

Eight Simple Steps to Developing a Content Map

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About The Author

As an experienced journalist and public relations professional, **Elizabeth Hockerman** has written a broad spectrum of content, from blogs, video scripts and web copy, to investigative articles and white papers. She has spent more than 15 years in the business to business (B2B) communications world working with numerous companies across manufacturing, technology, agriculture, construction, retail and professional services industries.

Elizabeth now leads the content creation division at Gravity Marketing in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Aimed at being easy and affordable, clients receive monthly articles, ePublications, white papers and case studies written for their target audiences by Gravity's team of vetted journalists. Elizabeth can be reached at 414-376-6500, extension 215, or at ehockerman@gravitym.com.



Introduction

It is clear that in a digital marketing world, content is king. Web copy, articles, videos, ad campaigns and the like are in many cases replacing face-to-face conversations with prospects and customers. Regularly posting educational, trend-based and insightful information on your website not only demonstrates to your audiences that you understand their business needs, it also helps your website rank higher in search engine results.

The challenge is this: quality content does not come without a significant investment in time. Whether companies are utilizing internal or external resources, without a standardized routine, even the most well-intentioned content marketing program can fall by the wayside – and in this digital world, brand awareness falls along with it.

At Gravity Content, we use content maps to reduce these inefficiencies by:

- Focusing your content mission and realm of expertise
- Housing a list of article topics to share this expertise in a way that is most timely and relevant to your audiences
- Determining a schedule to plan, create and distribute content
- Establishing a standardized, repeatable process for publishing quality content

In the following pages you'll find step-by-step considerations for bringing focus and structure to your content marketing efforts.

Every organization has inherent value...it's why the organization exists. Content defines this value. And, when given away in bits of pieces free-of-charge, you can position yourself as an industry authority – and the obvious choice.

Guiding Principles of Content Creation

Colorful language and clever analogies will only get you so far in the pursuit of a meaningful exchange with your target audiences. For an effective content marketing program, you need to think more Washington Post and less "Mad Men."

Content needs to provide information of value (and depth) as opposed to a self-promotional (and limited) sales pitch. When brainstorming potential article topics, consider the factors that help you as a reader determine that an article is educational, a resource is credible or an expert is quotable. When writing, keep these journalistic practices in mind to make your stories truly stand out.

- 1. Write for your audience.** The more complex the product offering, the more time you need to take to make sure you are focused on the value your solution brings to the audience, and not the technical aspects of how it is made.
- 2. Stand in their shoes.** Take the previous idea one step further by thinking about the challenges your target audiences are facing, and the questions they frequently ask your company. Demonstrate that you understand what they are going through by creating content topics about them, not about you.
- 3. Contribute to a conversation.** Search engines only care about one thing – providing relevant content to the terms entered in the search box. Because of this, they are drawn to timely content related to a news story or trend. Contribute to the conversation by providing your expert opinion or big picture thinking via your blog or newsletter.
- 4. Localize the story.** This can take many forms, from providing a local take on a nationally trending topic, to featuring your customer experiences as proof points in a technical overview. The more the audience can directly relate or learn from your content, the more frequently they will use you as a resource.
- 5. Give credit where credit is due.** Familiarize yourself with the type of content you want to deliver to your audiences by finding examples of great work. Did you stumble upon an infographic that would be a perfect visual for your blog post? A statistic that drives your point home in a white paper? Don't be shy to share it, along with a link back to the source's website.
- 6. Fact check.** The fastest way to lose credibility is to provide unreliable information. We've all been fooled by too-good-to-be-true photographs or news headlines. It is worth the due diligence to confirm the information you are spreading is in fact accurate and from an authoritative site.

With this foundation, you are ready to start creating your content map. Use the sample content map on Page 6 as a template as you work through the exercise. Once you develop the content map, you may have trouble committing time to writing. Let the journalists at Gravity Content do the work for you.

Learn more at <http://www.gravitym.com/marketing-services/content-marketing>

Step 1 – Define Your Objective

An overall objective will focus both your development of a content map and the execution of a content marketing program. As succinctly as possible (no more than one sentence), describe:

- Why are you developing this content?
- Who should it matter to?
- What will make it matter to them?

