7 Experts on Using the Content Lifecycle to Maximize Content ROI

How to Focus Only on the Things That Matter and Stop Wasting Time
INTRODUCTION

Using the Content Lifecycle to Maximize Content ROI

There’s nothing easy about building high-performance marketing content. Unfortunately, hard work does not always make good, impactful content. Many marketing teams work long hours to churn out volumes of perfectly mediocre content, and worst of all, they have no real idea how their content affects the audience or helps the business.

Building high-performance content depends on consistently generating high-value ideas, planning well and budgeting, managing an efficient and creative workflow, making sure the content reaches the right audiences at the right times, and measuring its performance. Sounds like a perfect world, right? Yet many do this consistently, and they do it well.

With the generous support of Aprimo, we decided to dig into the secrets of successful content marketing. We asked seven experts questions about how they manage each stage of the content lifecycle: ideate, plan, budget, create, distribute, and analyze. This eBook organizes their responses into chapters corresponding to these stages of the lifecycle.

It’s clear that at the end of the day, successful content marketers know what their content is worth and how much it should cost. They also know how to optimize and distribute it to maximize their return and how to measure its audience and business impact.

I for one found their insights refreshing and a good reminder that the cost of mediocre content far outweighs the extra investment needed to get the most out of your content lifecycle.

Regards,

David Rogelberg
Publisher, Mighty Guides, Inc.
Managing content has become increasingly complex across an explosion of new consumer channels. But it’s also become increasingly essential as consumers place more importance on customer experiences than ever before.

Accenture found that two-thirds of consumers are more likely to make a purchase from a retailer that sends them relevant and personalized promotions, and remembers their previous purchases. And conversely, a PwC study found that nearly 1 in 3 consumers will walk away from a brand they love after just one bad experience.

Delivering content that resonates, however, requires a lot of behind-the-scenes work, including:

- Ideation
- Planning
- Budgeting
- Creation
- Distribution
- Analysis

But without maximizing the time you spend on each of these stages of the content lifecycle, your enterprise can’t be sure its content is going to produce the ROI you desire.

In this book, 7 content experts weigh in on strategies and solutions for optimizing each stage of the content lifecycle. They will share insights and takeaways to help your enterprise overcome challenges to ensure you create the content you need for impactful customer experiences.

Regards,

Ed Breault
Vice President, Head of Marketing, Aprimo
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Building high-performance marketing content depends on consistently generating high-value content ideas. However, coming up with good ideas is not always so easy, and doing it consistently over time is even more difficult. Ideation is often the least understood part of the entire content development process. We looked at the ideation phase of content development by asking our experts the following question:

“How do you create and prioritize the strongest content ideas?”

Several key takeaways came out of these discussions:

1) Don’t worry about and get boxed in by format at this stage. Focus on content first.

2) Let people be free to ideate in their own way. Give it time, don’t force them to collaborate, and remove distractions.

3) Measure success by testing ideas or testing content after it’s in the market. Here’s what the experts had to say about creating and prioritizing content...
“To effectively ideate, sometimes a creative team must give itself time to share ideas with no expectation of output.”

Marketing communications professionals are classically taught to think about form before content. You need a brochure, a blog, or an email. Great! Now let’s fill that full of content. But the greatest success in the ideation stage comes from reversing that process. There are so many channels and so many formats the content can take that it’s really important to begin with the content. That means beginning with the story and its value. When you start structuring and telling that story, the form becomes clearer. This approach releases you from being caught in the constraints of the form. Channel and format come later in the planning stage.

Ideation is not always efficient. To ideate effectively, sometimes a creative team must give itself time to share ideas with no expectation of output. Organizations rarely encourage content teams to think about all the new and cool and interesting content they could create unimpeded by an output requirement. If you can develop the practice of giving yourself and the team time to brainstorm, with no expectation of being efficient, you actually become more efficient. Allowing ourselves to be creative and invest in time where there is no expected efficiency enables us to schedule things that are designed to be executed in an efficient manner.
It’s important to recognize that not all ideation is or should be collaborative.

