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THE B2B MARKETER'S

Content Strategy Toolkit.

A framework for connecting content to campaigns and 6 templates for getting it done.

WHY THIS KIT

Effective campaigns start with effective content.

The B2B marketing imperative is no longer just to have content—but to use content strategically to drive campaign outcomes. Your marketing programs depend on getting the right content in front of the right people at the right time. For the enterprise marketer, this can feel like a battle you can't win. Limited resources, lack of a centralized content planning function and departmental silos make it difficult to plan effective content marketing campaigns.

This kit will help you change that.

Use the framework and templates in this kit to:

- Build a repeatable, scalable and measurable content marketing strategy for your programs and campaigns
- Create, request and repurpose the right content for your audience and goals
- Gain clarity on your audience and the buyer's journey
- Align content with the buyer's journey
- Understand where you have content gaps and prioritize filling them
- Document your content marketing strategy—and gain buy-in for it

82%

of B2B marketers consider content marketing to be a key strategy in their organization's overall success

Source: TechTarget

55%

of B2B marketers cite creating content that prompts a desired action as one of their top content creation challenges

Source: Content Marketing Institute

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6 Common content marketing strategy mistakes

(that this kit will help you avoid).

This kit features a framework that will help you avoid these content marketing challenges. Use it from start to finish, or jump to the section that you need most.

Starting with a format rather than the function.

Ebooks, webinars, infographics, videos and blogs are all great when used for the right purpose and the right audience—but fall flat when they're not.

~~*"We need an ebook."*~~
↳ ***"What's the goal of this asset?"***

SOUND FAMILIAR? ↘

Confusing having a lot of content with having the right content.

Assets that are too product-centric, too general, too old or too narrow won't help you meet your goals.

~~*"We can make these assets work for this campaign."*~~
↳ ***"Which of our assets will be effective for this audience and campaign?"***

SOUND FAMILIAR? ↘

Creating content without knowing who it's for.

Your solution is your solution, but what someone needs to know about it depends on their role in their organization and buying group.

~~*"Let's create something about [topic]."*~~
↳ ***"Let's create something for [audience] at [funnel stage]."***

SOUND FAMILIAR? ↘

Not placing your content into the context of the buyer's journey.

Great ideas aren't enough. Content must be built around questions your audience has and provide a clear path to help them progress on their journey.

~~*"We could create an infographic about [topic]."*~~
↳ ***"What would answer the audience's questions at this stage?"***

SOUND FAMILIAR? ↘

Conflating content performance with content effectiveness.

Your content's value is determined by whether the right buyers engage with it AND whether it moves those buyers along in their journey.

~~*"How many leads did it generate?"*~~
↳ ***"What did the buyer do next?"***

SOUND FAMILIAR? ↘

Not planning derivative content from the start.

Repackaging content is one of the best ways to scale content production—but loses its efficiency when too many changes need to be made.

~~*"What derivative content can we create from [asset]?"*~~
↳ ***"What will the asset and its derivatives be?"***

SOUND FAMILIAR? ↘

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CONTENT STRATEGY FUNDAMENTALS

Why do B2B marketers need a documented content marketing strategy?

In its simplest form, a content marketing strategy shows how you will use content to achieve your marketing goals and business objectives. To be effective, your content strategy must be rooted in your audience's needs, map to the customer journey and be supported by a comprehensive activation plan.

Without documentation that flows through the entire content strategy, planning and execution process, these factors can get lost.

This leads to content that looks and feels great, but is not aligned to your audience or goals.

Success factors for top-performing content marketers.

