

MAPPING OUT
A CONTENT STRATEGY
TO DRIVE SUCCESS

10 things to know
before you GO



pwr
new media

A blue race car is positioned on a winding road that starts from the top right and curves into a large white circular callout. The road is marked with a dashed white line. The background is a solid orange color.

Content marketing is the art of creating, curating and distributing valuable content, combined with the science of measuring its impact on awareness, lead generation and customer acquisition.¹

A purple race car is positioned on a winding road that starts from the bottom right and curves into a large blue circular callout. The road is marked with a dashed white line. The background is a solid orange color.

Content marketing (n.): The use of storytelling to build relationships with consumers by providing them with something entertaining or useful.²

A purple race car is positioned on a winding road that starts from the bottom right and curves into a large white circular callout. The road is marked with a dashed white line. The background is a solid orange color.

A content marketing strategy is a plan for building an audience by publishing, maintaining, and spreading frequent and consistent content that educates, entertains, or inspires to turn strangers into fans and fans into customers.³

1

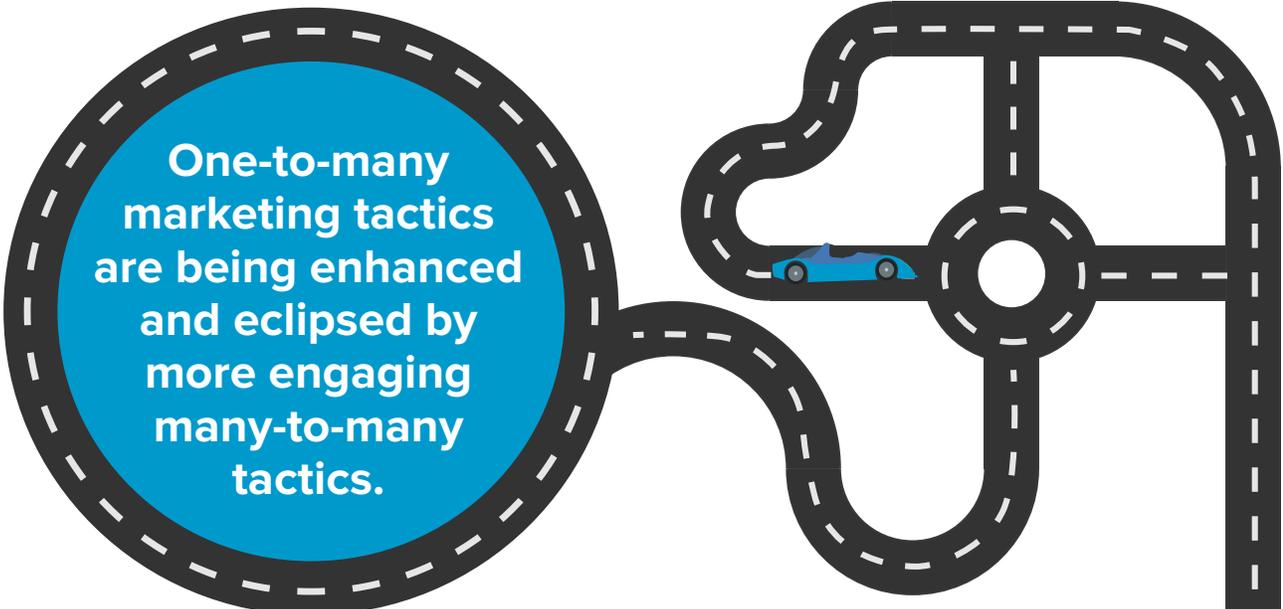
Know why you should care about adapting & executing a content strategy

Branded content is driving engagement, brand lift, ROI, and even budget share like never before.

Why? Because it works.