Content begins with an idea, and the best place to start creating ideas is with an objective. If you don’t know what you are trying to accomplish, you have no basis for creating ideas or knowing which ideas are most valuable.

Once you know the objective, the challenge is coming up with creative, inspired ideas. There’s a tendency for marketers to get in a room and brainstorm, but too often what’s produced is the same ideas—not much that’s new, interesting, or innovative. What they miss is true inspiration in their ideation.

Not all ideation is or should be collaborative; it needs to be balanced. Often in a group situation, people who are extroverted or have strong personalities tend to dominate. What’s missing, then, is input from those who take more time and think more carefully. People who take longer to formulate ideas are not thinking less creatively. Great ideas often need time to set and marinate. Instead of
brainstorming, it’s more like slow-storming and the ability to really think things through and look at opportunities that might be tangential to what comes immediately to mind.

Also, don’t box ideas in with format too early in the process. When you immediately jump to format, you miss the bigger story, and with that bigger story comes more creativity. As soon as you start boxing it into a format, you are judging whether or not something is right or wrong based on form rather than content. Marketers often do this because they are tactically oriented.

The best inspiration for great ideas, whether it’s marketing, products, or business models, comes from everyday life. It comes from outside of a person’s industry and outside of their normal habits. Good ideas come from being able to look at the world from a different point of view, connecting that back to the organization, and applying that inspiration to the work you do.

Ultimately, the team members are doing a good job of ideation if they are delivering a quantity of ideas that are relevant to the objective they need to accomplish. When the team members are getting it, they’re coming up with more good ideas more often.
An early convert to the ways of Agile marketing, Andrea Fryrear is now the world’s leading expert on translating Agile principles and practices for marketing. She holds numerous Agile certifications, including Certified Professional in Agile Coaching (ICP-ACC) and Certified Agile Leader (CAL-1). She is also a sought-after speaker who shares her findings (and failures) from stages around the world.

Andrea Fryrear, President and Lead Trainer, AgileSherpas

“The effectiveness of your ideation process manifests itself in performance metrics that tell how the content affects the audience and how it moves them.”

When it comes to ideation, creative people need space to be creative and to come up with those great ideas. You can’t have people just living from deadline to deadline or putting out fires all day long. They need relief from unnecessary meetings and freedom from repetitive data collection and analysis so they can get into a room together and explore ideas. They need permission to see this creative activity as work. Seeing it as work is an important starting point in building an effective ideation process.

The entire downstream content creation process is streamlined when the right people get together at the beginning, during this ideation phase, so everyone has that shared understanding of what the idea is and how it’s going to be realized. That can minimize unnecessary iterations once the work actually begins.

Early audience feedback can also help with ideation. This involves taking an idea that may not be fully fleshed out and testing a version of it to see how the audience responds. This is helpful because some ideas that sound really good in the brainstorming meeting turn out to be total duds. Figuring that out early gives everyone the opportunity to actually iterate and build on the original idea. You might be putting a lot of stuff out there, and you feel successful because you’re spinning the wheels, but you may not actually be seeing impact.
“Successful ideation is not just a productive brainstorming meeting. It is an ongoing process that steadily delivers valuable ideas over time.”

A successful ideation process should deliver a steady stream of good ideas that are focused on and relate to the target audience. Successful ideation is not just a productive brainstorming meeting. It is an ongoing process that steadily delivers valuable ideas over time.

Getting people into a room together can be a good way to stimulate ideas, but that approach will not result in equal participation from everyone. Such meetings can be made more productive by asking people in advance to think about something. Even people unable to attend the meeting may contribute something worthwhile. Also, it’s important to recognize that ideation is not just about volume. Someone may have only one idea, but that one topic might be highly valuable. Therefore, do not put quotas on the ideation process, but do try to keep it focused on the right types of ideas along the way.