82%

Know their audience

62%

Set goals that align with their organization's objectives

53%

Effectively measure and demonstrate content performance

Source: Content Marketing Institute

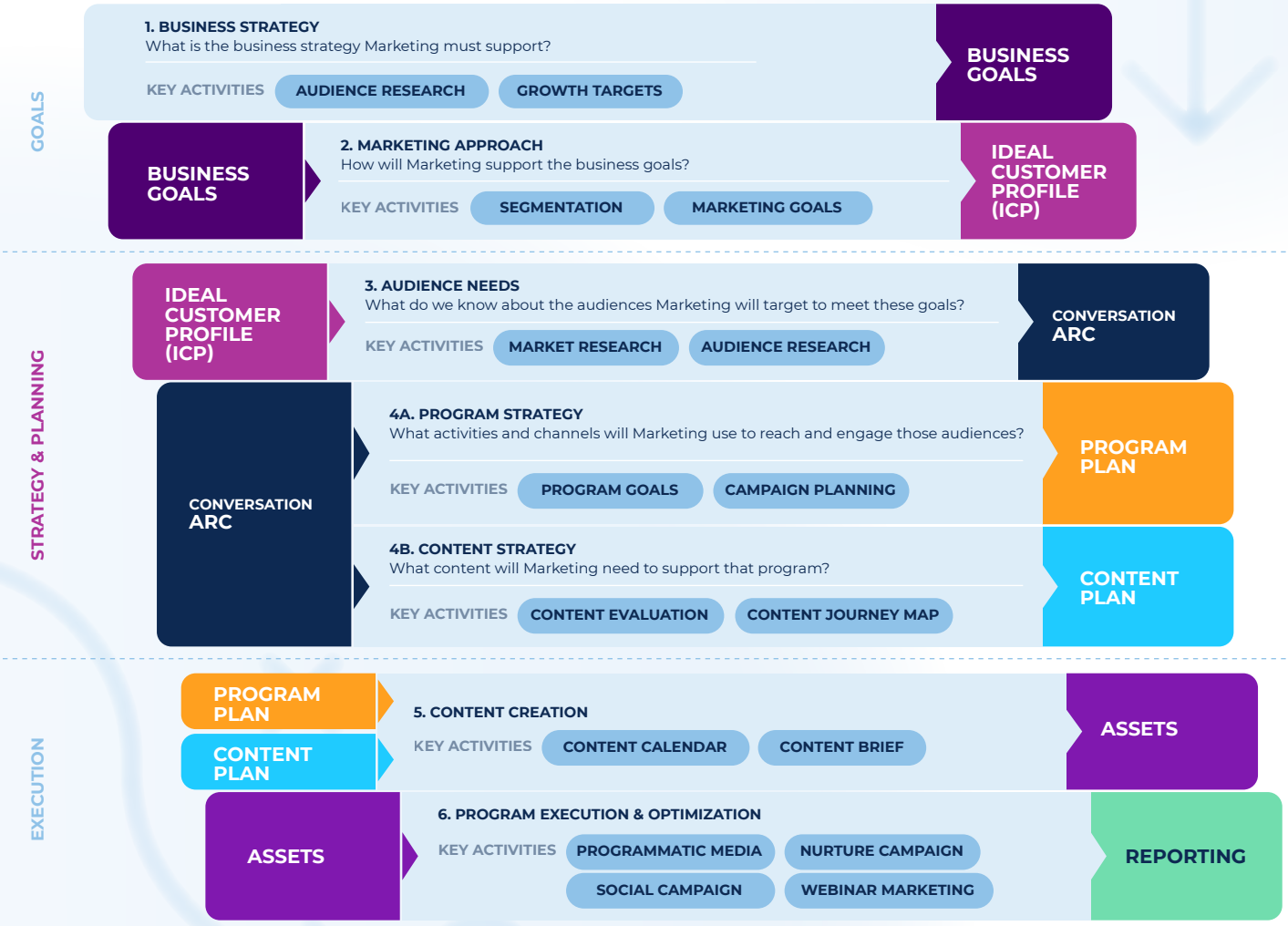
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CONTENT STRATEGY FUNDAMENTALS

Laying the foundation for effective content-backed programs.

Content creation should never happen in a vacuum. Rather, your content marketing strategy holds a specific place in your larger marketing and business strategy. Most content challenges can be traced back to a lack of organizational alignment around this principle.

Use this diagram as an anchor for conversations with your team, other departments and your executives to make sure everyone is on the same page.



When building out your content and campaign strategy, the activities at each step become inputs for the next step.

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Don’t ignore these important inputs.

