



Meltwater
Outside Insight

How to Map Your Content to Unpredictable Customer Journeys



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Chapter 1

What's the ROI on That Couch?

While on the road speaking about content production many years ago, there was a thought-provoking question that came from digital marketing author and entrepreneur Aaron Kahlow. His point wasn't to mock the audience; it was to attempt to make them think differently about the expense of online marketing. Companies build beautiful lobbies with waiting rooms that reflect the professionalism and sophistication of their brand. When the lobby was being built, a budget was created for interior design, decoration, furniture, and art. Did anyone ask what the return on investment was on that couch?

*Only 23% of B2C marketers are successful at tracking the return on investment (ROI) of their content marketing**



No.

We have taken for granted that the couch is critical to the lobby. Not just any couch. We buy a beautiful, comfortable, leather couch that resists wear and tear, so it lasts and lasts. Did anyone ask what the ROI was on that couch?

No.

Of course there was an appropriate budget for the expense, but no one looked at the couch as optional. Everyone in the company understood that someone would walk into the lobby and need somewhere to sit down. Most companies recognize that a cheap couch would reflect poorly on the prospect's perception of the business. The couch—whether we recognize it or not—is a marketing expense.

No one asks what the return on investment is on that couch. Content marketing is ubiquitous with having a business, whether you're serving businesses or consumers, small or large, and private or public.

Companies are required to budget for content just as they did their lobby. That's proving difficult as companies attempt to attribute revenue directly to each piece of content produced. Content marketers struggle to determine what to write, when to write, how often to write, and where to promote the content. Are we going about this the wrong way? Evidence may show that we are.

*Source: http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/2015_B2C_Research.pdf

Chapter 2

The Myth of Attribution

One of my good friends online is the social marketing expert, Mark Schaefer. He's a soft-spoken, sincere, and talented speaker on everything social marketing related. Mark shared one day that he found that he was speaking more and more with his Amazon Echo as if it were a friend in the room. Echo is a voice-controlled, cloud-based device that you can ask questions to, set reminders with, and even order products from via your Amazon account.

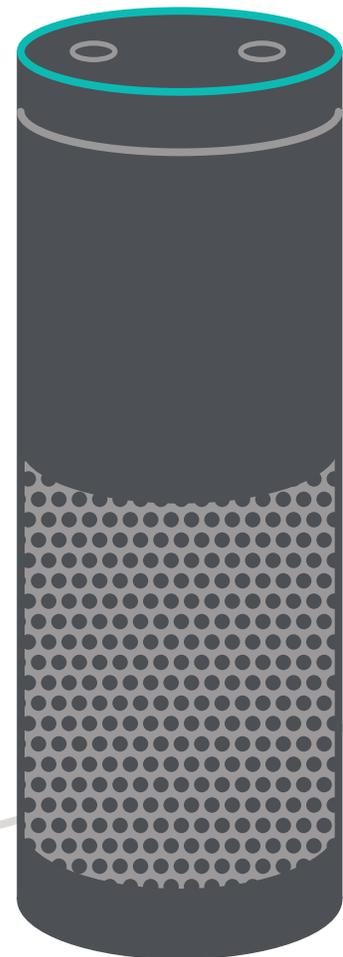
Even though I'm a technology geek, I hadn't given much thought to purchasing the Echo. In fact, I hadn't even researched them up until this point. I was intrigued because Mark is both a friend and, ironically, not a technology geek. He doesn't have influence online on purchasing technology devices, but he is a sincere and trusted resource of information.

I turned to YouTube and did some searches for Amazon Echo to get a quick overview of the device. I watched Amazon's marketing videos. I watched user videos.

I was intrigued.

I then went to Amazon and searched for the Echo where it was selling for \$179.99. I read the product page, the features, and a few of the worst reviews. Even the worst review wasn't compelling enough for me to decide not to make the purchase. I was still intrigued.

Since I'm an Apple fanboy, this wasn't an excessive cost, but it was still significant. That's the cost of my daughter's parking pass for a semester at college. I could



only imagine Katie's look when I gave her a hard time about paying for her parking as she observes the beautiful new device with the blue LED ring on the counter.

Next up? Reviews. I did a Google Search to read what major sites were saying. Gizmodo, The Next Web, and even Fortune wrote in-depth articles about the innovative device. My conversion finger was getting itchy.

Because it's an Amazon device, I didn't search for any alternate pricing on other sites or via Google Shopping as I normally would. I returned to Amazon and added it to my wishlist. I'd wait until payday and then make the purchase.