What are the right types of ideas? That depends on your audience and what actions you want from them. The best content is rooted in a strong understanding of who your audience is, what they care about, and what stage of their journey you are engaging. Good content creates new insight that helps your audience understand something they haven’t thought about before.
“An important part of successful ideation is looking at your own successes.”

A strong content idea is not strong just because you think it is. Good, strong ideas need to prove themselves. That is why an ideation process needs to generate ideas but also consider factors like the performance of similar ideas. This involves looking at similar stories and performance analytics around those to see what can be learned, how that relates to what you are trying to do, and how you can improve on it.

You can also develop ideas around keywords that you know perform well with your target audience. These might be 10 or 20 keywords provided by a client, or solid performing keywords based on research and performance metrics. You can also combine the keyword strategy with research on related content pieces to determine what ideas have the best chance of performing well.

Of course, not every idea will take off and become viral. If you are getting good traffic on some pieces, that’s fine, but you want to watch for those few pieces that really outperform the others. Then you can look at those to see why they took off and where the traffic came from. An important part of successful ideation is looking at your own successes, going back to the team to evaluate what performed well, understanding why it was successful, and developing additional ideas around that. It’s also good to have all hands on deck for that part of the ideation process.

Shane Barker is a digital-marketing consultant who specializes in influencer marketing, product launches, sales funnels, targeted traffic, and website conversions. He has consulted with Fortune 500 companies, influencers with digital products, and a number of A-List celebrities.
KEY POINTS

Don’t worry about and get boxed in by format at this stage. Focus on content first.

- Status Quo: Content marketers are classically taught to think about form before content. This is a mistake.
- Cost of Status Quo: If you box ideas in with format too early in the process, you miss the bigger story. You can produce lots of content and spin the wheels, but you’re not seeing impact.
- New Approach: A creative team needs time to share ideas with no expectation of efficiency or output. The best inspiration for great ideas comes from everyday life.

Let people be free to ideate in their own way. Give it time, don’t force them to collaborate, and remove distractions.

- Status Quo: A semi-random group of people show up at an ad-hoc brainstorming meeting without specific business objectives or goals.
- Cost of Status Quo: Quicker thinking, more gregarious personalities dominate the process, leaving out those who process more slowly or think more deeply. This shortchanges the ideation process.
- New Approach: Not all ideation is collaborative or done in a group setting. Set out business objectives, and give it time. Doing this actually makes the team more efficient. It enables the team to ideate things that can then be created and executed efficiently.

Measure success by testing ideas or testing content after it is in the market.

- Status Quo: Too often ideas are chosen in brainstorming sessions without external validation.
- Cost of Status Quo: You feel successful building lots of “great” content that fails to perform, forcing you to churn out even more ideas more quickly.
- New Approach: Good ideation is about outcome, not output. Look at business goals and previous performance successes, and test incomplete ideas to get early audience feedback.
Aprimo Scores a Hat Trick with MRM, DAM, and TCMA

Forrester Research, Inc., has named Aprimo a leader in three separate marketing technology evaluations!

Most recently, Forrester called our Marketing Productivity solution a leader in Marketing Resource Management in The Forrester Wave™: Marketing Resource Management, Q3 2018 because of its “comprehensive, yet modular, MRM solution portfolio.” Download the report [here](#).

Also, according to The Forrester Wave™: Digital Asset Management For Customer Experience, Q2 2018, Aprimo DAM “has outstanding marketing support with robust native and integrated functionality in the areas of content performance analytics, content marketing, and marketing resource management.” Download a copy of the report [here](#).

