



# Content Marketing Strategy

A Check List for Today's Marketing Needs

Create. Learn. Know More.

# Content Marketing Strategy

## A Check List for Today's Marketing Needs

Hart Consulting Services is a retail consulting firm for the graphic communications industry. We work in close partnership with custom media product manufacturers, retail brands and graphic communication firms to build new relationships, shape the conversation and drive influence In-Store.

Our suite of services include: lead generation, brand creative, campaign and strategy development, content and message development In-Store, broad-based marketing communications, onsite training, thought leadership and seminar.

A dark, smooth, rounded stone, possibly a river stone or a piece of volcanic rock, is positioned in the lower right foreground. It has a fine, pebbled texture and a deep charcoal or dark blue-grey color. The stone sits on a light-colored, fine-grained sand surface. In the background, several concentric, wavy ripples in the sand create a sense of depth and movement, receding towards the horizon. The lighting is soft and even, highlighting the textures of both the stone and the sand.

**Be  
Invited  
to  
Experience  
The  
Content  
Marketing  
Enlightenment**



# Content Marketing Has Exploded

**THAT'S GOOD BECAUSE YOU'VE FINALLY GOT A WAY AROUND THOSE ANNOYING BARRIERS THAT BUYERS TEND TO ERECT WHEN THEY SENSE OLD-SCHOOL MARKETING.**

But it's bad because it means you're competing against a tidal wave of shiny new content from competitors, analysts, thought leaders, bloggers and wannabes.

**Bottom line:** good content isn't enough any more. You need insanely great content that's on-strategy and incites action. And you need to deliver it in a consistent, ongoing program. To do that, you need to step back a little and think about what you're trying to accomplish and who you're trying to motivate.

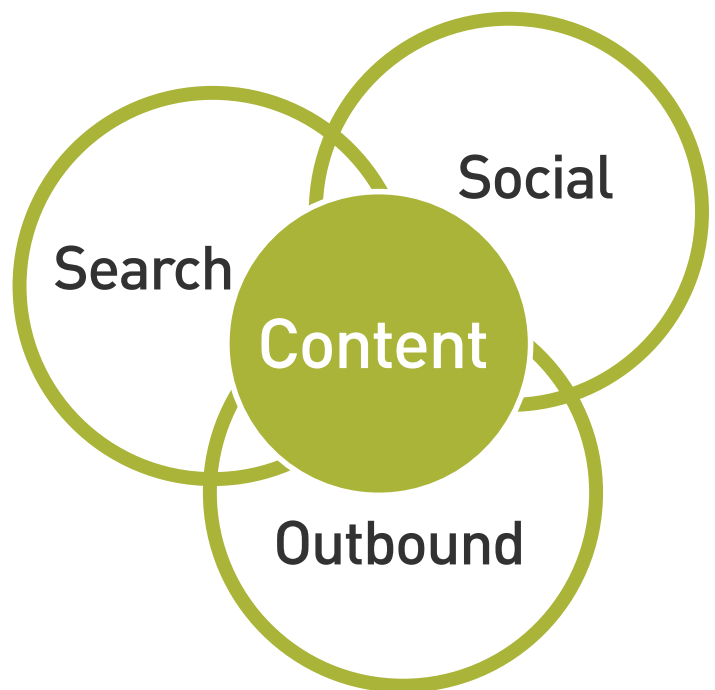
This is the era of **Content Strategy**, and it will separate the pros from the amateurs.

# Why Content is So Critical.

## CONTENT IS SO CRITICAL

**because people care about their own problems much more than they care about your products.**

When you capture your company's expertise and package it up to help your prospects do their jobs, you earn people's attention instead of simply assuming you'll get it. Content also fuels the three most important weapons in the B2B marketing arsenal:



### Search

If you don't work on your keywords, you won't get the traffic. Great content propels you up the search rankings.

### Social

Content gives you something to bring to the social party. You don't want to engage empty-handed, do you?

### Outbound

It may be out of fashion but outbound is about to make a comeback. Content gives you an offer for your outbound calls-to-action, driving up response rates.