- ✓ **75%** of marketers generated positive returns from content marketing.⁴
- ✓ **85%** of consumers regularly seek out content from trusted experts when considering a purchase.⁵
- ✓ **74%** of readers trust educational content from a brand—as long as it doesn't push a sale.⁶
- ✓ **80%** of business decision makers prefer to get company information in a series of articles versus advertisement.⁷
- ✓ **8-12** pieces of branded content are consumed by B-2-B decision makers before they decide to do business with an organization.⁸

People are increasingly turning away from traditional, interruptive advertising and turning to content.



One-to-many marketing tactics are being enhanced and eclipsed by more engaging many-to-many tactics.

You are now in the driver's seat!

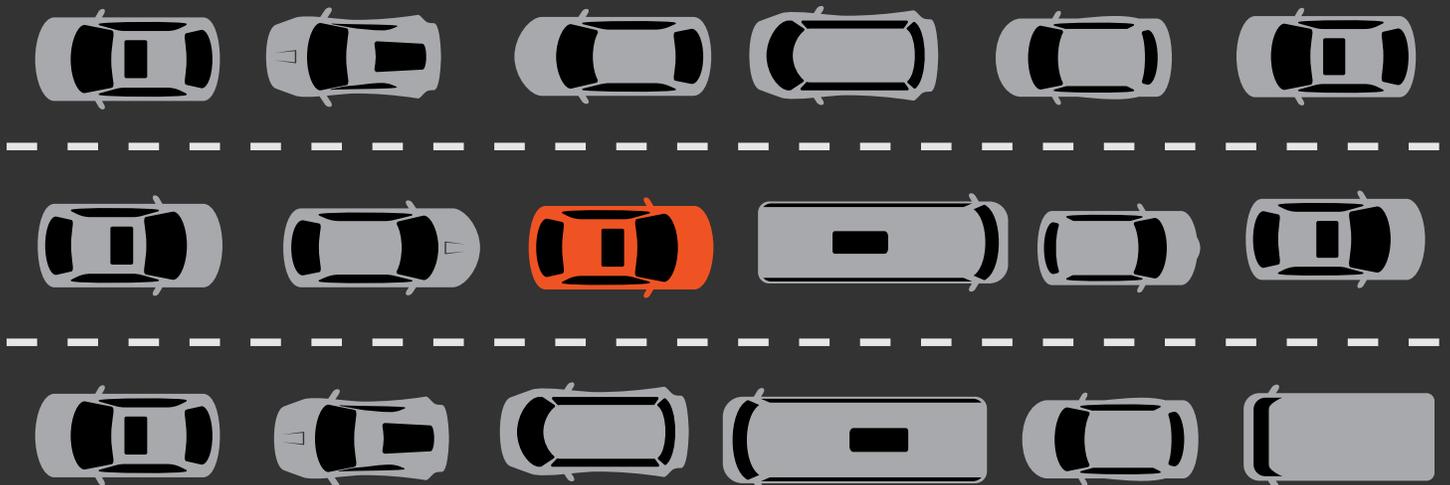
Now you can interact directly with your audience. Remember, people care about people, especially themselves. They care about their own problems far more than they'll ever care about your brand.

By creating and sharing useful content that aligns your brand's solutions with their problems, you win!



The bad news is that you're competing with a traffic jam of content.

It's important to stand out!



2

Know what you want to achieve with your content strategy

Winning the race starts with a clear vision of your brand's goals. You need to map out where you want to go.

Not sure where your map leads? Most great content strategies aim to do more than drive buzz; they aim to drive ROI. Below are some reasonable, and achievable, content strategy goals. Which ones align with your brand's map? What else are you hoping to achieve?

- Build brand awareness and grow brand lift.
- Establish your brand's credibility and authenticity.
- Educate buyers, clients, and potential customers.
- Engage more deeply with influencers, the media, and other stakeholders.
- Take care of current customers more effectively.
- Nurture sales leads through the sales funnel.
- Create new sales leads as well as upselling opportunities.
- _____
- _____
- _____



Please stop waiting for a map. We reward those who draw maps, not those who follow them.

— Seth Godin



3

Know how to be audience-centric

Getting to audience-centric is essential. Digital tools and platforms have transformed how people research, make buying decisions, choose services, stay in touch with brands, even fall in love. They've put the power in your audience's hands.