For the next week, I'd be followed by re-marketing advertisements from Amazon as I perused the web and participated in social media. On payday, I clicked one of those ads and purchased the device. It's now sitting in our office where we play music, set reminders, and ask it questions every day.

Where does the purchase of the Amazon Echo get attributed? Does Amazon attribute it to a mention by Mark Schaefer who provided no tracking link when sharing the Echo? My guess is Amazon doesn't have a clue that Mark made a mention of the device on social media. Does Amazon attribute the sale to their marketing videos? To their public relations teams that generated interest by third party sites? To their customers who produced their videos?

Most likely, Amazon will attribute the sale to their remarketing campaign. And they would be wrong. If they even could attribute the first-touch to Mark, that would be wrong as well. I had already heard of the Amazon Echo; I just hadn't read any content that compelled me to begin my customer journey.

The truth is that I honestly do not know the moment I decided to purchase the Amazon Echo. I couldn't even begin to guess what percent of the decision should be attributed to which source. All I do know is that, if there were no content produced about the Amazon Echo, I would not have made the purchase.



Chapter 3

The Over-Simplification of the Customer Journey

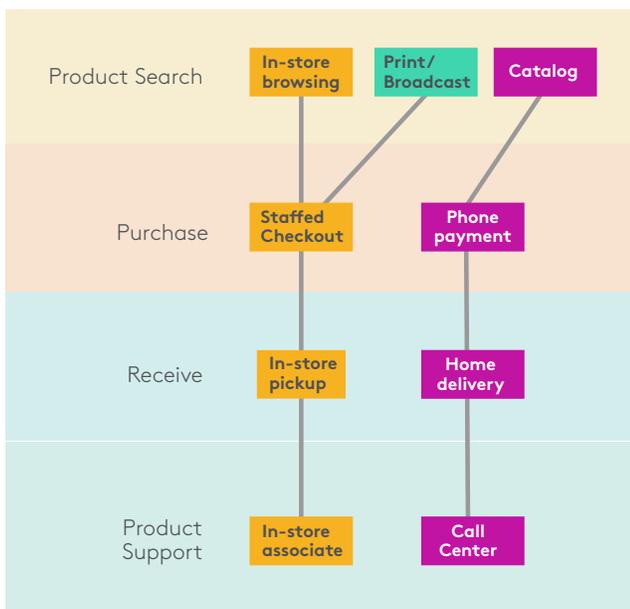
The advent of database marketing provided us with incredible tools where we could identify common characteristics between our current customers and our prospects. In recent years, marketing automation systems provided us with the opportunity to develop distinct personas and design marketing journeys commonly taken by our prospects.

It's not uncommon for the average company to narrow down their customers to between four and eight distinct personas along with the predicted, common paths they will take from awareness through to conversion. Predetermined customer journeys are an

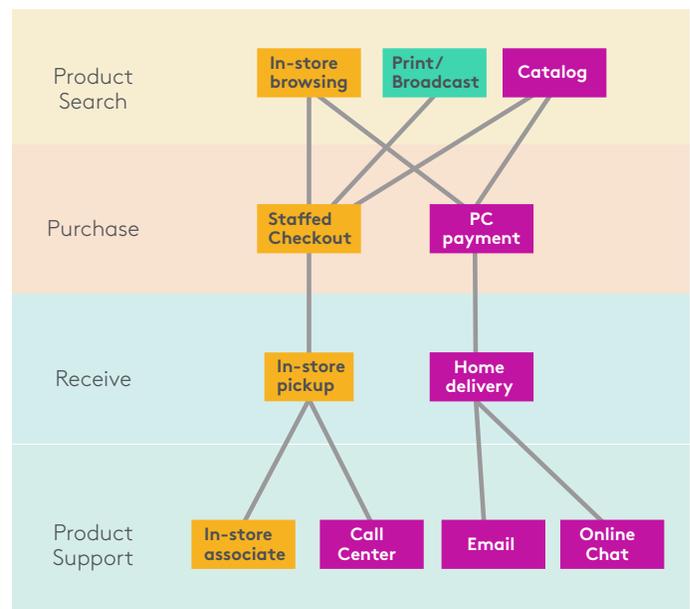
*51% of marketers say measuring content effectiveness is a challenge.**



Pre-Amazon Era - 3 Journeys



Omnichannel Era - 40 Journeys



*Source: http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/2015_B2C_Research.pdf