Additionally, Aprimo Distributed Marketing was recognized as a leader in The Forrester Wave™: Through-Channel Marketing Automation, Q2 2018 and received high ratings for its “channel and community management, control, and its flexibility across different types of partners.” Request the report [here](#).
Ideation produces ideas and stories, but the planning stage is really the first step to turning those ideas into content assets. Planning is a critical stage in the content lifecycle because poor planning can undermine all subsequent phases of the cycle. To find out what needs to be in a good content plan, we asked the following question:

**How can you create a better, more agile content plan, and what would you gain as a result?**

In answering this question, several key themes became apparent:

1) Have a schedule, but don’t rush the process and default to format too early in the process;

2) Agree on what to measure for success as part of your planning;

3) Build flexibility into the plan. Here’s what the experts had to say...
Carla Johnson is a world-renowned storyteller, an entertaining speaker, and a prolific author. Consistently named one of the top influencers in B2B, and digital and content marketing, she regularly challenges conventional thinking. The author of eight books, Johnson travels the world teaching anyone (and everyone) how to cultivate idea-driven teams that breed unstoppable creativity and game-changing innovation.

“Planning involves thinking about what you want to accomplish before you make decisions about format. You first have to really understand what audience you are targeting and what you want them to do.”

A plan enables you to select the best ideas that serve the objective and provide focus on those best ideas. Without the focus that a plan provides, people’s attention becomes scattered, which causes work to progress more slowly. By choosing one, two, or at most three of the best ideas and focusing on those for a short period of time to execute them really well, you can be more agile in making necessary adjustments as you go through the process. In an agile process, you create and adjust, create and adjust, create and adjust. That process often results in something very different from where it started, but it’s a much better final product.

Planning also involves thinking more about format, which requires really understanding what audience you are targeting and what you want them to do. Again, this goes back to your original objectives. There’s a linear decision process about getting to format, but many marketers jump to the format before they understand what they’re trying to accomplish. Once they understand audiences and
audience priorities, that dictates format. Defaulting to format too early in the process results in teams doing what they’ve always done because that’s what they know.

Another important part of planning is deciding what to measure to determine if the content is working. There are many things you can measure. The metrics you select depend on what part of the funnel and customer journey that content is targeting. As you think about what you are measuring, you also need to maintain that agile mindset of creating and adjusting.

If you expect everything to always be perfect, you’ll never take creative risks. You can try little, really creative things, and if they fail right out of the box, you can adjust. You can’t know if something is done well unless you test things. If you only execute what you know is done properly, you create mediocre work.

Unfortunately, 70% of all content that’s created for sales is never even used. A big part of that is because marketers default to the formats they’ve always used. Developing inspired content that serves the objectives requires spending more time up front getting the ideas and planning right. Doing that ensures the content you do create is better quality and someone will actually use it.
Robert Rose is the author of three best-selling books on content marketing. As founder of The Content Advisory, the consulting and education group of The Content Marketing Institute, Rose has worked with more than 500 companies over the past five years, including global brands such as Capital One, NASA, McCormick Spices, Hewlett Packard, Microsoft, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Robert Rose, Chief Troublemaker, The Content Advisory

“When you come out of the planning process, you should have a bill of materials for assets that are going to be produced and budgeted.”

Planning should be a content needs alignment process. For many companies to do that well, they need to de-silo their content planning. The content lifecycle in most organizations is siloed in groups such as corporate communications, demand generation, brand marketing, email marketing, and website, and there may be different groups covering these functions in different regions. These operations are typically siloed, which means they do planning in their own silos. It isn’t until the creation stage that they realize they’ve re-created the same content four times.

De-siloing needs to be part of the planning stage. It requires introducing information sharing, transparency, and insight into what everybody’s doing in a rolled-up fashion so that the planning process also becomes an alignment process. That is how you avoid creating multiple iterations of content items.

Some organizations are concerned this will slow down the process because you’re actually suggesting more meetings to get everyone aligned. Yes, this does slow down the planning process, but every
step that follows is exponentially faster. It’s the classic measure twice and cut once. Planning is where you figure out channels, outputs, and formats. You’re going to do an interview with a customer? Fantastic! Let’s get a camera crew and audio crew there and schedule 10 minutes with a photographer. Let’s make sure the writer is there and ask about the case study. Let’s make sure everybody’s objectives around that idea are met so that we reduce the duplicated effort later on.