That means what your audience wants to learn about beats what you want to talk about.

Getting to audience-centric starts with identifying audience needs. Tools like personas, customer journey maps, and empathy maps enable a deeper dive into questions like...

Who are your primary audiences? _____

Who are your secondary audiences? _____

What keeps your audience members up at night? _____

What problems do they have you can solve? _____

What opportunities are in front of them that you can help them capture? _____

Which channels and mediums do they touch as they look for solutions? _____

What emotions do members of your audience experience as they move through the stages of awareness, interest, desire and action? _____



Here's a handy exercise to get you started:

Brainstorm 3-5 brand personas and focus on their problems—problems your brand can help personas solve.

Try framing their problems like this...

Persona 1: _____ needs a good way to _____
_____. Unexpectedly, in his or her world _____
_____.

Persona 2: _____ needs a good way to _____
_____. Unexpectedly, in his or her world _____
_____.

Persona 3: _____ needs a good way to _____
_____. Unexpectedly, in his or her world _____
_____.

Persona 4: _____ needs a good way to _____
_____. Unexpectedly, in his or her world _____
_____.

Persona 5: _____ needs a good way to _____
_____. Unexpectedly, in his or her world _____
_____.

Next, think about the buying stage each persona goes through. What questions and emotions do they experience as they move from awareness to interest to desire to action? What kinds of content would speak most directly to them at each stage of their journey?

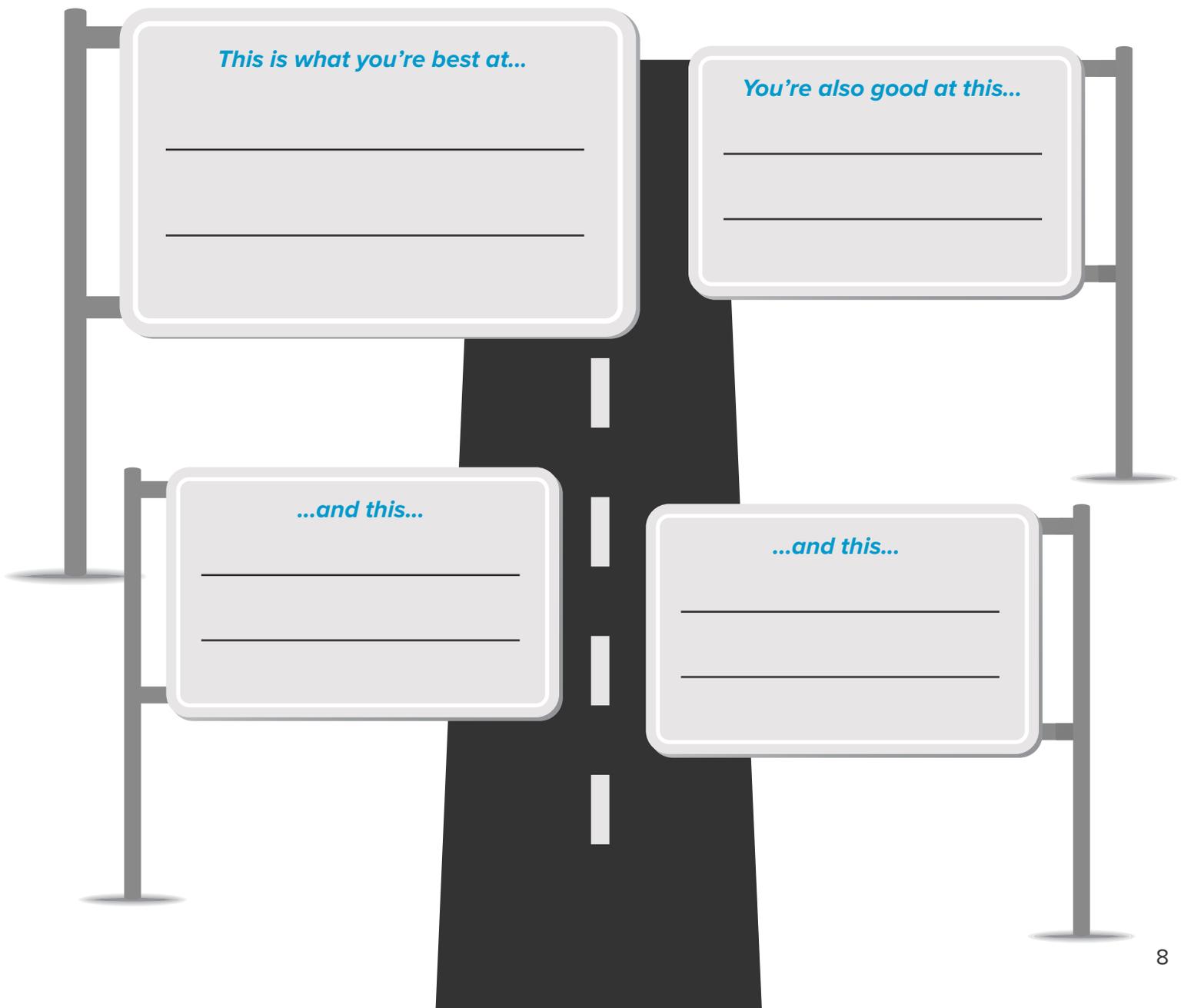
Once you understand your audiences, you'll have a clear picture of what they want to learn from you and which channels and mediums will connect with them.