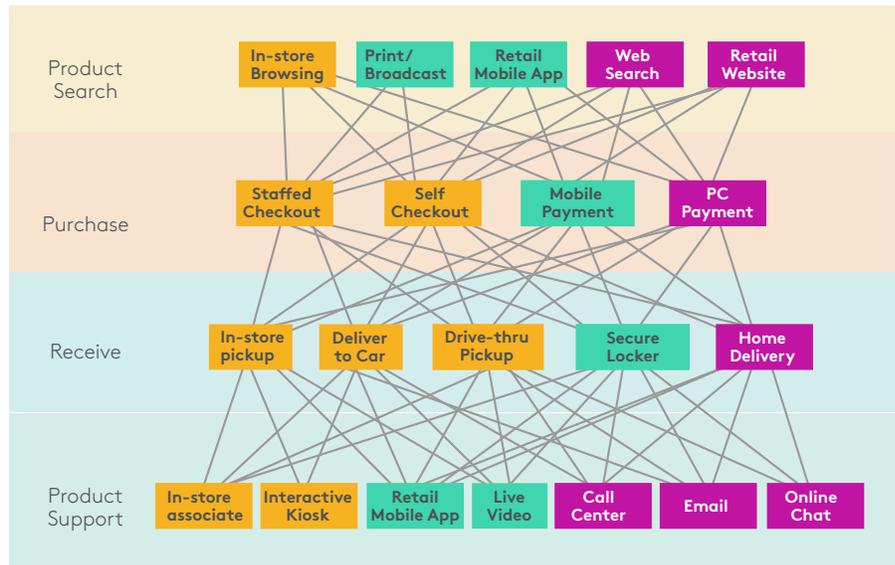
over-simplification of a much more complex reality with a huge margin of error.

Recent [research from Cisco](#) provides evidence that the average product has over 800 distinct customer journeys. Consumers and businesses require hyper-relevant content to allow them to research their next purchase decision—whether it’s an Amazon Echo or a new home.

And they want relevant, up-to-date content when they’re searching for it. [Research from Google](#) on microments shows that the customer journey doesn’t happen in a predicted timeline, it happens in a connecting-the-dots series of moments that are different for every customer. While I took a few weeks to make my purchase, others might take minutes or months.

My personal anecdote of the Amazon Echo purchase isn’t the exception; it’s the norm. Both Google and Cisco research points to the fact that we must provide relevant and personalized content targeted towards an array of dimensions.

Internet of Everything Era - 800+ Journeys



Google recommends:

1. Examine all phases of your customers’ journeys and map the moments when people find inspiration, learn about your products, make a quick purchase, or anything in between.
2. For each moment, identify content that needs to be developed to help make the purchase decision easier or faster.
3. Leverage context to personalize the content. Location, time of day, device, and demographics are needed to align the content with the customer for increased impact.
4. Optimize the content in each moment to help move the visitor from one moment to the next instead of driving them from awareness through to conversion.
5. Measure each of the moments you’ve mapped to identify gaps and fill them.

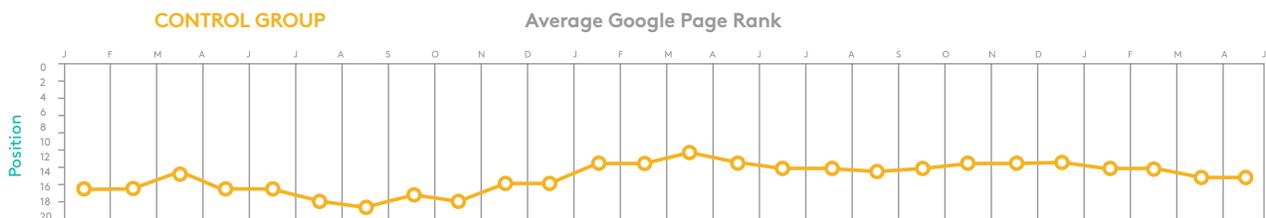
Chapter 4

Filling the Content Gap

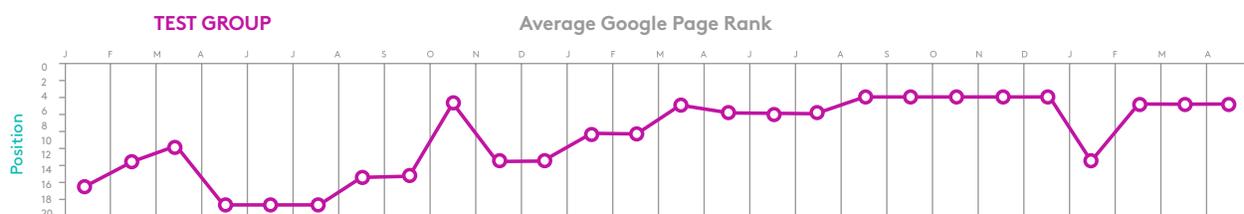
For several years, we worked with an online publisher who had invested millions of dollars into their online content but were failing to see a return on the investment. Previous consultants simplified their strategy into a few distinct paths and then applied all resources in the company to drive content to those focus areas. After over a year, they saw no measurable increase in their content marketing efforts.