By the time you reach the planning stage, you know the story you want to tell. The de-siloed planning process specifies how you are going to tell the story, and when you come out of that planning process, you should have a bill of materials for assets that are going to be produced and budgeted. When you go into the budgeting process, you’re not budgeting for random acts of content. You’re budgeting for larger tent pole projects that are going to live in multiple places.

"De-siloing... does slow down the planning process, but every step that follows is exponentially faster. It’s the classic measure twice and cut once."
An early convert to the ways of Agile marketing, Andrea Fryrear is now the world’s leading expert on translating Agile principles and practices for marketing. She holds numerous Agile certifications, including Certified Professional in Agile Coaching (ICP-ACC) and Certified Agile Leader (CAL-1). She is also a sought-after speaker who shares her findings (and failures) from stages around the world.

Andrea Fryrear, President and Lead Trainer, AgileSherpas

“Agile teams plan more frequently than traditional teams. They’re just creating shorter, more lightweight and flexible plans.”

There’s often a misconception that agility and planning are antithetical. But in fact, agile teams plan more frequently than traditional teams. They’re just creating shorter, more lightweight and flexible plans that are designed to respond to an iterative inspect and adapt process. When planning for agility, you’re really looking for a minimum viable campaign. What’s the smallest slice that you can put out that still provides you the outcomes you’re looking for as a marketing team but also delivers value to your audience? You need to put out the minimum that hits those targets and then see what happens. See what the audience response data tells you. Then you can build on the things that are successful. This way you learn faster with less risk, and there are opportunities to double down on the things that are really working well.

This not only enables building on success but gives you the flexibility to adapt to changing marketing needs. For example, some product feature you didn’t expect may turn out to be everyone’s favorite, and that’s the big selling point. You need to be able to pivot and change your messaging around that.
The worst case scenario is a massive, big-bang campaign that is ridiculed on social media or on the late-night talk shows. The teams kept it all to themselves. After spending 6 or 12 months making this massive campaign, they put it out with a big fanfare, and it turned out to be a massive miscalculation. It becomes a huge cost to the brand, plus the actual financial costs that went into a campaign that was an utter disaster. It’s painfully quantifiable.

Agile planning reduces that risk. However, it must also include what you are going to measure. How are you going to know that this is something worth investing more time and resources in? How do you know what to abandon because it’s a failed experiment? When you’re setting up a new project, include key metrics in the project plan. What are you measuring, and what are you expecting? What are the pivot or persevere triggers that you need to watch?

“Agile planning reduces that risk. However, it must also include what you are going to measure.”
“Making sure everyone agrees on project objectives and the KPIs you will use to measure them is essential in the planning phase.”

One key function of a plan is to make sure everyone on your team and the client’s team has the same understanding of what’s being delivered and what they expect to get from it.

The planning phase needs to settle essential questions: What are you looking for? What are the overall goals? You need to look at those objectives and make sure they’re reasonable, that everyone has proper expectation around them.

You don’t want to be in a situation when you are in downstream phases of executing the plan that you are not meeting expectations because the client’s goals were unrealistic.

Related to that is another critical part of the plan: defining the KPIs you are using to measure its performance. And these KPIs must align with the client expectations.
For example, if you as the content company say you’re working toward getting more brand mentions and more people talking about the client online, and the client expects are expecting the campaign will deliver more sales, there’s a possible disconnect.

These kinds of disconnects are not uncommon in influencer marketing. When the campaign wraps up, the content group looks at one thing and thinks it was a success only to find the client was looking at something else completely and decides the whole project was a failure and a waste of money.

Making sure everyone agrees on project objectives and the KPIs you will use to measure them is essential in the planning phase. Then you have all the pieces of the puzzle you need to develop the initial content pieces and make assessments and adjustments as you go.

“Making sure everyone agrees on project objectives and the KPIs you will use to measure them is essential in the planning phase.”
“The plan should allow for making sure you get the most out of your content development efforts.”