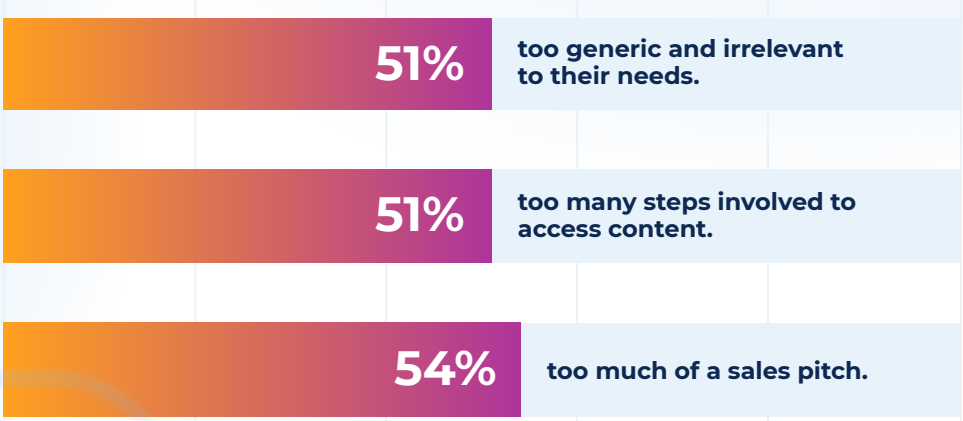
While this kit provides tools for creating and documenting your content marketing strategy, there are many other inputs necessary to build and execute on that strategy, including:

Segmentation & targeting exercise. Marketing efficiency depends on clear audience targets. Identifying the target audience for a particular goal ensures you can focus your audience research, campaign channels, paid media lists and content decisions effectively for that goal.

Audience-level messaging. Leaving it up to individual teams to adapt general messaging to specific audiences leads to a disjointed experience for buyers. Establishing and sharing audience-level messaging ensures that you are telling a cohesive story across channels.

SEO strategy. Understanding your organization’s SEO strategy and keyword goals can help you create or request SEO-friendly content from the beginning.

Where do buyers say content goes wrong?



Source: Demand Gen Report

Using the templates in this kit.
We’ve packaged all the templates in this kit into a handy Google Sheets workbook that you can copy and modify to meet your needs.
Get the Google Sheets templates

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CONTENT STRATEGY FUNDAMENTALS

Establishing a shared vocabulary around content.

Having a basic, agreed upon set of terms is critical for getting what you ask for. Before we begin, here's how we use these terms in this kit. If you use them differently in your organization, make sure to update the templates to match.

Asset. A finished piece of content that can be shared via a standalone file (such as a PDF) or a link. For example, an ebook, blog article or webinar.

Blog. The house for your blog articles. Your blog is the channel; the articles on your blog are content.

Buying group. The set of individuals who are involved in the decision-making process for purchasing your product or service.

Buying group role archetypes. Descriptions of the common needs of key roles in the buying group, regardless of actual title. For example, decision maker, champion, influencer and user.

Campaign. Coordinated set of marketing activations that involve various marketing strategies and channels to drive a specific audience to take a specific action.

Channel. The places where you will distribute your content.

Content. In the context of content marketing, content refers to discrete assets that can be used as part of a marketing program. It does not refer to promotional elements such as emails, ads, social posts or landing pages, or to the parts of an asset, such as headlines and body copy.

Content journey map. A tool for assigning the right content to different stages of the customer journey for a particular audience.

Content marketing. The strategy of using content to attract, engage and convert prospective buyers.

Conversation arc. What questions your audience needs answered at each stage of their journey—and how you will answer them.

Copy. The words inside your content pieces and promotions. Usually used to refer to the language used in ads, social media, emails, webpages and other short-form units.

Derivative content. New assets created from existing content to extend your reach to additional channels, buying group members or verticals without starting from scratch.

Format. The house or packaging of the content, such as blog article, video, or ebook.

ICP. Ideal Customer Profile. The set of demographics, firmographics and technographics that represent the best opportunities for your company to achieve your business objectives.

Persona. A profile of a key member of your target audience that helps marketers and content creators understand their challenges, preferences and goals.

Messaging. Approved language and themes to be used in short-form copy and long-form content pieces.

Personalization. A variety of tactics used to make marketing activations and content more relevant for the end audience. Personalization may involve using a tool to display custom messages or assets to a site visitor, or adapting existing content to speak to a different audience.

Thought leadership. Often mistakenly used to refer to a content format, thought leadership refers to any content that expresses a new and specific point of view from key individuals in your company. The most common formats for thought leadership content are blog articles, webinars and social posts.

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Planning your content measurement strategy.

It's common for B2B marketers to focus their attention on content performance metrics such as clicks, downloads and webinar registrations. These so-called vanity metrics are incredibly important for understanding whether your content topics, formats and promotions appeal to your target audience. But they don't tell the whole story. They may even tell the wrong story.