There were no tools on the market that would allow us to analyze the vast quantity of content they had produced and how consumers were digesting it. We developed a custom big data solution where we imported all 17 million pages of their site, over 600,000 keyword combinations they ranked on, competitive data, social sharing, sentiment, and conversion analysis. Meltwater was a rich source of much of the information. We aggregated each keyword combination to a specific topic, excluded branded terms, and applied location-centric findings.

We selected 10 cities, as a control group, where we continued the company's current content strategy of writing general topics. We selected ten similar cities as our test group. We wrote and deployed hyper-relevant, long-tail topics that the company had positive sentiment and ranking on. After six months, we measured the results.



The results were both drastic and amazing, far exceeding our expectations. The test group ranking skyrocketed from an average positioning on page two of Google to ranking averaging in the top few of page one.



Storytelling is the new rage in content marketing nowadays. It's not simply the ability to write an effective story that matters, though. It's the story's hyper-relevance and emotional connection with the reader that's driving visitors, sharing, and conversions.

Chapter 5

Five Dimensions of Content Marketing

Companies are spending an inordinate amount of time crafting and promoting content for prospects and customers. We often underestimate the cost of the content we're producing and undervalue the cost of content that we have produced for us. Content Marketing expert Jay Baer released some startling analysis on this topic in his post, [Why Blog Posts Fail](#).

In Jay's analysis, the average blog post costs approximately \$900 for a company to develop, yet 80-90% of all blog traffic comes from 10-20% of the posts. Why then would companies invest in a strategy where they value posts at \$15 to \$100 per post? It's mind-boggling. Developing a comprehensive content marketing strategy involves much more than pulling a keyword report and working to spew a couple shallow blog posts every day that look and sound the same.

*60%-70% of
B2B content
created goes
unused.*



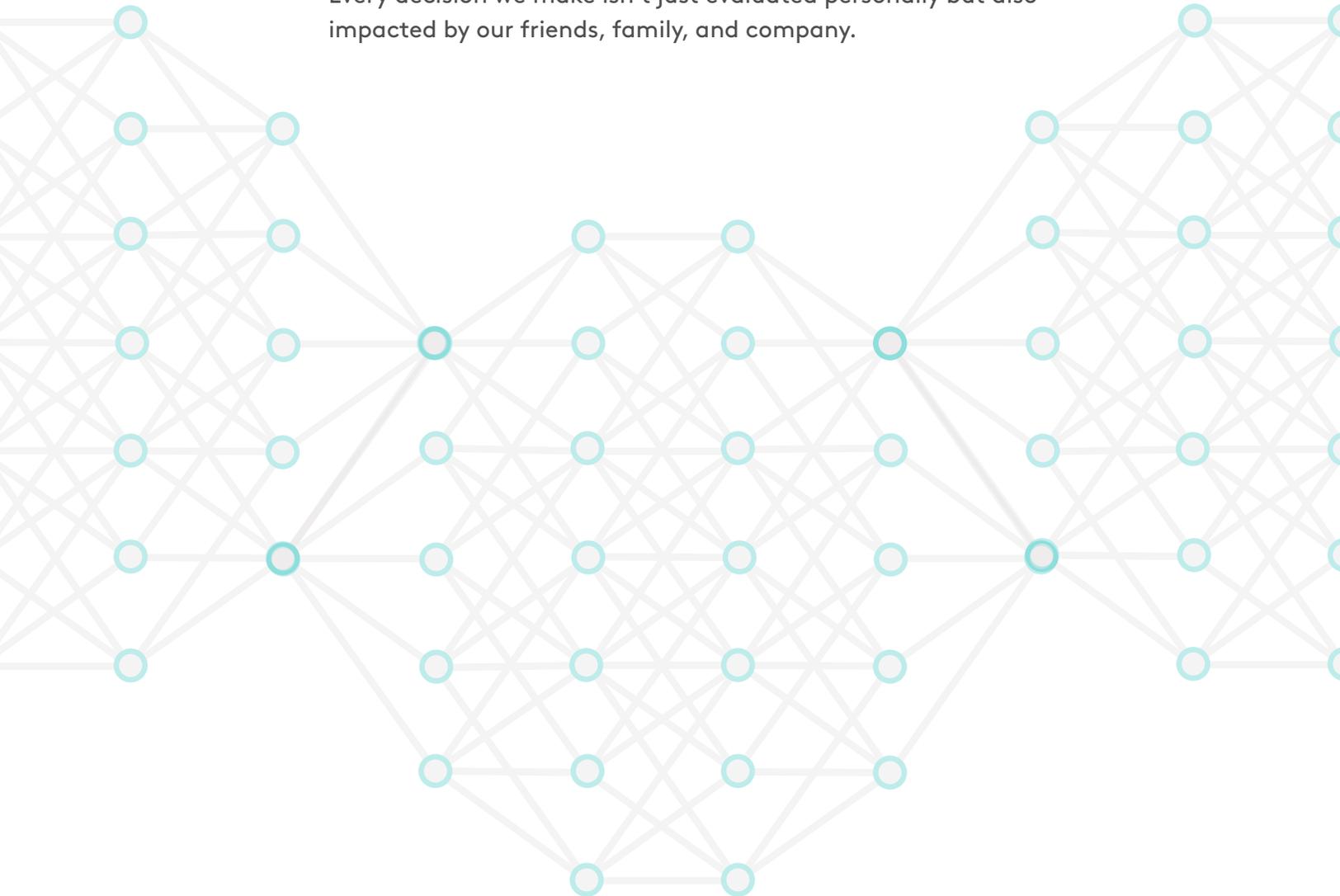
We've identified five dimensions that you should be evaluating every single piece of content that you produce:

- 1. Reader Cognition:** Your audience is diverse in how they digest content. Diversity in your content—including visual, audible, and kinesthetic interaction is needed to reach all readers.
- 2. Sharing Motivation:** Sharing is critical in a social world to extend your reach to a wider, relevant audience. There are specific reasons why readers share content. Readers share content to increase their value to others, create an identity online, involve themselves in their community, extend their network, and bring awareness to causes.

3. Persuasion: [Robert Cialdini's research](#) has identified six principles of persuasion—liking, reciprocity, consensus, scarcity, consistency, and authority. How are you persuading your readers to move from one moment to the next in their customer journey?

4. Decision-Making: Every individual is impacted differently from a variety of supporting criteria when making a decision. Trust, facts, emotion and efficiency all play a role, with combinations therein. Having balanced content with respect to supporting criteria is a best practice on every piece of content produced.

5. Factors: As we write content, we often don't think about other factors influencing a person outside the content we're discussing. Every decision we make isn't just evaluated personally but also impacted by our friends, family, and company.



Chapter 6

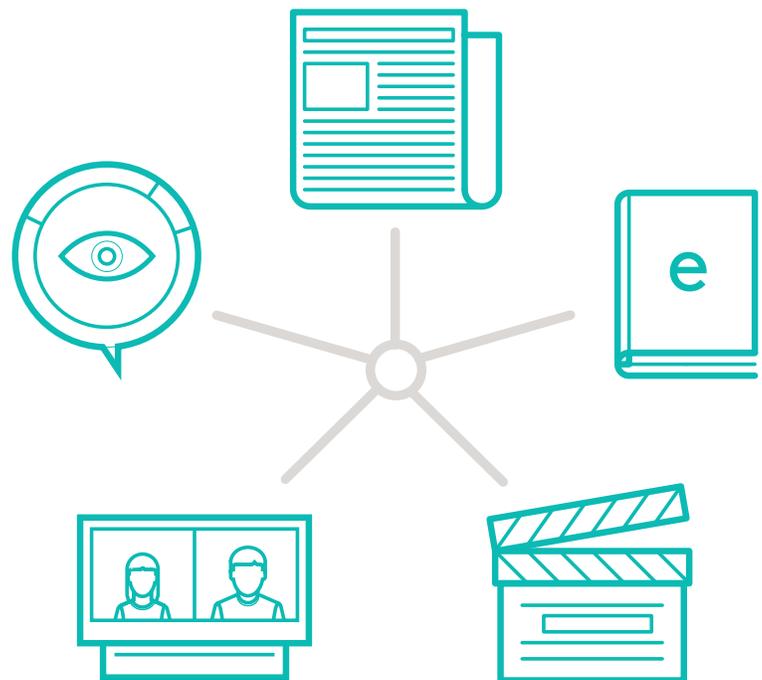
Dimension One: Cognition

You continue to write comprehensive, well-written, valuable pieces of content. Your competitor developed an explainer video. While their video shares a fraction of the insight you've provided, their video continues to get shared and promoted throughout the industry. Why? Some readers respond to visual and audible content and not to written text.

In fact, the science of visualization is solid. Adding visuals to a verbal presentation [increases its ability for comprehension, persuasion, and sharing](#). Not to mention that the average reader [only reads 28% of the words](#) when visiting your latest article.