There are three really important parts of the planning phase:

1. **Building a realistic schedule:** It’s important to have a calendar and move it forward. Otherwise, you risk never getting to the publishing stage. The operational schedule specifies the time required to develop and deliver content items. An important influence on schedule is the approval process. Every additional person slows down the process, so you must account for this when planning schedules. Some approval processes are more complex than others, depending on the industry and its regulatory environment. The goal is to minimize the approval process.

2. **Defining performance metrics:** The plan must include performance metrics for published content. Many people want to see content campaigns turn into dollars as soon as the content hits, but that’s not how content marketing works. Initially you want to know if the content is being viewed, and page views are a good indicator of that. That metric is less important in a
Christoph Trappe, Chief Content Officer, Stamats Communications, Inc.

deep assessment of campaign performance, but it tells you quickly if content is reaching people. Time spent with content is also useful, especially in a lead generation campaign. The important thing to remember about performance metrics is that content requires time to gain traction. You need to give it time to ramp up. There are ways to accelerate this ramp-up time, such as through syndication, but that means additional expense.

3. **Planning to maximize your return on effort:** The plan should allow for making sure you get the most out of your content development efforts. For example, if a filmed interview can be turned into a YouTube video and related articles, blog posts, and other pieces, this enables you to gain more content performance from the original interview effort. A content plan should consider maximizing return on effort.

“Every additional person slows down the process, so you must account for this when planning schedules... The goal is to minimize the approval process.”
KEY POINTS

- **Have a schedule, but don’t rush the process and default to format too early in the process.**
  - Status Quo: Planning is too time consuming, so content teams rush to the creation phase. They default to format too early in the process.
  - Cost of Status Quo: Content creators create what they’ve always done because that’s what they know. Content is misaligned with performance expectations and fails to deliver on KPIs.
  - New Approach: Slow down the planning process and make sure there is cross-team and cross-silo involvement. This takes longer, but every step that follows is exponentially faster. It’s the classic measure twice and cut once.

- **Planning includes agreeing on what to measure for success.**
  - Status Quo: Planning fails to define metrics and KPIs that align to content and business goals.
  - Cost of Status Quo: Later in the content cycle, there is a lack of insight into how content is performing and why, which limits one’s ability to make smart decisions about plan adjustments.
  - New Approach: During the planning phase, make sure everyone agrees on project objectives and specific KPIs you will use to measure them.

- **Build flexibility into the plan.**
  - Status Quo: Organizations invest in huge monolithic campaigns that take a long time to build and are slow in delivering measurable results.
  - Cost of Status Quo: Failure of large, inflexible plans hurts business and damages the brand.
  - New Approach: Take an agile approach to content planning. Agile teams plan more frequently. They create shorter, more lightweight, and flexible plans that are designed to respond to an iterative inspect-and-adapt process. Plan for a minimum viable campaign.
A good content plan is the foundation for a content budgeting process, but there are many things to consider when building and allocating budgets. These include what the plan is going to do for you and how you can adjust spending to meet changing needs. We explored the budgeting process in greater detail by asking our experts the following question:

**What are the best ways to develop a budget that maximizes ROI?**

In discussions of the budgeting process, several key ideas became clear:

1) It’s important to know the worth of your content;

2) You need to clearly understand your content objectives and what you expect to get from them;

3) You need to be willing and able to pull funding from things that aren’t working and move it to things that are. Here’s what the experts had to say...
“Working back from impact enables you to think not only about how much something costs, but also what it is worth.”

A proper budget will be built relative to expected outcome. When you are thinking about your content marketing strategy overall, you have to map what you’re doing in content to the revenue impact that content is going to have. Working back from impact enables you to think not only about how much something costs, but also what it is worth. Determining what it is worth also relates to an appropriate budget allocation. You’re not necessarily determining what channels you will be using at this point, but you are deciding what you’re willing to spend to achieve an outcome.

Working back from expected outcomes in this way is a good approach to creating a content budget, not only for deciding what you need in the way of budget, but also because it helps justify the spend to a manager or CFO.