For example, that blog post that got a lot of clicks but had an average engagement rate of 6 seconds? It's definitely not helping accelerate the journey. It may even be inhibiting potential buyers from clicking on your next interesting-sounding post. It looks good, but it could actually be standing in the way of achieving your goals.

In addition to measuring content performance, you must evaluate content *effectiveness*, or how your content contributes to your overall marketing and business goals.

As you plan your measurement strategy, consider how you can answer these questions:

- How well does your content help build trust in your organization? (repeat visits, frequent engagement)
- Which content assets accelerate the customer journey? (time to MQL, time to hand-raise, time to close)
- Does your content lead to more efficient and impactful sales conversations? (customers are more ready to buy when they get to sales)

Is it your content or your campaign?

Just as clicking on content is not the same as consuming and valuing that content, not clicking on content doesn't necessarily mean the asset itself has missed the mark. Before throwing that on-demand webinar under the bus, ask:

- Was it promoted to the right audience and on the right channel?
- Did the promotional copy speak to that audience and accurately represent what they can get out of the asset?
- Is it easy for the audience to consume the content? If it's gated, is it worth trading an email address for? Is the form short and sweet?
- Are the title and cover art appealing to the target audience? Do they invite the buyer to engage?

THE PROGRAM STRATEGY TEMPLATE

Aligning your content strategy with your business goals.

Imagine your goal is to help grow new logo acquisition among B2B tech companies.

Specifically, you're on the hook for driving $100MM in sourced pipeline and $400MM in influenced pipeline for your company's event lead capture solution.

Before you get to planning, you'll want to document the foundational elements of your strategy so they don't get lost as you work on the details.

Every part of your marketing strategy should drive toward a specific business goal. It's the same for your content strategy. Before deciding on any content, you need to know what you're trying to achieve. Only then can you recommend the right content for the job.

The Program Strategy template.

Use this template to map your content marketing strategy to a specific marketing outcome. The information you enter here will help you make additional important decisions down the line.

Business objective. What goal will this campaign or program support?	E.g., Grow new logo acquisition by 25%
Program objectives. How will this program support that business goal?	E.g., Drive sourced pipeline and influenced pipeline of net new tech industry logos
Target audience. What segment and personas will we target to achieve the program objectives?	E.g., Event managers in B2B tech companies with ARR of $100MM+
Program tactics. What tactics will we use to achieve the program objectives?	E.g., SEM, social, paid media, email marketing
KPIs. What will we measure to evaluate this initiative? Be SPECIFIC.	E.g., x MQLs y% lift of MQAs CPA

Understanding your audience.

You know buyers value content and messaging that feels made for them. To resonate, your campaign will need to help your audience solve their challenges, rather than push the features your product team loves.

So ... what do you know about field marketing managers in the B2B tech space?

40% of marketers cite creating the right content for their audience as a challenge. One of the big reasons for this is that many marketers don't really know their audience.

Getting to the heart of your audience means going beyond simple demographic and firmographic data. You need to understand your audience as people. This does NOT mean creating personas with info about their pets or their favorite IPA.

It's about ascertaining what your audience is struggling with, and how they're trying to solve those challenges. We've all been told to identify audience pain points, and that's a great place to start.

That's just the "what" of your audience's needs. You also need to know the "why"—why they are trying to solve that pain point in the first place. It could be a skill set shortcoming on their team, or not enough resources or a lack of organizational buy-in.

And don't forget the "why not." Often overlooked, this calls out the roadblocks that could keep your audience from saying "yes" to your solution. These should be challenges at the ICP level (not the account level). That is, think about blockers that are likely to be common to your audience, instead of specific to a given account.

For instance, many enterprise organizations tend to be highly siloed. If you sell a SaaS solution, a common blocker may be the challenges of system-wide tech integration. An account-level blocker, by contrast, would be something like "existing relationship with [competitor]."

> **PROTIP: Don't fall into the trap of trying to create content for every SINGLE member of the buying team. A much more manageable approach—which means it's more likely to actually succeed—is to focus your output on 2–3 key buying group roles for your ICP.**

4 Underused ways to learn about your audience.

1. **Subscribe to relevant industry newsletters.** Want to learn what's current in their world? No better place to start than (free!) newsletters.
2. **Scrape competitor content.** See what other players in your space have to say on the matter.
3. **Join LinkedIn affinity groups.** Sit in on (or participate in) real-time conversations your audience is having. This is a great way to learn about the language they use in addition to their biggest challenges.
4. **Talk to your sales team.** You've heard this before. This time, though, approach it with a new mindset: It's a self-serve world for buying groups, so your content needs to be doing the work of the sales team. Interview Sales to learn what conversations they're having, and REPLACE those conversations with your content.