Interactive sites that provide kinesthetic experiences increase comprehension as well. [People recall 20% of what they read, but 80% of what they see and do](#).

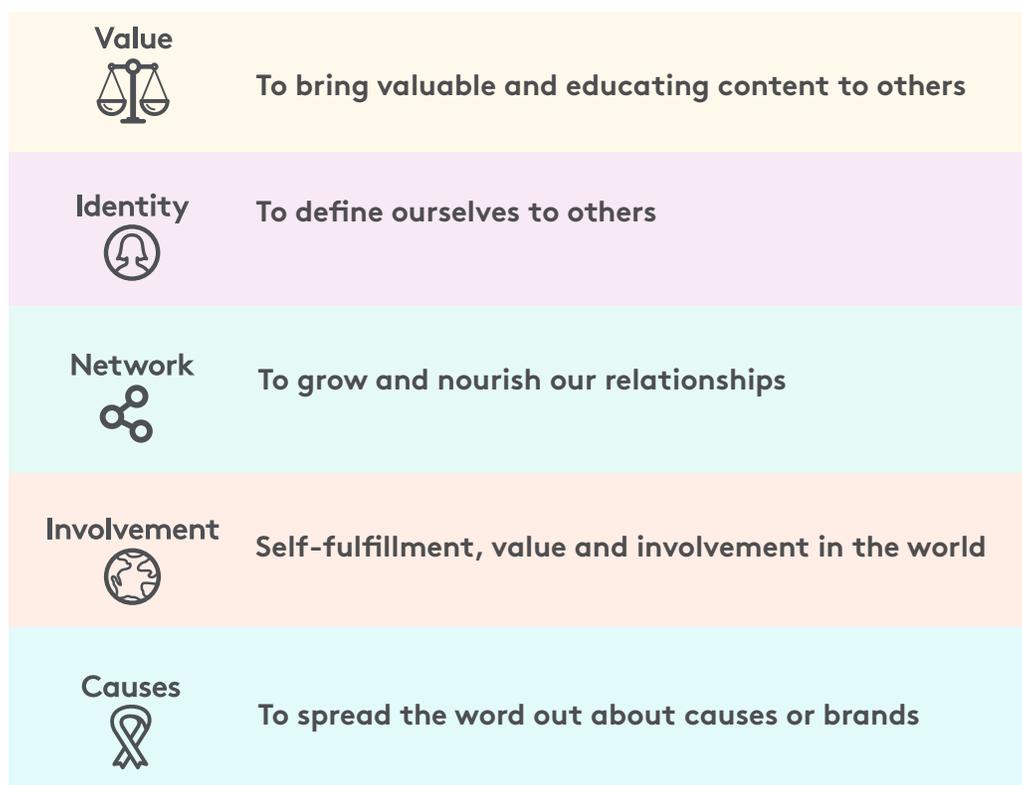
How in the world does a marketer keep up? Publishing your content in an article, in an ebook, in a presentation, in an infographic, in a video, in a webinar, and discussing it on a podcast is not repetition. Repurposing your content to reach the appropriate audience with the same message is an effective strategy.



Chapter 7

Dimension Two: Sharing

According to The New York Times Customer Insight Group in a new whitepaper, [The Psychology of Sharing](#), there are five primary reasons why people share content:



Selling is not a reason for sharing. In fact, sales-driven content can have quite the opposite effect. If all of your content is pushing for a sale, the chances are that your content is quite lonely, never getting shared or promoted within the industry.

As we develop content strategies for our clients, there is always a call-to-action or navigation element adjacent to the content, but it's not the primary strategy. We develop content calendars where much of the focus is providing value to the audience. Valuable content builds authority for the company and is shared within a relevant network of potential customers.

Primary research, secondary research, how-to articles, industry information, and curated content that aids in the success of the reader's career makes for shareable content.

Chapter 8

Dimension Three: Persuasion

Content that persuades a visitor to take additional action has six distinctive characteristics. It's no surprise that these characteristics are common to the overall sales process and our customer's journey:



1. Liking: Consumers and businesses alike wish to work with organizations that they admire. Social media demands that we become more transparent in our engagement with our audience or community. To be liked requires revealing details about ourselves beyond our product, logo, or slogan.



2. Reciprocity: The reasons we ask key industry experts onto our podcast isn't as simple as providing unique and valued content, it's also that many of those experts reciprocate the opportunity. Those experts often promote the podcast or introduce us to decision-makers that may be interested in our business offerings.



