more of your campaigns. Examples include "Do more with less" and "Double your growth." These simple stories can help align your content with your product marketing team's messaging and help avoid the creation of "orphan" content that's wholly unrelated to the rest of your content library.

Step 6: Create a content map.

If you look at your content library, you may notice that your content is heavily weighted towards awareness or another stage of the buyer's journey. This can make it difficult to progress prospects and leads from one part of the funnel to the next.

A content map can be used to ensure your team plans a "balanced diet" of content. It might include a checklist of preferred asset types and topics for each stage of the buyer's journey. You might also want to include minimum quantities or ratios (e.g., no more than one awareness eBook for every two videos or similar).

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Step 7: Identify your content team.

Even the world's greatest content strategy won't work if you don't have enough people to plan, produce, and distribute your content. Ideally, you'll need:

- Content strategists to plan content and work with SMEs and product marketing to understand changing needs

- Content producers to write, design, and produce content assets

- Content operations specialists to distribute content outside the company, catalog content into libraries, and measure performance

If you're not sure who will perform any of the above tasks, you may need to find help within your organization or identify third-party service providers to pitch in.

Step 8: Include distribution plans.

Content that doesn't get any eyes on it won't generate leads or even provide useful engagement data. Your content strategy should recommend the best-performing distribution channels for each asset type. You can use historical campaign data to figure this out. For some distribution channels, you'll want to evaluate include email, organic social, paid social, paid search, events, and of course your website.

Step 9: Map your content to your lead-scoring model.

The type of content that leads consume is closely related to their readiness to buy. Generally speaking, top-of-funnel leads tend to consume high-level educational content like cheat sheets and infographics, while more serious potential buyers might download white papers or watch product demos.

Your content strategy can specify how much weight to give each content asset at each stage of the buyer's journey when scoring leads. For example, a top-of-funnel lead may receive a lower score if they download an infographic and a higher score if they choose a 15-page educational guidebook.

Step 10: Track your progress and pivot as needed.

Performance data can help you determine if your content strategy is on track and if individual content assets are meeting expectations. You can work with your marketing operations team to get engagement and attribution reporting. It may also be worth talking to your demand generation and sales teams to get their take on which content is driving the most leads.

Remember that your content strategy is only a starting point. If you don't get the results you were hoping for, don't be afraid to make changes and try tweaking certain approaches. Additionally, keep in mind that if you have a long sales cycle, it may take more time to gather meaningful data.
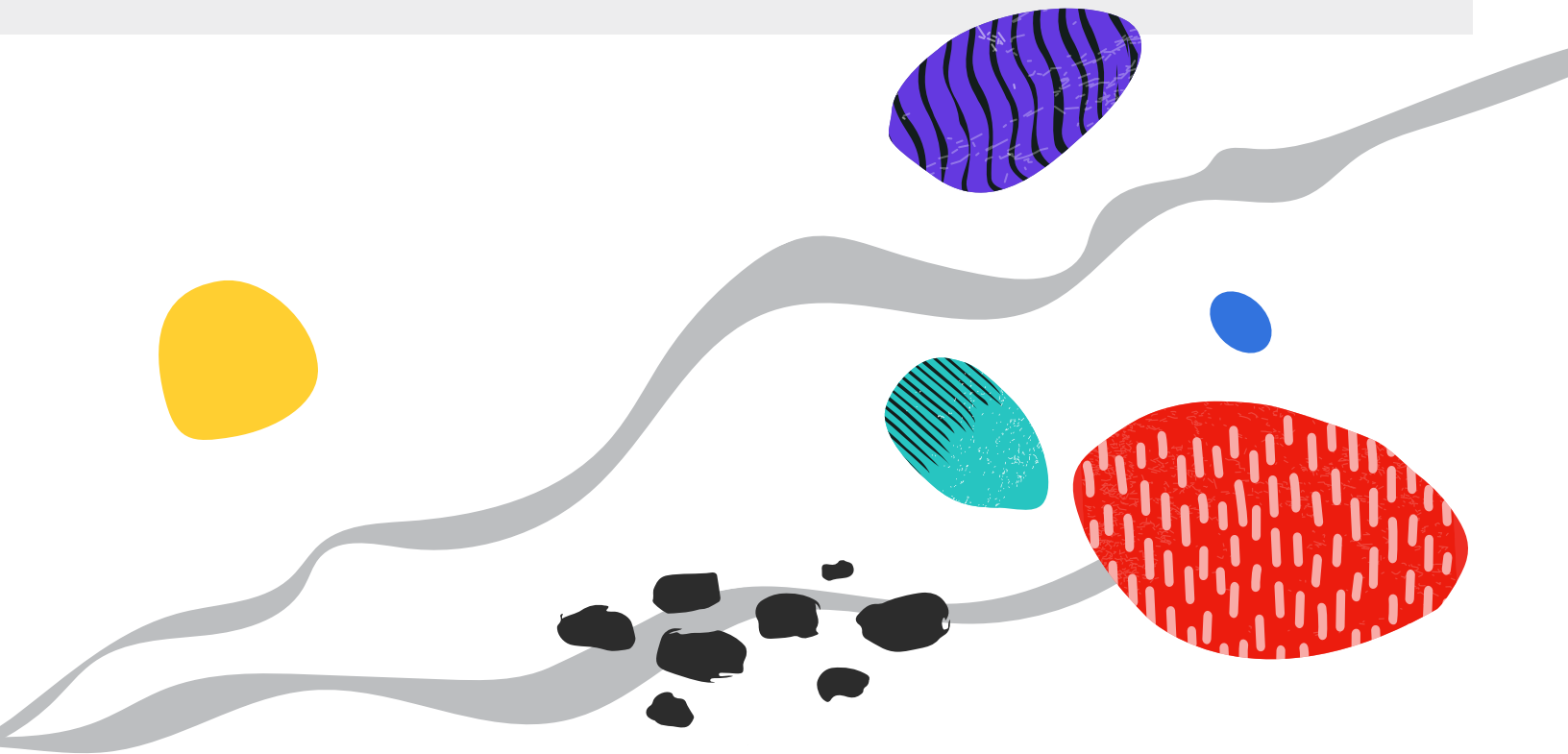
Take a deeper dive.

This 10-point plan puts the customer at the center of your strategy, so you can develop content that truly supports business needs and delivers results. Not only will this plan help boost the value of your content overall, but it will also allow you to prove the impact of content on leads and revenue—and keep improving that impact every quarter.

Ready to learn more about content strategy and planning?

Definitive Guide to Engaging Content Marketing

On-demand webinar: Building a Content Strategy: Setting the Foundation for High-Velocity Content Production

Campaign Planning Templates

[1] https://www.semrush.com/blog/content-marketing-statistics/