Example

Provide engaging content that helps our target audiences: discover or solve a problem, answer questions they are researching, and/or become more educated in our industry.

The objective of your content map should align with the business case for your content marketing program.

Step 2 – Clearly Define Your Audiences

Yes, "audiences" is supposed to be plural.

Websites attract three types of audiences, each with their own distinct needs. Cater to each audience directly through the content topic and where it is placed on your website.

- 1. Early** – Multiple times per day, people land on your site when researching a topic through a search engine. These people may have never heard of your company before and are often overlooked during the website development process. Feature content on your home page, blog and ePublication to help them form an opinion about your company and your industry expertise.
- 2. Considering** – This group of people is familiar with your industry or the solutions you provide, but needs to be able to vet your reputation and conduct some cost/benefit comparisons with your competitors. Offer information on product or service pages that helps them do this.
- 3. Existing** – Existing customers may refer to your site when looking to contact you, download resources or research additional products for purchase. It is important to keep this audience updated on tips, company changes, product launches and customer successes.

TIP : Set goals to ensure you are accomplishing your objective. Internal goals could relate to efficiency and quality, and external goals could measure qualified lead generation.

Step 3 – Determine the Questions Your Audiences Are Asking

You don't need to hire a search engine optimization (SEO) consultant or subscribe to an analytics software program to know what your online audiences are asking — although these can be valuable resources. Consider some of these free tools, then make a list of between five and 10 questions each of your three audiences are most likely asking. This exercise is the first step in determining the most relevant and effective content topics that your company can share with its prospects and customers.

Manual Search

Put yourself in the shoes of your target audiences and start entering terms and questions into your search engine of choice.

- Does your website appear on the first two pages of the search results? You have done a great job providing content in this topic area!
- Do you have this information on your website, but it does not appear on the first two pages of the search results? Compare your content with the sites that did appear in the search results and determine what you could add to improve the quality of your content. For example, do competitors offer more detailed information, creative presentations or external links?
- Don't have this type of information on your website? Add your search terms as a question your audience is asking, and as a potential topic to address.

Internal Audit

For some audiences, the same questions are being asked in person as they are online. Poll your sales team to determine the most common questions they are asked at each stage of the buying process. And while you have their attention, ask them for their top selling points that resonate with prospects.

Web Tools

Web resources such as Google Ads Keyword Planner, Soovle and SEM Rush can provide you with more insight into common and trending topics linked to the keywords you use to describe your company and products.

Step 4 – Identify Subject Matter Experts

Great content is only as good, memorable or valuable as the information and advice it provides. So, in many cases, the quality of content is dependent on the knowledge the subject matter expert is willing to share. Create a list of go-to subject matter experts at your company who can provide the opinion, facts, resources or general background information you will need in order to develop high quality content.

Step 5 – Identify Company Differentiators

What makes your company different than your competitors? Do you provide solutions in a unique way? Is your customer service unmatched? Does your quality of work speak for itself? Write down the reasons why a prospect should choose you, and why customers continue to work with you, and use these statements as proof points.

TIP : Ideal subject matter experts are those who a reporter would want to interview, others learn the ropes from, and/or have many years of industry experience.

Step 6 – Create a List of Potential Article Topics

Brainstorm a list of 20 potential article topics keeping these items in mind:

- Guiding Principles of Content Creation
- Questions your target audiences are asking
- Specialties of your subject matter experts
- Your company differentiators

It is OK if the ideas come across as similar in nature. Yet the ideas by thinking about:

- If it would appeal to an early, considering or existing audience
- Resources needed
- Key messages
- Amount of valuable insight you can share

Now, sort the topics into potential blog posts, website copy, newsletter articles, case studies or white papers.

Step 7 – Commit to a Deliverable Schedule

Blog and social media posts aren't the only content outputs that require scheduling. All outreach is most effective when it is delivered at the same time every day, week or month, and when your audience is most likely available to consume it. Understand the typical calendar year for your target audience – the busy seasons, the budget planning and approval months, the down periods. This will help you determine the appropriate timing and content topics for your schedule.