4

Know how to hold your main lane

You probably have a list a mile long of things you're good at. That's just how superstars like you roll. But to craft terrific content, it's best to own your brand's main lane—that's the zone where you have the greatest authority, where no brand can surpass your expertise.

Jot down your main lane topic, then build out from there, adding secondary topics your audience is interested in and that you can address authoritatively, deeply and useful. These are the topics you'll craft content to address.



5

Know the attributes of great content

You know where you want to go, you know your audiences, and you know your main lane topics. But before crafting content, you also want to know the attributes of stand out, superstar content.

We want to flag five attributes we think are most important.



Great Content Triggers Emotions:

Emotions trigger dopamine in the brain, which makes people process and retain information better. That's why marketing has always chased emotions like happiness, for example. And for good reason: awe-inspiring and funny stories get more shares.⁹ Content that triggers fear and anxiety is also highly successful.¹⁰ But content that triggers other emotions—anticipation, anger, sadness, hope—can also move the needle.

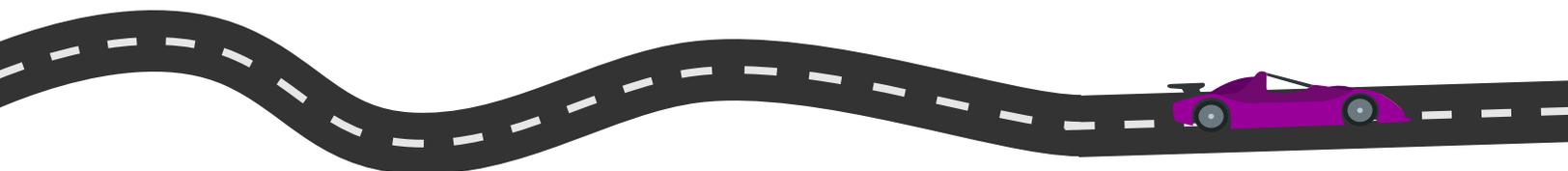
As you craft each piece of content, keep in mind the emotions you want your audience to experience. Use words, phrases and imagery designed to trigger those emotions.



Great Content Tells Brand Stories...as Stories!

One sure fire way to trigger emotions is to craft brand narratives that tell stories—stories that feature protagonists who overcome challenges, stories that have a beginning, middle and end. Stories should tie to your brand in some sense. Ideally your brand will play the role of superhero, solving the protagonist's problem. But content that ties more loosely to the brand can be exceptional too, especially for top of the funnel messages.