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The Audience Worksheet template.

Use this template to get clear on your audience. Go beyond industry and job titles to understand what questions they have, where they get their information, how they impact the buying group—and what's *really* keeping them from meeting their goals. Add a column for each role you are targeting.

ATTRIBUTE	ROLE 1: EVENT MANAGER	ROLE 2:
Title. What are common titles and job levels for this person?	E.g., Field marketing manager, event marketing manager	
Description. 1 sentence about who they are	E.g., Responsible for planning and executing events	
Buying group role. Are they the champion? Decision maker? Influencer? User? etc.	E.g., Decision maker	
Around the watercooler. What's happening in their world? What conversations are being had?	E.g., Travel budgets not back to pre-pandemic levels, how to bring back the sizzle	
Watering holes. Where do they get news and information? Blogs, newsletters, specific outlets, etc.	E.g., LinkedIn, Cvent, industry-specific pubs & events	
Trigger. What made this person realize they had a problem?	E.g., Pressure to justify event budget	
Starting condition. Solution aware? Problem aware? Deep into research, or just info gathering?	E.g., Problem aware, becoming solution aware	
Goals. What do they want to achieve? It's not just "produce more content." More content unlocks something else for them. What is it?	E.g., Show that their events have a business impact	
Pain point #1. What are their specific needs? These are NOT product features. A need is a desired outcome that has business value for a persona. Needs can be organizational, departmental or personal for the persona.	E.g., Lack of attribution in CRM	
Pain point #2.	E.g., Lack of information from in-person conversations leads to missed follow-up opportunities	
Pain point #3.	E.g., Delay getting leads into system post-event	
Blockers. What's keeping them from saying yes to your solution?	E.g., Event-specific vendors, sales resistance	
Your solution. Which of your solutions would solve their problem?	E.g., Event lead capture app	
Key message. How can you transform them?	E.g., Tie event conversations to sales with a universal lead capture app that integrates with your CRM	
Key benefits. What else is important to communicate?	E.g., Universal event lead capture, instant sync with CRM, uniform data collection	

THE CONVERSATION ARC TEMPLATE

Building out the buyer's journey.

Based on your research, you determine that field marketing managers' biggest challenges are lead attribution and demonstrating event ROI.

Now you're ready to unpack the questions they'll have as they discover, learn about and decide on your solution—and how you will answer them.

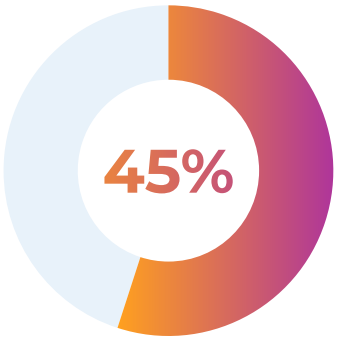
Before you can plan new content for—or assign existing content to—a program or campaign, you need to understand the journey your audience takes as they move from awareness to decision.

Think of the relationship between your audience and your content as a conversation. They will enter the conversation at a given point with certain questions. Your content's job is to answer those questions. The conversation is the back and forth between your audience and your content as the nature of their questions and concerns evolves.

Make sure you can answer the following questions for each funnel stage:

- What is their state of mind before and after this stage?
- What questions do they have?
- What new questions will they have?

> **PROTIP: Thinking about the audience's end state is an overlooked strategy that is very useful for planning and placing content. Understanding where they need to be at the end of this asset or stage helps you ensure your content actually gets them there.**



of B2B marketers cite aligning content with the buyer's journey as one of their top content challenges not related to content creation

Source: Content Marketing Institute

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The Conversation Arc template.

Use this template to map out the flow of information in your buyer's journey. Orchestrate the conversation between your audience and your content by making sure you understand how your audience's questions and needs evolve as they progress through the funnel.

