

# The Five Elements of Content Marketing Success

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How to use content to achieve your business goals and drive ROI

Strategy  
Traffic  
Engagement  
Action  
Monetization

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2017

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**Content marketing costs 62% less than traditional marketing and generates about 3x as many leads.**

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DEMANDMETRIC

## Content Marketing Maturity and the Path to Success

Over the past decade, the content marketing space has dramatically evolved.

Not long ago, content marketing was seen as a “nice-to-have” – and was used primarily as last-minute filler for social channels or paid campaigns.

But now, as traditional forms of digital advertising start to lose their effectiveness, content marketing has become crucial for any brand looking to build and maintain meaningful relationships with customers.

People look to brands for information, inspiration, and entertainment. According to Havas Group's 2017 Meaningful Brands survey, 84% of people expect brands to create content. And Forrester found that the average person consumes 11.4 pieces of content before making a purchase.

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FORRESTER

There's a clear connection between content and business results. But while technology can help marketers track the customer journey, the sheer amount of data involved can make it challenging for all but the most sophisticated marketers to do so.

In this whitepaper, we'll share our content marketing methodology, honed through our work with the world's leading brands for 10+ years. We hope to provide two primary takeaways:

- 1 A comprehensive understanding of what constitutes a successful content marketing program.
- 2 Actionable next steps to apply the methodology in a way that improves your overall content marketing maturity and performance.

The first step is figuring out where you are on the Content Marketing Maturity Curve.

## The Content Marketing Maturity Curve

In working with customers to align content marketing to measurable business results, we've developed the Content Marketing Maturity Curve.

If the ultimate goal is to measure ROI and optimize your program to achieve the best results, there are several steps needed to get there, beginning with a documented content marketing strategy.

## The Content Marketing Maturity Curve



Assessing your current content marketing maturity allows your team to identify areas for improvement and validate current strengths on which to double-down. These findings will help you shape your content marketing strategy.

The specific details, tactics, and success metrics will, of course, be unique to your organization. But the end goal of content marketing is always the same, across all companies and industries: **generating positive business impact.**

## Content Marketing Framework: Five Elements of Success

Once you've determined your place on the curve, how can you improve?

We've found that in order to achieve success, there are foundational components that must exist in every content marketing program. Our framework breaks down these components into five distinct, yet linked elements:

### STRATEGY

#### Document content marketing goals and strategy, and establish executive sponsorship

- + Clearly identify content marketing goals and KPIs tied to top-level company business objectives (*e.g. driving revenue*)
- + Develop a clear business case and receive approval from your leadership team
- + Build a team to execute on the content marketing strategy
- + Launch or designate a website as primary channel for housing content

## TRAFFIC

### **Produce, promote, and distribute content across channels**

- + Write content aligned to strategy to engage target audience
- + Consistently publish and scale quality content (both original and licensed)
- + Promote, retarget, and optimize content to increase return visitors
- + Establish healthy website traffic to support marketing and business goals

## ENGAGEMENT

### **Understand the best formats, channels, and topics for each type of content – and focus on those areas**

- + Based on learnings, set channel strategies and optimize content formats
- + Define content pillars with an audience in mind, design intuitively into your website
- + Consistently track engagement metrics for content formats and channels
- + Create processes for identifying, further distributing, and building more of most engaging content
- + Regularly conduct content audits to ensure the optimal mix
- + Continuously optimize channels and site layout

## ACTION

### **Convert visitors to leads, then to customers**

- + Use conversion metrics to glean insights on past performance and optimize website calls to action (CTAs)
- + Analyze micro-conversions on website
- + Optimize website for conversions based on data

## MONETIZATION

### **Correlate metrics with real business outcomes**

- + Connect internal metrics to goals and revenue
- + Work with existing CRMs and KPIs to drive attribution from content to revenue
- + Clearly understand behaviors and actions that map to monetization
- + Align with appropriate team on how to track monetization
- + Establish a reporting standard on how to present data
- + Use performance data to baseline and forecast future business growth targets

When these elements are present and incorporated into your content marketing program, you'll be able to measure business results. Reaching this point takes long-term investment and commitment. However, you can expect to see lifts in the leading indicators of success, like engagement and traffic, relatively quickly.

## Document content marketing goals and strategy to establish executive sponsorship

Convincing your team and leadership to invest in content marketing requires a clear strategy to get collective buy-in on a specific business case. Content marketing demands that organizations move from traditional digital advertising towards a more holistic approach to marketing – one that requires an upfront investment, but promises a stronger, long-term return.