Before crafting content, consider writing it as a narrative and think about where your protagonist would be in the beginning, middle and end of the story as well as you're your brand's role and helping the protagonist overcome obstacles.





Great Content Makes Use of Visuals

We humans are truly visual creatures—we understand, process, and retain visual information much faster than textual info. That’s because 99% of all sensory information is filtered out by the brain immediately, which means only 1% of information actually gets through.¹¹ Of all the info successfully transmitted to the brain, 90% is visual.

Select attention-grabbing visuals that surprise or appeal to the senses. Consider taking some risks with the visuals you use. And making use of visuals doesn’t mean just adding images. Consider videos, infographics, GIFs, illustrations, charts, etc.



Great Content Appeals to Humans

One sure-fire way to appeal to humans is to write like a human. Let your brand’s personality shine through in the content you create. A conversational writing style is more engaging. No one wants to read/watch/listen to boring, grey, corp speak. But we love engaging with content that tackles real ideas, in a real voice, with a dash of passion and humor. Authentic and real trumps perfect and predictable every day!

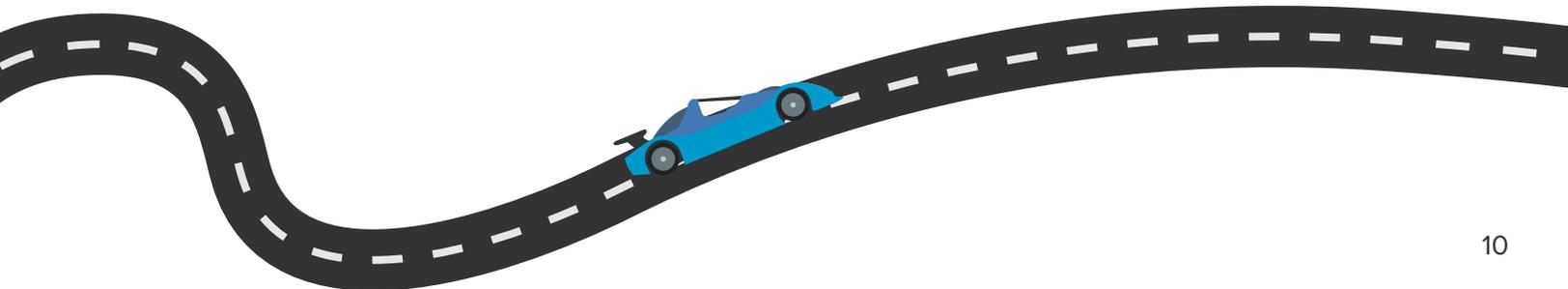
Make sure your writers, designers and vendors are aware of you tone, story and style guidelines. (And if you don’t have these, now may be the time to get them!) Read your content out loud to make sure it flows smoothly and sounds personable.



Great Content is Nonpromotional

We could have chosen many adjectives to highlight here: timely, relevant, informative, entertaining, useful, to name just a few. Indeed, virtually every great piece of content you’ll ever see either entertains or educates...or both! But if we had to choose one attribute that differentiates content marketing from traditional marketing, that attribute would be nonpromotional.

Make sure your content isn’t just a sales sheet in disguise. No one likes people, or brands, who drone on about themselves ad nauseam. Ensuring your content isn’t too self-promotional is especially key for top of the funnel content.





Know how to choose the right mediums

The right medium for a given piece of content is the one that maximizes impact on your brand's goals. A mixed media approach is, for most brands and content lanes, ideal.