JOURNEY STAGE	PRE-AWARENESS	AWARENESS	CONSIDERATION	VALIDATION + DECISION
Theme	This is a problem; here's why	Here is a solution to this problem	Our brand can help; here's how	Here's the proof and specifics you need to make your decision
What must be addressed to progress them to the next journey stage?	The legitimacy and relevance for this audience	The applicability of your solution to their specific instance	Your brand's demonstrated expertise on this subject	The ROI of engaging with your brand
Buyer transformation	From passive to actively seeking info	From problem-aware to solution-aware	From understanding solutions to understanding YOUR solutions	From considering your solution to reaching consensus w/in their organization about your brand.
Buyer state of mind - entering What are they thinking/ feeling?	E.g., "I'm so tired of losing potential leads and not being able to show event performance because the information is missing from the CRM."			
Key questions to answer at this stage	E.g., Are there other ways to do this? How will attribution improve? What are the costs of not changing?			
Desired action of buyer Enter the specific action you want them to take	E.g., Start to search for a solution, click SEM ads			
Blockers What could keep them from continuing the conversation?	E.g., Fear internal change is not worth the effort, not understanding the impact			
Messaging Enter specific messaging points for each stage	You can prove the value of your events - no more questions about ROI			

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Evaluating available content for your campaign.

To curate or create—that is the question. To answer it, start by gathering up relevant resources from Digital Demand, Webinar, Product, Research and any other teams that produce content.

With any luck you'll find everything you need to fill out your campaign. More likely, you'll need to repackage or replace some of these assets to meet your goals.

Nearly half of marketers say they struggle with aligning their content to the buyer's journey. Without this alignment, you don't have a campaign. You just have a pile of content.

Once you've established the beats of your conversation arc, you'll have a clear picture of who your audience is and what questions they need answered. Now it's time to start planning the content for your campaign. The first step is to evaluate your library of existing assets.

The core concept of a content evaluation is to identify which assets are a good fit for the specific campaign you're planning. To do so, you should catalog all your assets for this industry or solution and evaluate them against consistent criteria.

Building a robust audit demands going beyond simple aspects (format, target persona, topic) and even past performance. To distill a truly useful assessment of quality and fit, you'll need to evaluate the questions each piece of content addresses, and if those answers are relevant to the particular audience and funnel stage you're targeting.

> **PROTIP: Keep in mind, the bigger your organization, the more likely you are to encounter content silos. For instance, the North America group may have their own version of content that the EMEA group uses. Or maybe digital assets all live with the marketing department, but webinars live with another group. Try to make sure you're collecting assets from the whole organization.**

4 Derivative content ideas.

As you perform your content evaluation, it's a great time to look for opportunities for derivative content. Here are four ways to adapt existing content to extend your reach.

1. **Change the format.** Have a blog that's doing well? See if you can pull out some key data to format as an infographic. Maybe that webinar would translate to an ebook. Think about how to tell the same story in a different way.
2. **Chop it up.** Take a longer asset and break it out into pieces. Chapters in an ebook, for example, could be split into standalone downloadable content or blogs.
3. **Shift focus.** Most assets will have a main point with supporting content. Look at the parts of the piece that don't go into depth—and create new content around those topics.
4. **Get visual.** Create visual summaries/companions for your content. Have a data-heavy report? Supplement it with an infographic or chart with all the data in one place. Mention a process in your blog? Create a worksheet to go along with it.

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The Content Audit template.

Use this template to evaluate content for campaigns. Here are some of the most common fields we use when doing so for both internal and client programs. Use this list as a starting point to build your own tracker, or download our companion Google Sheets-based toolset to get a spreadsheet made to track all of these attributes.

Basic information.	Quality and performance.	Opportunities and decisions.
• Asset title • Link to live file • Link to source document • Asset format • Description • Journey stage • Asset objective • Target audience • What questions does it answer?	• Previous performance • Brand guidelines met? • Clear CTA? • Current information? • Questions answered relevant to this audience? • Effort level to update	• Updates needed • Possible derivative content • Decision

Get the Google Sheets workbook containing all the templates in this kit.

COPY TEMPLATE

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THE CONTENT JOURNEY MAP TEMPLATE

Mapping content to the customer journey.

Finally the fun part! Knowing your audience's key questions makes it easy to lay out content across your campaign. It also makes their unanswered questions really stand out.

Rather than just slotting your content into journey stages, refer back to your Conversation Arc to see what questions you need to address in each stage. Then, plot the assets you identified as usable against them, indicating whether each asset addresses each question.

Plotting your content along the journey helps you assign the right content to your activations. It also helps you see what's missing and be much more precise in your recommendations to fill the gaps. And, when content is tightly aligned with the journey, what content your audience consumes can give you a better understanding of where they're at.