### Create a Documented Content Marketing Strategy

The very act of creating a documented content marketing strategy sets you up for success by aligning key stakeholders on your strategy and tactics. Components of a successful content marketing strategy include:

+ **Definitions:** Articulate your content marketing goals and measurable KPIs for content, such as:

→ **Brand Awareness + Brand Equity**

- Pageviews
- Engagement time
- Engagement rate
- Social shares
- NPS
- Repeat visitors

→ **Conversions**

- Newsletter sign-ups
- Leads generated
- Revenue influenced
- Downloads (whitepapers, e-books)
- Customer acquisition costs

→ **Loyalty**

- Customer lifetime value
- Customer retention
- Customer growth

+ **Insights:** Determine your target audience and build content that will resonate

+ **Plan:** Create content pillars and map content to relevant stages of the buyer journey; identify team members to execute on all areas of your strategy

- + **Curation:** Partner with top brands and publishers to source relevant content
- + **Distribution:** Create a distribution strategy so your content will meet your audience wherever they are
- + **Measurement:** Establish a plan to measure and analyze data to inform and optimize your content marketing strategy

However, even the best content marketing strategy won't succeed if there's no executive sponsorship. There needs to be top-down commitment to the plan, across your organization.

## How Virgin Media Built a Business Case + Got Executive Buy-in

Two years ago, Virgin Media launched a content marketing program. But beforehand, Gill Worby, Virgin Media's Head of Digital Marketing, took a multistep approach to getting executive buy-in:

### Pre Buy-in

#### Map Out the Process

First, Worby educated senior executives – inside and outside her division – on content marketing and the business value it would drive:

- + **Education:** Worby and her team articulated their goals and the value they would bring to the business.
- + **Evaluation:** They identified and communicated what KPIs and metrics they'd track to measure success and ROI.
- + **Execution:** They outlined the processes and teams they'd work with to execute – building a cross-functional web of support.

#### Identify a Common Language

Like most brands, Virgin Media was very advertising-led. With this in mind, Worby made it a point to educate senior executives on the difference between advertising and content. They created a common language that differentiated them, with "advertising" being brand-led and "content" being audience-led.

**"No one person or one team can own content. There is a massive need for strategic alignment and someone to lead that, but you can't take it all on yourself."**

**GILL WORBY**

**Virgin Media's Head of Digital Marketing**

[Read full article](#)

## Emphasize “Always-on” Messaging

With traditional advertising, Virgin Media saw peaks and valleys of engagement. Virgin Media saw content as an opportunity to establish an always-on “cruising altitude” conversation level around key business points.

“With this cruising altitude, we’d be starting our campaigns at a higher point each time, so we were never going back to the basics,” Worby said. “It was really important that we made sure that people understood the value in that.”

## Promise Business Results

To drive home their content marketing business goals, the team drafted some shared values:

- + **Value 1:** Content is lasting and permanent.
- + **Value 2:** Content serves two masters: your audience and the search engine.
- + **Value 3:** Content gains trust; trust gains customers.
- + **Value 4:** Content speaks to skeptical millennials better than advertising.

## Post Buy-in

Once achieving senior executive buy-in and receiving budget and headcount, Worby and her team began implementing their content marketing strategy through the following steps:

### Audit Existing Content

“We found huge volumes of content that we had created, but we were not being very efficient with how this was being produced – and it was creatively inconsistent,” said Worby.

### Expand on the Common Language

To better help people grasp the concept, they deepened the common language that defined the types of content they wanted to produce:

- + **Hero:** Big rock activation pieces that are core to campaigns.
- + **Hub:** Always-on pieces that ensure that you’re always in the conversations you want to be in, as a brand.
- + **Hygiene:** Critical SEO pieces that drive conversions.

## Create a Content Council

To keep stakeholders informed about priorities and performance, Virgin Media created a cross-team Content Council that met regularly to discuss progress against goals.

## Measure Success

The team used a slice of campaign budgets to test and learn various forms of content and unlock bigger budgets as they proved out the ROI.



### Key Takeaway

A strategy is only complete if it has metrics, goals, cross-team participation, and executive sponsorship that views content marketing as an important business mandate.