Here are our five faves:

-  **Blog** – Think of your brand's blog, or, if you're like PWR, resource center, as the hub of the wheel, the place where all of your brand's content is housed and organized. Some type of hub is an essential ingredient in any healthy content strategy.
-  **E-newsletters** – Tremendously underrated, a robust and thoughtful e-newsletter can be the touchstone of your outbound strategy. Think of your e-newsletter as a place to package audience-appropriate content, repackage evergreen content from your content hub, and share timely and new messages. Remember, you're growing relationships with your subscribers so keep it consistent, useful (to them!), and interesting.
-  **Whitepapers** – Long form content is on the rise and, for a robust content strategy, a great way to explore the many aspects of a given topic. Well-written and properly illustrated whitepapers can go a long way to establishing your lane credibility.
-  **Video** – Video continues to be a highly sharable and engaging medium. But remember not to bury the lead with your video. You only have a few seconds to make a good impression and ensure folks stay through the rest of the video; long introductions or boring talking heads at the beginning can be a turn-off. Consider a video series that builds over time, illustrated videos that capture attention, or a quick and casual approach that gets to, and illustrates, a valuable point quickly.
-  **Infographics** – Infographics continue to be a great way to grab attention and make a point quickly. Adding a little motion to your infographics (= motiongraphic) can take them to the next level and draw eyes exactly where you want them most.

Consider which mediums will best tell your main lane stories and how mediums should adapt as audiences move through the stages of brand engagement.

7

Know how to repurpose, reuse and reshare

If you're like marketers for most brands, you're dealing with limited resources. So knowing how to repurpose, reuse and reshare content is a must.

Start with a content audit so you know what content is already available; what content is evergreen; and how, when and by whom content is being used.

Look at your universe of content and ask...

What lane gaps need to be filled in order to execute the content strategy? _____

Now look at each piece of content individually and consider the many ways a given piece of content can be broken into smaller, channel-appropriate pieces. For example, take a larger infographic and create snackable versions of key stats or facts to share across social channels, or, turn a webinar into a few different blog posts. This approach works best if you start with long-form content and then break it into smaller pieces.

For each piece of content ask...

How can this be improved? _____

How can this be broken down into smaller, channel appropriate pieces? _____

How evergreen is this content and how often, when and where can it be shared?

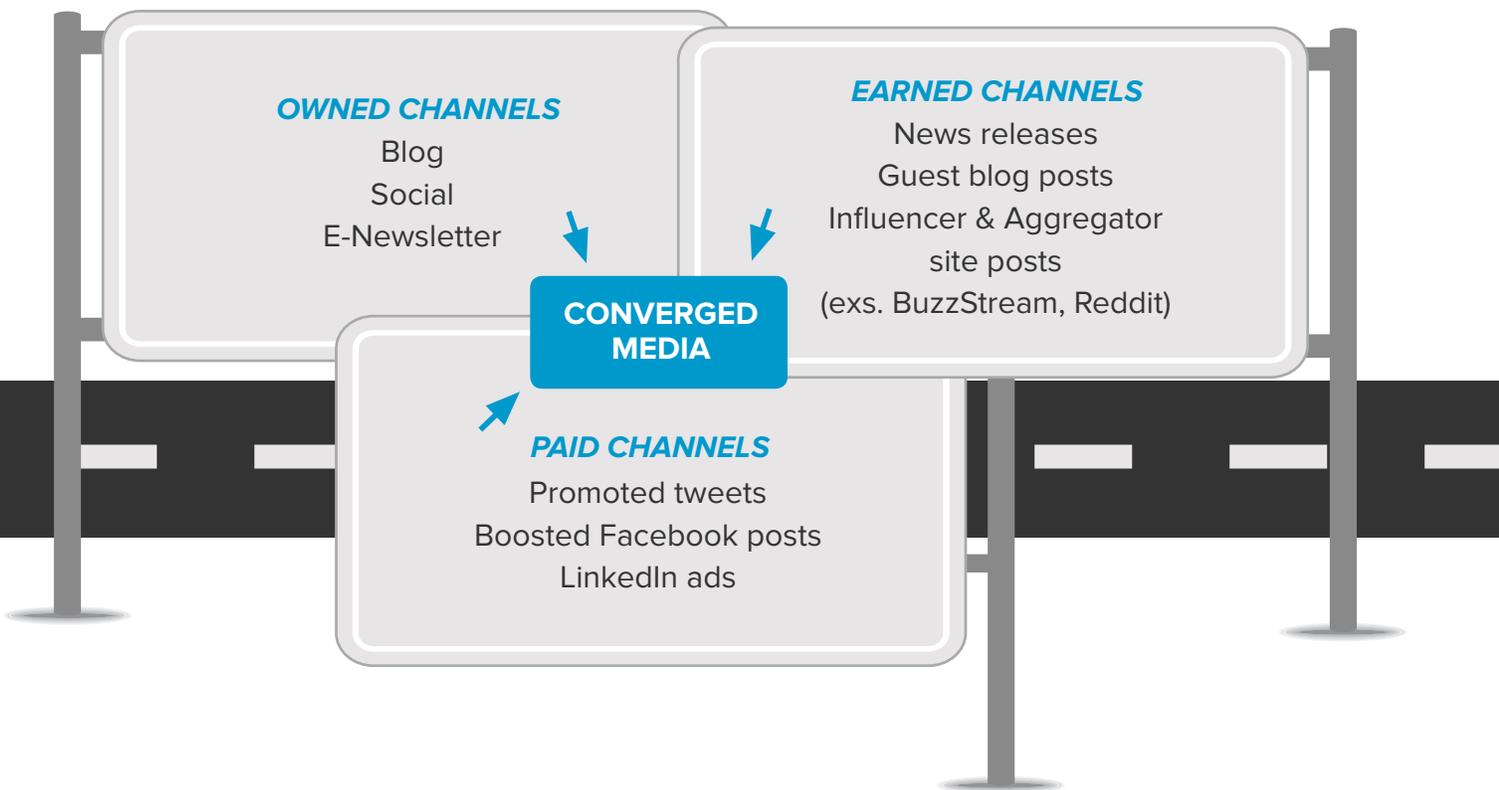
Remember: consistency is key and quality trumps quantity. Focus on fewer, more significant pieces of content that can be repurposed, reused and reshared.