When developing a schedule, consider all of the steps that need to be accounted for in a content production process.

1. **Tasks** – Write out the entire process, including the people who will need time to review and approve the content at various stages.
2. **Estimates** – Estimate the amount of hours needed to complete each task.
3. **Length of Cycle** – Calculate the entire production cycle by determining the publish date, and then working backward through the task list, giving each task a reasonable turnaround time.
4. **Tracking** – During the production process, adjust the timeline as needed to ensure all parties stay on track.

Step 8 – Execute, Measure and Improve

Congratulations! Your content map is complete! Now you can start writing and publishing in a structured and timely manner. Follow these maintenance tips to keep momentum and efficiency high:

- Regularly analyze the efficiency of the process to see if adjustments need to be made to accommodate schedules and overall content quality.
- Regularly measure audience engagement with your published pieces. Are there some that are read more than others? Some that result in more inquiries? What do those pieces have in common that the others do not?
- Moving forward, adjust topics, writing style, medium, and so on to ensure you are creating the most relevant content for your audiences, and the most effective content for the growth of your business.

| **TIP :** A website that is regularly updated with fresh, relevant information will be favored by search engines.

XYZ Company Food Processing Equipment Industry

OBJECTIVE OF CONTENT DEVELOPMENT		
Provide engaging content that helps our target audiences: discover or solve a problem, answer questions they are researching, and/or educates them more about the food processing equipment industry.		
TARGET AUDIENCES		
Early Researching processing equipment basics.		Considering Evaluating the benefits of ownership.
Existing Focused on maintenance long term care.		
QUESTIONS AUDIENCES ARE ASKING		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Early:</i> What is food processing equipment? How do I know what equipment I need? What are best practices for using food processing equipment? What are the overall benefits of processing automation, and why is it important? <i>Considering:</i> What features should I look for in food processing equipment? Do I buy new or refurbished? How would I go about adding equipment to my facility? What is the total cost of ownership and/or return on investment? How do I choose the right machine for my business? Am I ready to expand my production line? <i>Existing:</i> How can I best service my food processing equipment? How do I train my employees? How do I troubleshoot challenges I am having? What are some best practices or tips and tricks for extending the life of my equipment? 		
SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS		
Name	Expert Subjects	Email/Phone
Paul	Sales	
Sean	Technology/Engineering	
Rachel	Product Development	
COMPANY SUCCESSES/DIFFERENTIATORS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patented technology Design, construction and installation service Dedicated approach to delivering excellent customer service Locations across the country Technician training and certification program 		



SAMPLE CONTENT MAP

CONTENT TOPICS			
DELIVERABLE SCHEDULE			
Month	Deliverable	Month	Deliverable
July	Article – Overview of the different types of food processing equipment	November	Article – Tips for choosing the right food grade lubrication
August	Article – Estimating the cost/benefits of new and refurbished equipment	December	Article – Benefits of testing products at manufacturer R&D facilities
September	Article – 5 keys to extending the life of your food processing equipment	December	White Paper – Maximizing revenue by minimizing costly downtime
September	White Paper – How to evaluate the cost of expanding your production line	January	Article – Start the year off right with these 10 annual service updates
October	Article – Why XYZ technology is changing the way food is processed	February	Article - How customer XYZ saved \$100,000 a year

Company Name

Industry

OBJECTIVES OF CONTENT DEVELOPMENT																					
TARGET AUDIENCES																					
 <pre> graph LR A[Early Prospects] --> B[Considering] B --> C[Existing Customers] </pre>																					
THEMES/TYPES OF ARTICLES																					
SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS																					
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Name</th> <th>Expert Subjects</th> <th>Email/Phone</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Name	Expert Subjects	Email/Phone																		
Name	Expert Subjects	Email/Phone																			
COMPANY DIFFERENTIATORS																					



CONTENT MAP

CONTENT TOPICS	
CONTENT SCHEDULE	
January	
February	
March	
April	
May	
June	
July	
August	
September	
October	
November	
December	