### STATISTICS FOR A BUSINESS CASE

**"85% of consumers regularly seek out content from trusted experts when considering a purchase."**

**NIELSEN**

**"75% of marketing leaders saw bottom-line outcomes, such as loyalty or reduced marketing or media expenses from content marketing."**

**FORRESTER**

## Produce, promote, and distribute content across channels

Building a healthy traffic base is one of the most critical components of a successful content marketing program. You first have to get your target audience onto your site, then move them through your funnel for conversion. Attracting an audience requires both quality content as well as an omnichannel distribution strategy.

### Create Quality Content

Venture capitalist [Tomasz Tunguz](#) notes that “content is one of the few forms of marketing that has a compounding return.” Creating high-quality content on a consistent basis will keep your content hub fresh and generate long-term returns through search even after publishing, distribution, and promotion have occurred.

One of the most pressing challenges content marketers face is producing high-quality content at scale. Without a consistent flow of interesting, relevant content, it is extremely difficult to attract a loyal traffic base to visit your site often enough to convert to something more meaningful for your business.

The first step to finding your content niche – and produce content that is both relevant to your audience and aligned with your expertise – is to talk to your customers and those who work with them (your sales and account management teams, for example).

- + What questions do customers most frequently ask?
- + What expertise do they seek from us?
- + What can we create consistently with existing or new resources?

Measuring how well various topics perform against the KPIs in your strategy will help you hone your content strategy – and your wins will enable you to build internal support as you scale.

### Build a Central Hub

In order to maintain a high-quality audience, you need a central content hub where your content will live. This allows you to direct visitors toward a singular owned destination that is trackable and optimized for ushering people through the buyer journey.

Driving repeat traffic while simultaneously introducing net new visitors to your site are good early indicators of a healthy content marketing program. Measure your progress through KPIs like pageviews, new visits, and repeat visitors.

## Scale Content Production

Creating content on a steady basis can be strenuous, especially when you're committed to making the content exceptional.

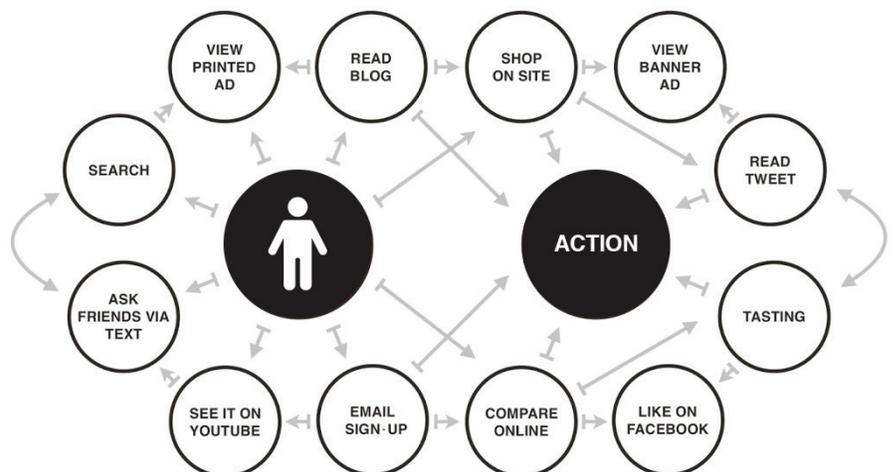
At this stage, many marketers add software tools to enable collaboration among multiple authors, along with publishing and promotion, to increase operational efficiency. In addition, licensing relevant content from trusted publishers or partners can help you maintain your publishing cadence and increase your bandwidth for writing and editing your own original pieces.

## Meet Your Audience Where They Are

The customer journey is more fragmented than ever. To be effective, you need to be present where your audience is through an optimized distribution strategy (that includes nurturing and retargeting).

Well-distributed content creates an ecosystem of touchpoints that drive consumers closer to action. Initial awareness from a YouTube video or Google search result can lead a customer to stumble upon your blog and enter your nurturing ecosystem.

Driving repeat visitors is a solid indicator of a content marketing program well on its way to success. One effective way to do so is to launch a newsletter or another retargeting strategy for bringing traffic back to your site. Make sure you capture visitors' emails and basic information about their preferences to serve them relevant content on a regular basis and prompt interactions with your website. (Tip: Building up a loyal audience will also reduce a reliance on paid promotions to drive traffic.)



Keep these tips in mind while distributing your content:

- + Use paid social to drive conversions (e.g. email sign-ups, e-books downloads).
- + Optimize email and social media campaigns as they're running.
- + Utilize smart copy and compelling graphics to draw people in.



## Key Takeaway

Healthy traffic requires creating quality content for your target audience, scaling production, and optimizing distribution. This will create an ecosystem of engaging content where you can meet customers where they are – resulting in ongoing engagement and compounding returns.