8

Know your distribution and amplification plan

Now you've built it, but will they come? Not without a plan. The road to successfully amplifying your content leads through paid, earned and owned channels.

Your content strategy must include a plan for promoting content in unique, platform-friendly ways across all owned, paid and earned channels. Our favorites from each category are below.



An editorial calendar that outlines publication expectations (how often, and where, you plan to share) and creates a framework for who own the content (who is responsible for producing, approving, and distributing content) is a must. But do keep it flexible enough to adapt to topical stories and unexpected inspirations. And don't forget to enable social sharing and interaction across channels to drive engagement.

And remember, these channels are no longer siloed. Now they converge, flowing into one another so that the paid promotion of owned media can lead to earned media wins, for example. Consistency is a converged media key, so keep it in mind.



Know which metrics you'll track and why

It's important to measure your content strategy so you know if it's working. Above all, metrics must align with your content strategy's goals. For example, if your goal is simply to increase engagement, then feedback, follows and interactions are a perfectly fine way to measure this. But if your goal is to drive real ROI, then business metrics that quantify the number of new leads and conversions are more appropriate.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself as you consider the successes, and failures, of your strategy.



Is your content driving engagement? Yes No

Is your content driving web and social traffic? Yes No

Is your content driving media exposure and brand lift? Yes No

Is your content driving new leads? Yes No

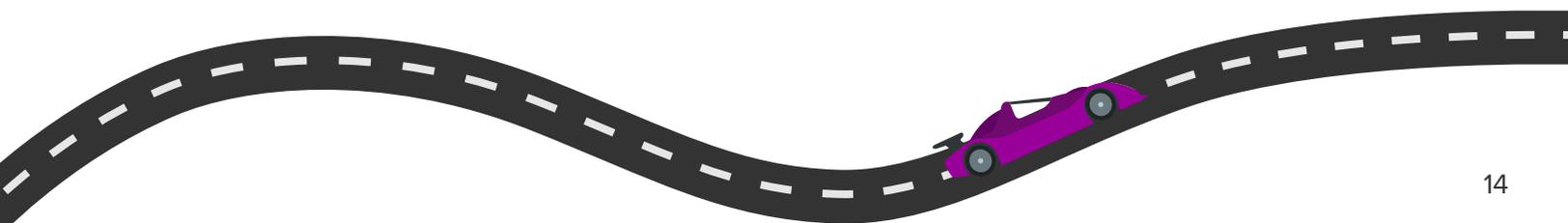
Is your content driving sales leads through the sales funnel? Yes No