> **PROTIP: If someone asked you a question, you wouldn't just respond with silence, would you? Take the same approach in your content conversation. Make sure your audience can always easily and quickly find the next piece of content for their journey. Better yet, nudge things along by actively serving them that content via email, retargeting and website personalization.**

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The Content Journey Map template.

Use this template to assign specific content to specific points in your buyer journey. Get granular—call out which buyer questions your assets answer. This will help you identify the gaps in coverage to see what content you still need to produce.

Pre-awareness (pre-funnel)			
Questions	Are there other ways to do this?	How will attribution improve?	What are the costs of not changing?
Blog: Not all event capture is equal	×		
Blog: Why you aren't getting sales-ready event leads		×	×
Blog: Reframing event performance		×	×
Asset 4			
Becoming aware (top of funnel)			
Questions	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
Asset 1 (title + link)			
Asset 2			
Asset 3			
Asset 4			
Learning and evaluating (middle of funnel)			
Questions	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
Asset 1 (title + link)			
Asset 2			
Asset 3			
Asset 4			
Deciding (bottom of funnel)			
Questions	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
Asset 1 (title + link)			
Asset 2			
Asset 3			
Asset 4			

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THE CONTENT PLAN TEMPLATE

Pulling it all together.

You uncovered some really great content that would be more effective in a different format—and some key gaps.

Don't worry. Your content plan will help you keep track of all the assets you've plotted for the campaign—whether they already exist or need to be created.

Make sure to copy the important details from this planning sheet to your creative briefs to ensure updated and new assets support the outcomes you want.

It doesn't matter whether you're planning a small ABM nurture campaign or a complex full-funnel strategy. A content plan ensures you have clearly defined goals for each asset.

It's the nerve center of your campaign, enabling you to keep tabs on the interlocks between your assets, your goals and your audience.

> **PROTIP: Your content plan is not the same as your content calendar. A content plan is for planning and tracking each asset in a given campaign. The goal is to have a single location where you can check asset status, details, place in the campaign and performance at a glance. A content calendar, on the other hand, is for planning and tracking the production and activation of your assets. This includes scheduling, promotions, buildout plans and more.**

Resources for content creation.

Content assets 101 – Is it an ebook, a report, or a guide?

How to make your AI copy sound more like you.

Steal this MOFU content strategy.

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The Content Plan template.

Use this template to keep track of all of the content for your program. You'll want to customize the attribute columns for your organization. Download our companion Google Sheets-based toolset to get a pre-made spreadsheet with the attributes we use most already set up.

- Asset title
- Link to source document
- Status
- Publication date
- Link to live file
- Asset format
- Description
- Funnel stage
- Asset objective
- Target audience
- Buying group role
- What questions does it answer?
- Channels
- KPIs
- Keywords
- CTA
- Tags

Creating content that converts.

72% of B2B buyers report sharing content with relevant team members. Here's what they were most likely to share:

60%

assets packed with shareable stats and quick-hitting insights

58%

a strong story that resonates with the buying committee

Source: Demand Gen Report

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3 Steps to solidify your content marketing strategy.

Planning content for your campaigns is three quarters of the work. Here are three final steps to ensure your planning translates into the outcomes you want.

1

Make sure your content creation team understands your content strategy.

Share your completed toolkit to give them visibility into the process. And include key information such as format type, journey stage, audience info, questions to answer and KPIs in the creative brief for each individual asset.

Empower your sales team to use your content library as effectively as possible.

2

Consider creating a simple playbook that breaks down what key questions you've identified, the assets that address each and even some example scenarios in which they might share given content with prospects.

3

Assess what is and isn't working on a regular cadence.

When the data starts coming in, keep an eye out for the difference between asset-level and campaign-level performance. If you're not hitting your goals, you may need to adjust a given asset, or you may need to replace it.

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Take the next step toward creating more effective content marketing campaigns.



Get expert tips for creating B2B content that converts.

WATCH WEBINAR



Fill your middle of the funnel content strategy fast with these four timeless assets.

STEAL THIS STRATEGY



Find out what it's like to work with us on your content marketing strategy.

LET'S TALK!

IRON HORSE

Iron Horse is a growth marketing agency focused on B2B enterprise and emerging growth companies. We're dataheads, creative thinkers and go-to-market experts with a collective passion for creating audience-centric programs that deliver the outcomes you want. Discover how at **www.ironhorse.io**.

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