# Engagement

## Measure and optimize high-quality traffic on your site

You can pay for traffic, but you must earn attention.

And while traffic metrics like pageviews and visitors are leading indicators of a healthy content marketing program, it's important to build engagement and loyalty with your target audience. This trust will eventually move consumers closer to a business goal.

These metrics can help you gauge whether people are interacting with your content in a way that shows that it's resonating:

- + Return visitors
- + Reading multiple stories per session
- + Increased time on site
- + Increased engagement rate

Once you have a sense of what topics and formats are performing well, use those learnings to inform future content creation and optimization.

For example, if a story has high pageviews and high engagement, think about related content that you can spin off from it. Can you write a whitepaper or an e-book, since that topic resonates with your audience? Or, could you create an infographic or video to further bring the topic to life? What about a series of articles that expands on the points addressed in the story?

For stories with low pageviews but high engagement, put your energy behind promoting them. The high engagement indicates that people find the topics interesting. Now, it's a matter of getting them in front of more of the right people. Boost them with paid social promotion. In addition, optimize them for SEO to give them another bump.



### Key Takeaway

**As content marketers, we're not trying to reach the broadest audience possible – we're focusing on reaching and engaging the right people with content that resonates to have the highest probability of conversion.**

## Align your micro-conversions with your ultimate content marketing goals

It's no longer enough for content marketers to measure success with vanity metrics like pageviews and uniques. To retain buy-in, resources, and budget, content marketers must show that their strategies link actions on-site to real business results.

One way to do so is by measuring conversions. A "conversion" is an action a user takes that gets them one step closer to becoming a customer. When people convert, they're saying that they trust your brand and are looking to engage with you on an on-going basis. You have their permission to connect with them regularly until they're ready to buy, or to keep them engaged in between purchases.

Actions taken on a site are key indicators of how effective your content marketing program is.

Since it takes an average of 11.4 pieces of content to convert someone to being a customer, you need to inspire people to interact to move them further down the funnel. To ensure your content is working to that end, make sure that you're converting people at every opportunity.

Onsite CTAs, like pop-ups, are the first line of defense in driving on-site conversions. At NewsCred, our CTAs are responsible for 70% of our newsletter subscriptions – to put that in context, we have more than 100K subscribers. And our newsletter allows us to regularly engage with customers and prospects, as well as build trust and credibility.

Simply put, we've found that optimizing your site for conversions – and aligning those conversions with your business goals – creates a reliable way to nurture prospects and customers.

### CONVERSIONS, DEFINED

**Conversions are any positive business action that someone takes:**

- + Signing up for your newsletter
- + Downloading an e-book or whitepaper
- + Visiting your pricing or product page
- + Making a purchase



### Key Takeaway

**Driving desired actions and conversions on your site will lead to a higher return on your content marketing program. Make sure that your site is optimized for these conversions so you can build ongoing relationships with users and nurture them on the path to purchase.**

# Monetization

## Correlate metrics with real business outcomes

The goal is not simply to be good at content. The goal is to be good at business using content.

While this seems intuitive, there are stark differences between thinking about driving business outcomes and actually being able to prove them. Figuring out the proxies (monetization event) that tie together content and its dollar value is a crucial first step. It's important to note that the definition of "monetization event" may vary by company or content marketing program, but there still must be some tangible metric in place that illustrates success. Measuring the return on content marketing today is possible due to advances in marketing technologies. In short, metrics can be mapped to real business results.

All monetization metrics are not revenue, but all can impact it directly. Each industry has its own specific metrics. Some examples include:

- + **Share of Conversations:** SOC is the percentage of online conversations in your space that include your brand – the consideration set that a customer is looking at for an eventual purchase. SOC is more sophisticated than a generic Share of Voice (SOV) because it is based on the analysis of specific conversations or keywords (the strategic keywords related to themes that your company wants to own). It provides a clear measurement of brand awareness for each specific conversation.
- + **Conversion Rate:** Conversions are the prospects who became customers because of useful and entertaining content your brand has provided them. It is possible to calculate the average value of a conversion rate for a specific piece of content if we know the average sale and the number of qualified leads generated by that specific piece of content.
- + **Marketing-generated Opportunities:** Marketing-generated opportunities are the opportunities generated by the content program. It's the content marketing contribution to all your opportunities.

### CASE STUDY:

## NewsCred Insights

Our ROI analytics give insights into posts that are driving business results – even if they don't appear to be high performers on the surface.