3. Consensus: The currency of content isn't money, it's trust. As you build trust online, you drive more sales. Mass adoption of strategies happens with consensus. If many in your network utilize PayPal, for example, you'll most likely be using PayPal. It's not so much that people wish to be part of the herd, it's that the risk of going alone may be too high for many.



4. Scarcity: Time constraints, expiring discounts, remaining seats, and contests are all strategies that persuade the audience to move from the current moment to the next. Push too hard and you can turn off your audience, but be strategic and you can accelerate the customer journey.



5. Consistency: Over a decade ago, I left the newspaper industry. Fear paralyzed the industry. Executives would tout successes that were failures anywhere else, like “We’re retaining subscribers 15% better than the industry average.” At issue was that the industry feared change and desperately wanted consistency... even when it was constantly in decline. There’s a significant percentage of the population that wishes to avoid change, and consistency is a great persuader for them.

*65 percent of respondents say web content is “hit or miss” or “unreliable.” **



6. Authority: Content that’s shared helps the author or company that’s published it gain recognition in their industry. Industries all have few leaders and plenty of followers. The perception of authority on a topic is a proven characteristic of persuasive content. Authority doesn’t happen overnight, though. Authority is attained over time. Authority requires momentum as recent, frequent and relevant content you’ve produced is both shared and recognized.

*Source: <http://contentsmagazine.com/articles/reconsider-the-source/>

Chapter 9

Dimension Four: Decision-Making

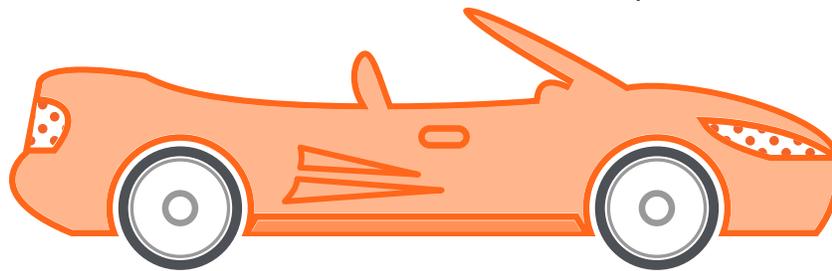
Sales training and coaching transformed the success of my business. With the right direction, we were able to better identify which prospects were a great fit for our company, we were able to close larger engagements, and we were able to reduce the time it took to convert our prospects into customers.

With the right training, we were able to observe and gain insight into our prospects to understand what motivated their decisions.

Recognizing that what motivates you to make a decision is not what motivates your prospect, or your audience is a break-through in content creation.

People weigh facts, trust, efficiency, and emotion when moving throughout their customer journey. An example of this was my decision to buy my first luxury car. My grandfather wasn't a wealthy man. In fact, he had to stop installing roofs in his seventies after being found hanging from a ladder by his ankle. While he never accumulated wealth, he was very proud of one possession—the luxury car in his garage. The grandchildren would visit Grandpa each Sunday, and he'd have his car shined up and

ready for a ride. When the day came for me to upgrade my car, you can only guess what brand I purchased. The decision was an emotional one and had little to do with facts and nothing to do with efficiency. For various reasons, the brand I stuck with previously had destroyed my trust in them. The day I could afford the luxury brand, I drove down unannounced and drove home with a beauty. The purchase was emotional with a touch of trust issues to put me over.



A good friend of mine recently purchased a new vehicle. It took a few months of analysis of resale values,

discounts, dealership specials, and two days of negotiation. They saved a bundle on a new SUV with all the bells and whistles. Watching and listening to him and his wife talking about their decision made me want to take a nap. I could have never done it.

What motivates me is not what motivates my readers. I have to keep that in mind to provide a variety of content that incorporates facts, emotion, trust and efficiency so that I can connect with all readers. The content need not be equally balanced throughout all four, but sharing each encourages reaching more.