Is your content driving happier and/or more loyal employees, customers, and/or stakeholders? Yes No

Is your content driving cost savings? Yes No

Is your content driving greater customer retention? Yes No

Metrics make it easier to learn lessons so you can quickly dust yourself off, adjust your content, and try again. Chances are, you'll learn something new in the process.



10

Know how to learn from successes and failures

Crafting and sharing content just for the sake of content itself won't get you where you want to go.

Every piece of content should have a purpose. And the purpose should align with business goals and be tailored to audience and channel. But that doesn't mean everything you do will be a win.



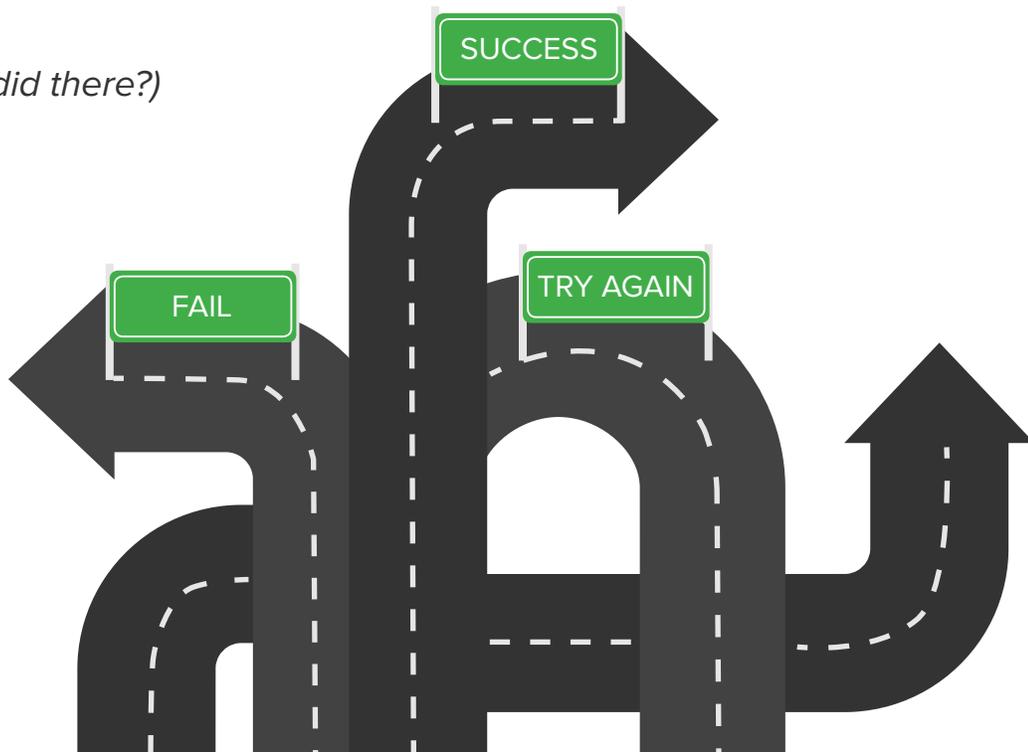
If you're trying new things, being bold and pushing the envelope, you're going to occasionally FAIL.

Embrace it. And, track it! Pay attention to your metrics so you're learning through the process and applying what you learn.



If you're trying new things, being bold and pushing the envelope, you're going to occasionally SUCCEED. Embrace it. And, track it! Pay attention to your metrics so you're learning through the process and applying what you learn.

(See what we did there?)





Want more info? We're always happy to make new friends and work with new people.
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Sources:

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