**Published:** October 20, 2016

**Pageviews:** 2,463

**Readers:** 1,573

**Engaged Time:** 1:07

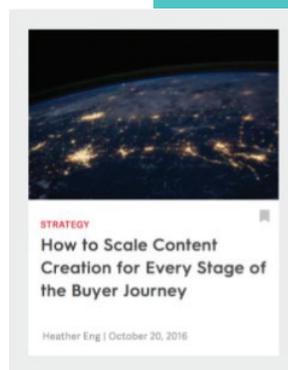
**Engagement Rate:** 46%

**Leads Reached:** 448

**Leads Generated:** 9

**Deals Influenced:** 6

**Revenue Influenced:** \$950,378



# Monetization (cont.)

- + **Marketing-generated Revenue** and/or **Marketing-influenced Revenue**, is the revenue you can tie to your content program. One of the most straightforward cases is one of content directly driving to an e-commerce program and some of the most complex include the tracking of the entire buyer cycle, from content interest, to downloads, to marketing opportunities and then revenue influenced by that specific piece of content.

Tracking monetization, which at the end is nothing more than measuring the return of your content programs, is now possible.

A proper marketing tech stack has to be implemented for measuring marketing opportunities. Usually a CRM (e.g., Salesforce.com) and a marketing automation platform (e.g., Marketo, Eloqua) make it possible to track the entire lead cycle from someone engaging with a specific piece of content, to acting on a CTA (e.g., downloading a whitepaper), to becoming a lead, to finally closing a deal and knowing what content was influential along the way.



## Key Takeaway

Measuring the return on your content marketing program is now possible. Metrics like conversion rate, marketing-generated opportunities, and marketing-generated revenue can be mapped to tangible business results with a proper tech stack implemented and measurable goals aligned to that tech stack.

# Additional resources

We recognize that the goal is not to simply be good at content. The goal is to use exceptional content to drive business results for your company. Content marketing is a long-term investment that takes buy-in and commitment, but by following this framework, you will achieve success.

To learn more about the topics covered in this whitepaper, here are some additional resources:

## Strategy

- + [The Ultimate Guide to Building the Business Case For Content Marketing](#)
- + [How Virgin Media Got Executive Buy-in for Content Marketing](#)
- + [How to Create a Documented Content Marketing Strategy](#)

## Traffic

- + [The Ultimate Guide to Creating an Editorial Calendar](#)
- + [SEO Best Practices For Content Marketing](#)
- + [How to Scale Content Creation for Every Stage of the Buyer Journey](#)

## Engagement

- + [How to Create Exceptional Content \[CHECKLIST\]](#)
- + [How to Measure Top-of-Funnel Content: Key Metrics, Explained](#)

## Action

- + [Google Analytics: The Complete Guide to Setting up Your Content Hub to Measure Conversions](#)
- + [Google Analytics: Gaining Actionable Insights on Content Marketing Conversion Goals](#)

## Monetization

- + [Content Marketing ROI: How to Measure Brand Equity, Conversions, and Loyalty](#)

# Content Marketing Checklist

## How mature is your program in the five key elements?

### STRATEGY

#### Document content marketing goals and strategy, and establish executive sponsorship

- Clearly identify content marketing goals and KPIs tied to top-level company business objectives (e.g. driving revenue)
- Develop and receive approval on a clear business case
- Establish content marketing as a mandated, corporate initiative
- Build a team to execute on the content marketing strategy
- Launch or designate a website as primary channel for housing content

### TRAFFIC

#### Produce, promote, and distribute content across channels

- Write content aligned to strategy to engage target audience
- Consistently publish and scale quality content (both original and licensed)
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- Establish healthy website traffic to support marketing and business goals

### ENGAGEMENT

#### Understand the best channels for each type of content – and double-down in those areas

- Based on learnings, set channel strategies and optimize content formats
- Define content pillars with audience in mind and design intuitively into your website
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### ACTION

#### Convert users to leads, then to customers

- Use conversion metrics to glean insights on past performance and optimize website calls to action (CTAs)
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### MONETIZATION

#### Correlate metrics with real business outcomes

- Connect internal metrics to revenue
- Work with existing CRMs and KPIs to drive attribution from content to revenue
- Clearly understand behaviors and actions that map to monetization
- Align with appropriate team on how to track monetization
- Establish a reporting standard on how to present data
- Use performance data to baseline and forecast future business growth targets