Then as the plan moves forward, you have metrics that can help you see if you are achieving the outcomes you are looking for. It can be difficult to measure content effectiveness because most content is not a direct response in which you see immediate
action. Identifying influence and attribution to specific content is also difficult. However, if you understand what that next step should be to move an audience toward the outcome you are looking for, you can measure that.

Measurement is an important part of budget allocation adjustments as you execute your plan. If you see that something is working, you need to have the flexibility to double down on it. You should be asking yourself how much more you can do to sustain those results.

On the other side of the equation, you also have to be willing to look at things that aren’t working and pull the plug. Any good manager or CFO will want to see responsibility on both sides of the spending equation. There’s an opportunity cost to not cutting budget on things that are failing. There’s also an opportunity cost to not increasing funding on things that are working and can scale.
“Your budget depends on what you already have and your priorities for what you want to accomplish.”

When developing a budget and working to maximize your return, you first have to understand your objectives. Are you looking to generate brand or product awareness? Do you want people to subscribe to your content? Are you seeking conversions, or working to improve retention? You must understand your objectives and then allocate budget that way. Look at what kind of content you have, and determine if it serves those objectives. Look at where you need to fill holes to make sure you’re creating an experience across the entire customer journey. Your budget depends on what you already have and your priorities for what you want to accomplish.

Then as the program moves forward, focus your spend on things that are working. Sometimes that is a difficult decision for marketers. Sometimes programs just need more time to gain traction. You can’t start a content marketing program and expect to see something in the first few months. There are areas where you need to invest...
and understand that up front. If you’ve invested or if things consistently fail to deliver, you do need to adjust your spend.

Determining if something is working goes back to your objectives, where you are in the customer journey, and what you want to have happen. Initial engagement indicators are not always a sign of overall performance. Still, they can be early indicators that build up to important results like conversions and pointers to quality lead generation. If you wait until you get six months down the road for the important metrics to kick in, you may end up wasting a lot of time and money. You want to optimize your spend. Keep in mind that part of the return goes beyond performance metrics. It’s also the learning you gain that can help you build successful subsequent content.

“Determining if something is working goes all the way back to your objectives.”
Andrew Davis is a best-selling author and keynote speaker. He has built and sold a digital marketing agency, produced for NBC, and worked for The Muppets. Today, he teaches business leaders how to grow their businesses, transform their cities, and leave their legacy.

One problem most marketers face when it comes to budgeting is the willingness to stop the things that aren’t working and reallocate that budget in a timely way to things that might work better.

A large part of budgeting involves deciding how to divide up the marketing budget pie. For many organizations, the marketing pie isn’t getting much bigger. It’s just being sliced more and more ways. Content marketers can’t always expect to get more money from somewhere else. They have to be willing to look at the content, formats and channels, media, and bought advertising, and they need to reallocate budgets toward things that will be more effective.

This also applies to budgeting time. If you’re sending out an email newsletter every week that takes you 10 hours to produce but you’re not generating revenue from it, maybe you should stop doing a newsletter and reallocate that time toward content that might be more effective.

One problem most marketers face when it comes to budgeting is the willingness to stop the things that aren’t working and reallocate that budget in a timely way to things that might work better. You need to be flexible enough to evaluate those things and be willing to reallocate budgets in a way that makes more sense.
Robert Rose is the author of three best-selling books on content marketing. As founder of The Content Advisory, the consulting and education group of The Content Marketing Institute, Rose has worked with more than 500 companies over the past five years, including global brands such as Capital One, NASA, McCormick Spices, Hewlett Packard, Microsoft, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Robert Rose, Chief Troublemaker, The Content Advisory

“More and more companies are building greater flexibility into the budgeting systems where content teams become ‘owned media’ teams.”

Good planning makes it possible to budget content as a portfolio of assets. You can also build separate creation and production budgets, which gives you flexibility in creating different form factors from the same core content assets.