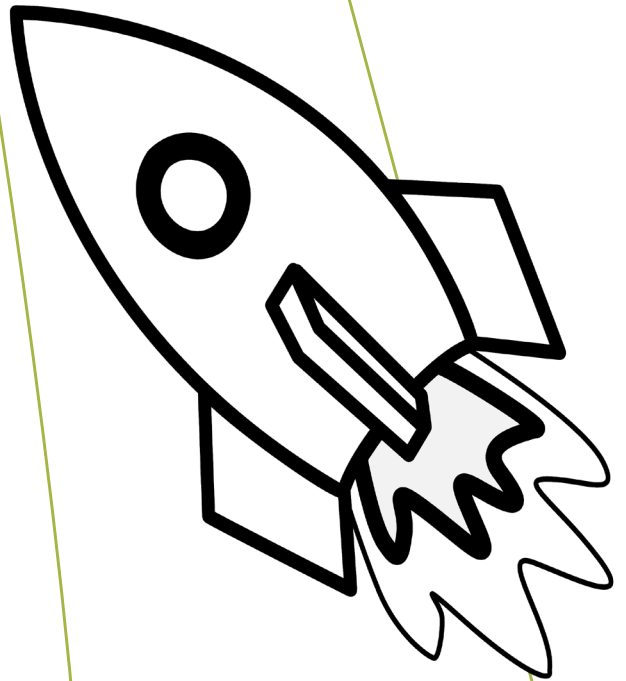
In short, content is what makes the **B2B** world go round. If you're not getting good at content, prepare to lose market share.

# B2B

## HERE'S A CHECKLIST TO HELP.

The first part of the checklist is designed to help you hone your content marketing strategy and building the foundation of an ongoing content marketing program. The second part should help you attack your very next piece.

You may need to do this exercise for each product line or one for each region or whatever. But these are the kinds of questions you'll need to answer if you want your content marketing to go faster than a speeding bullet and leap over tall buildings in a single bound (or a series of carefully nurtured smaller bounds).



# PART1 - The Big Picture



Think About Your  
Whole Content  
Marketing Program

# PART1 - *Goals*

## START BIG AND WORK YOUR WAY DOWN:

- ☐ Capture what the business wants to achieve in the next 6-12 months.

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- ☐ Write down what marketing needs to achieve in the next 6-12 months.

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**Think about** what you'd need to change to make these goals happen – and aim high. This isn't just about business as usual.

**Prioritize** the most important things content can do for you, including:

- ☐ Building awareness
- ☐ Educating buyers
- ☐ Moving leads along the purchase path (nurturing)
- ☐ Engaging with all influencers serving existing customers
- ☐ Cross-selling or up-selling
- ☐ Generating new sales leads
- ☐ Establishing your expertise

**For Each Goal You Choose, Identify The Metrics You'll Track.**



Get buy-in on these. Everything depends on clear goals that everyone agrees on – and build them into your analytics!





# Target Audiences

## SUMMARIZE EACH BUYER PERSONA

IN A FEW BULLET POINTS AND PRIORITIZE:

Persona 1

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Persona 3

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Persona 2

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Persona 4

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Persona 5

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We like to use short, visual personas that include psychographics not just demographics.

**For the B2B Content Marketing Strategy Checklist, target persona #1 is:**

John Smith 46

CMO of a fast-growing \$100m graphic imaging company

Ambitious, confident & forward thinking

A big believer in the power of connecting online

His results from static campaigns are flattening out

# Target Buying Stages

**EACH PIECE OF CONTENT SHOULD CAUSE  
A PROSPECT TO MOVE TO THE NEXT  
STAGE OF THE BUYING JOURNEY.**

Fill in your top personas and use AIDA or whatever buying stages you prefer:

	Awareness	Interest	Desire	Action
Persona 1	_____	_____	_____	_____
Persona 2	_____	_____	_____	_____
Persona 3	_____	_____	_____	_____
Persona 4	_____	_____	_____	_____
Persona 5	_____	_____	_____	_____

Some pieces of content can serve in several different cells. But you do need a sense of progression – so you encourage people to move along your funnel. That's what lead nurturing is all about.

**It can be helpful to list the questions that buyers have in each stage of the buying process. Then develop content that answers the questions appropriate to the stage you're targeting.**

# Target Buying Stages

**ANOTHER WAY TO TARGET CONTENT**  
IS TO THINK ABOUT THE EVENTS WITHIN  
THE TARGET COMPANY THAT MIGHT  
TRIGGER INTEREST IN YOUR SOLUTIONS

Personas					
Trigger 1					
Trigger 2					
Trigger 3					
Trigger 4					
Trigger 5					

**Does each trigger have some way of signaling itself?**  
**How can you know when a prospect experiences one?**

**A trigger event may be: A B2B company  
just hired a new CMO**

.....  
The prospect just had a content marketing  
success and wants more.  
.....

How are these two triggers signaled?  
We could look for news of major marketing  
job moves. But it's mainly through search  
and social.