Chapter 10

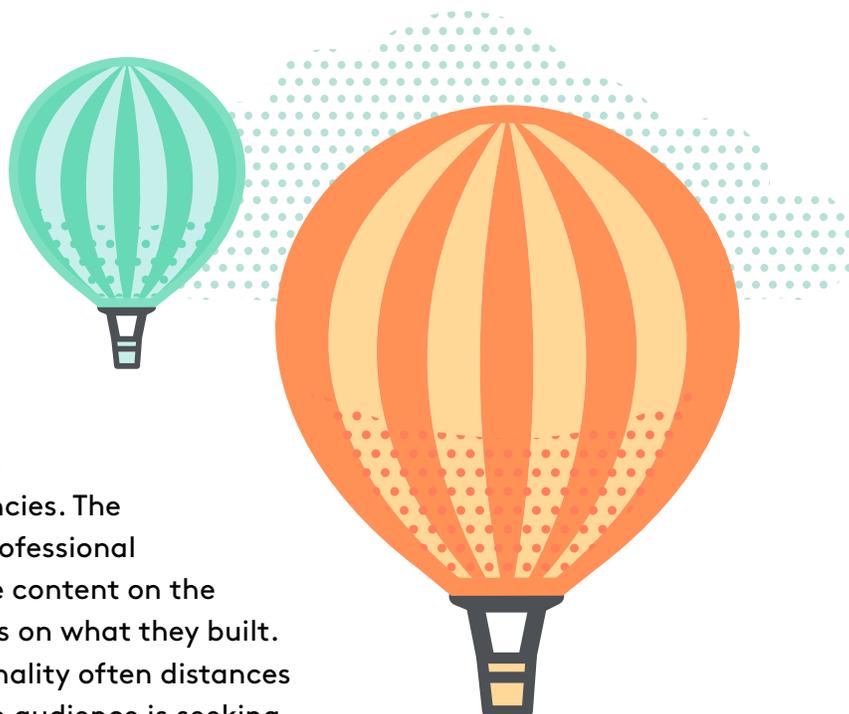
Dimension Five: Life Factors

Content marketers often hyper-focus their content on one factor in a buyers' life. A business platform, for example, may focus solely on the cost savings to the company. The decision-maker has a lot more going on in their life. Perhaps the implementation of the platform is going to require the decision-maker to have to work more hours and add unnecessary stress to the buyers' life.

While the solution may be perfect, is it worth it for the buyer to go home late and stressed out? What if colleagues all work with a different solution and share tips and tricks to make its use more efficient? What if the industry standard is a much more expensive solution but will result in the decision-maker being much more in demand for their skills in the industry?

If the content is hyper-focused purely on the company, you're ignoring many other factors that could lose your audience. After a year of publishing and promoting content about the efficiency and effectiveness of your solution, you may be scratching your head at why you do not see the sales needle move.

We often hear complaints from companies about the content provided from professional services and branding agencies. The complaints are often unfounded. The professional services or branding agency focused the content on the audience while the company's focus was on what they built. Corporate pride in features and functionality often distances the company from recognizing what the audience is seeking.



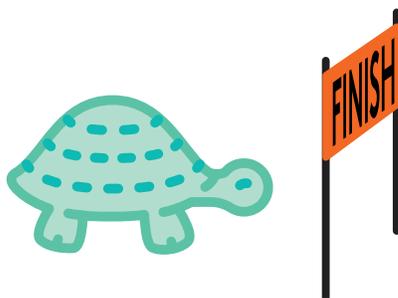
Conclusion

How Slow Can You Win the Race?

Questions about the return on investment on contact marketing are followed by questions about the quantity of produced content needed to impact results. “How many blog posts should we write each week?” The analogy of racing is one we often apply for this. The equivalent question is, “How slow can we go to win the race?”

There are thousands of combinations of content sought by your prospective audience based on the dimensions shared above. The solution isn’t “How many blog posts should we write each week?” The solution is “What is the complete catalog of content we need to share to reach all of the different dimensions of those who might purchase our products or services?”

If that sounds like a lot of work, the analysis is. You may be surprised that the answer might include reducing your output or optimizing your current content. We often work with clients that have thousands or even millions of pages of thin content that was never read, shared, nor converted a reader into a customer.



By auditing their content, we’re able to optimize their content:

1. We collapse multiple articles on the same topic into one single, thorough article that incorporates as many dimensions as possible. We redirect traffic from the weak articles to the new, rich articles.
2. We research topics beyond popularity and make a [complete map](#) of topics by hierarchy, taxonomies, and lexical onomies. We implement repurposement processes that drive efficiency and maximize resources within the organization.
3. We align channels to ensure the content is incorporated into email, mobile applications, video, podcasting, public relations, organic search, social media, and paid promotion strategies to maximize impact.
4. We measure the performance of the content strategy over time, observing ranking, visits, new visits, sharing, and sentiment. We often do this utilizing testing against a control group to observe the impact.
5. We incorporate effective calls-to-action and landing page strategies to ensure readers can convert when they are ready to.

We don’t worry about how slow we can win the race, we figure out how to win the race.

About the Author

Douglas Karr is the Founder of the Marketing Technology Blog, author of Corporate Blogging for Dummies, and CEO of DK New Media. His firm assists sales, marketing, and technology enterprises increase their market share and build their web presence with measurable strategies.

For more great information be sure to check out Meltwater's extensive resources for free webinars, eBooks, and industry reports to get the latest edge you need.

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