# Target Buying Stages

**THE BEST CONTENT** COMES FROM  
A VERY SPECIFIC, CLEARLY DELINEATED  
SPHERE OF EXPERTISE.

This is the zone where you have the most authority.  
It's where no one has a better claim on expertise  
than you do. **Write yours in a sentence:**



**Our Sweet Spot is...**

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**Your sweet spot mixed with your customer's pain points  
is where the truly valuable stories are.**

# Content Audit

**FEW COMPANIES START WITH NO CONTENT.** IT'S IMPORTANT TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU HAVE SO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR GAPS ARE.

	Existing Content	Persona(s)	Buying Stage	Notes
1.	_____	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____
7.	_____	_____	_____	_____
8.	_____	_____	_____	_____
9.	_____	_____	_____	_____
10.	_____	_____	_____	_____

**Include everything that can be used or re-purposed:**  
blog posts, ebooks, sales decks, videos, archived webinars, etc.



# Themes

**THEMES ARE WIDER IN SCOPE THAN SPECIFIC TOPICS. THEY REPRESENT A WHOLE AREA YOU WANT TO START 'OWNING'. DECIDE ON YOUR CONTENT SUCCESS CRITERIA AND SCORE EACH THEME AGAINST THEM.**

Kind of like this (in priority order):

Criterion:	1	2	3	4
Theme:				
1	_____	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____	_____
4	_____	_____	_____	_____
5	_____	_____	_____	_____

We always include 'in our sweet spot' as one of these criteria. Also things like 'likelihood to be shared' and 'hot topic'.

# SEO Key Phrases

IT'S GOOD TO DECIDE ON YOUR SEO  
KEYPHRASES BEFORE YOU PICK A TOPIC  
– BUT IT'S CRITICAL TO DO SO BEFORE  
YOU START WRITING.

Key Phrase	1	2	3	4
Topic:				
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

Don't forget: long tail terms can deliver  
the best returns in B2B.

# EXAMPLE

**MAP YOUR PATH TO SUCCESS /**  
**SCHEDULING YOUR CAMPAIGNING**  
**IS CRITICAL TO MANAGING YOUR**  
**MESSAGE & MARKETING FREQUENCY.**

Market/Vertical	Content Form	Delivery Method	Content Theme	Persona of Target Market	SEO Key Phrases	Date of Launch	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June
Vertical A							1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	e blast						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	white paper						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	case study						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	webinar						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	video						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	adwords						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	e book						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	presentation						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	nurturing content						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	newsletter						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	blog						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
Vertical B							1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	e blast						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	white paper						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	case study						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	webinar						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	video						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	adwords						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	e book						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	presentation						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	nurturing content						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	newsletter						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	blog						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
Vertical c							1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	e blast						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	white paper						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	case study						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	webinar						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	video						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	adwords						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	e book						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	presentation						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	nurturing content						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	newsletter						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
	blog						1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

## PART 1 Summary

# The Big Picture

Your Content Marketing Program is 39 times more likely to succeed if you start by being clear about the things we just discussed.

But it's not enough to have clarity about goals, personas and buying stages...you also must have buy-in from the whole team.

**This up front investment WILL pay dividends.**

## PART 2

**Now  
Focus  
On Your  
Next Piece**



# Topics

**FOR EACH CELL IN YOUR PERSONA /  
BUYING-STAGE MATRIX, YOU NEED  
TO GENERATE TOPIC IDEAS.**

Just as in the 'themes' section above,  
decide on your content success criteria  
and score each topic against them:

Criterion:	1	2	3	4
Theme:				
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

**A topic is a theme with a spin and a compelling title.  
It's where you get specific.**

# Media

## YOU'VE GOT A TOPIC.

### NOW WHAT MEDIUM IS BEST FOR IT?

Prioritize according to things like the size and scope of the topic, the need to gate behind a download form, shareability, etc.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blog post            | <input type="checkbox"/> Survey or contest |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guest post           | <input type="checkbox"/> Print             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> eBook                | <input type="checkbox"/> Article           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White paper          | <input type="checkbox"/> Live event        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> eNewsletter          | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Checklist            | _____                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interview            | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Customer             | _____                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3rd party expert     | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In-house expert      | _____                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Video                |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interview/Chalk talk |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Demo/Documentary     |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Webinar              |  |

**It's good to keep a mix of different media – it's a lot more interesting than a library of 19 white papers.**

# Information Sources

## **GREAT CONTENT IS AUTHORITATIVE.**

Your choice of format will influence where you source your information.

☐ In-house experts (list):

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☐ Customers:

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☐ Known sites & resources:

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☐ Existing internal content:

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☐ Existing external content:

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☐ Desk research (Google, Twitter, Social forums...)

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☐ Original research

☐ Commission an expert

You don't have to consult all these sources before getting started. Once you feel you've nailed the topic, you can keep researching to validate your ideas but you might as well start writing your outline.

For this checklist, 'content marketing strategy' is clearly the driving keyphrase – but we're also interested in ranking for B2B 'content marketing' and a few others.

# Tone & Style

**YOU'VE PROBABLY GOT A TARGET TONE  
OF VOICE OR 'LOOK & FEEL' IN YOUR MIND.**

Share it with the writers and designers who will be creating the content:

□ Copy style guide pieces  
(stuff that kind of sounds like):

[illegible]

□ Design guide pieces  
(stuff that kind of looks like):

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

**You don't want to tie the hands of your creatives – just give them a sense of where you're aiming.**

# Get Going!

You've Got Great  
Content!

**Now Get Out  
There. Put it to  
Use. Connect  
and Measure its  
Impact.**



# Campaigns

**THINKING ABOUT THIS BEFORE YOU CREATE THE CONTENT CAN HELP YOU SPIN IT FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT. BUT IT'S GOOD AS A POST-CREATION CHECKLIST TOO:**

## **Your Own Channels**

- ☐ Your blog
- ☐ Your e-newsletter
- ☐ Your website real estate
- ☐ White papers
- ☐ Email footer

## **Paid Media**

- ☐ Banner ads
- ☐ Newsletters & sponsorships
- ☐ Webinars
- ☐ Ad Words
- ☐ Direct mail & print media

## **Social Media**

- ☐ LinkedIn – including relevant groups
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Pinterest
- ☐ Vimeo

# Lead Nurturing

**ON EVERYONE WHO DOWNLOADS AN EBOOK.  
YOU NEED TO BE SCIENTIFIC ABOUT IT.**

Using lead nurturing will allow you to use your content where it belongs in a prospect's 'journey' (instead of just throwing it at everyone who's in your database today).

So a new prospect who might sign up for your newsletter next January may get your new piece of content first – to them, it's brand new! Nurturing does many good things for you but extending the life of your best content is a biggie.

## **Lead Nurturing Checklist for Marketing**

- ☐ Meet with sales to define a sales-ready lead
- ☐ Decide how to score leads according to fit and behavior
- ☐ Set up your marketing automation platform\* for salesforce integration
- ☐ Map your content to stages in the buyer's journey
- ☐ Design a content flow for each new prospect segment
- ☐ Send inbound prospects into your new nurture stream through automation

**\* What, you don't have a marketing automation and lead nurturing platform?**

**Well... Go get one.**

# Measuring & Testing

**WORK OUT WHAT SUCCESS REALLY  
MEANS FOR YOU AND MEASURE IT.**

- ☐ Make sure all URLs are tagged
- ☐ Set up test landing pages, campaigns, etc
- ☐ Set up goals and custom reports in your analytics
- ☐ Set up advanced segments  
(to track each channel and campaign)
- ☐ Optimize to ramp up what works  
(and kill what doesn't)
- ☐ Report on campaign ROI

The best content marketers tend to live inside Google Analytics (or their chosen tool). You don't have to master it yourself (go on, it's fun) but you do need someone on your team to master it.

# Learning

**THE BEST CONTENT MARKETING ORGANIZATIONS HAVE LEARNING CULTURES. IT'S IMPORTANT TO EXPLICITLY CAPTURE WHAT HAS WORKED, WHAT HASN'T, AND WHY YOU THINK IT'S TRUE.**

- ☐ Identify success factors and capture them
- ☐ Identify what failed
- ☐ Gather evidence to support conclusions
- ☐ Share with the widest team possible, regularly

Regular, informal meetings to share what you've learned – and hear what others have learned – is a great way to start to embed this learning in your marketing. They make the whole process more fun, too.

## 5 Parting Principles to Keep You on Track

1. **START WITH WHAT YOUR PROSPECTS NEED TO KNOW.**  
Not what you need to say.
2. **STICK TO YOUR SWEET SPOT.**  
Where your company is an undisputed expert.
3. **HAVE REAL IDEAS AND WRITE WITH PASSION.**  
Confidence is the most powerful force in marketing – and a bit of attitude and energy go a long, long way.
4. **LESS CAN BE MUCH MORE.**  
Fewer major pieces of real value beat a firehose of lightweight stuff. You're building a content brand here: you need to be famous for excellent content that's worth people's time.
5. **LIVE BY THE NUMBERS.**  
There's no excuse for flying blind anymore. Analytics is to digital marketing as air and water are to the human body.





# HCS. Evaluating the Road Ahead.

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