This is where that de-siloed planning process really pays off. It gives you transparency and insight into content consistency and cost optimization. You can move away from the practice of every group hiring its own agency to create its own materials (some of which may be redundant). De-siloed planning allows you to reduce the number of agencies or outside and internal resources involved in the creation process. It also gives you greater consistency and insight into costing. You will be able to better see which agencies excel in different parts of the content lifecycle, including creative and production, transforming content to different formats, putting it into different languages, distributing it, and managing it.

Every company budgets in its own way. For instance, traditionally promotional budgets have been owned by the brand team or media team, and if a content group wanted to promote a piece, they had to beg funds from one of these other teams. More and more, though, companies are building greater flexibility into the budgeting systems where content teams become “owned media” teams. This gives content teams that are running owned media properties more agility in the way they respond quickly to market needs and timely event.
KEY POINTS

■ **It’s important to know the worth of your content.**

  - **Status Quo:** Most marketers do not know what a piece of content is worth in terms of its actual outcome value to the business.
  
  - **Cost of Status Quo:** Not knowing what content is worth makes content budgeting pure guesswork.
  
  - **New Approach:** Working back from impact enables you to think not only about how much something costs, but also what it is worth. You are able to decide what to spend to achieve an outcome.

■ **You need to clearly understand your content objectives and what you expect to get from them.**

  - **Status Quo:** Many market plans fail to set clear, measurable objectives for content.
  
  - **Cost of Status Quo:** Without measurable objectives, it is not possible to attach value to those objectives. This results in budgets that provide little guidance on what is an appropriate spend for a specific content piece or project.
  
  - **New Approach:** Budget to outcomes. Mapping content to the revenue impact that content will have enables accurate budgeting.

■ **You need to be willing and able to pull funding from things that aren’t working and move it to things that are.**

  - **Status Quo:** Most marketers develop inflexible budgets that make it difficult to stop things that aren’t working and reallocate budget in a timely time way to things that will work better.
  
  - **Cost of Status Quo:** Inflexible budgets result in increased opportunity cost. There’s an opportunity cost to not cutting off budget on things that aren’t working. There’s also an opportunity cost to not increasing funding on things that are working and can scale.
  
  - **New Approach:** Build budgets based on outcome value. This gives marketing the flexibility to make informed decisions to adjust spend in ways that improve content performance.
With ideas, a content plan, and a budget, you are ready to create. But the creative process is often plagued by bottlenecks, uneven delivery, and the production of content that delivers disappointing results. What’s the problem? To find out, we asked our experts the following question:

**How do you manage your team to avoid bottlenecks and mistakes and eliminate costly delays and duplication?**

Several themes emerged in discussions about the creation process:

1) Too often teams jump from idea to create without adequate planning, which can result in churn in the creation process;

2) Leveraging technology can help use content assets more efficiently and reduce duplicate efforts;

3) If you understand success metrics, you can use them to inform the creation process.
Robert Rose is the author of three best-selling books on content marketing. As founder of The Content Advisory, the consulting and education group of The Content Marketing Institute, Rose has worked with more than 500 companies over the past five years, including global brands such as Capital One, NASA, McCormick Spices, Hewlett Packard, Microsoft, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

“\nA good indicator that your process is working well is the amount of content produced based on plan versus ad hoc requests.\n”

Robert Rose, Chief Troublemaker, The Content Advisory

The ideal approach to content development is to begin with ideation and then plan, budget, and create. But what often happens is a process something like this: create, plan, ideate, budget, and analyze. One can easily see how this happens. It typically begins with a content group being asked to create something, and in many organizations, the content team is viewed as an on-demand vending machine for content. When they get a request, they find a plan to fit that request, and then they ideate ways to put content into that plan. Then it’s all the content they can fit into the plan that makes the budget. It is like a backward assembly line that often churns out mediocre content.

The ideal process of ideation before planning, budgeting, and creation makes for a much better creative process. It becomes a process in which you are creating something that has been ideated well, planned out properly, budgeted appropriately, and is ready for you to put the creative effort you need to deliver a quality product. A good indicator that your process is working well is the amount of content produced based on plan versus ad hoc requests. If only 20%
of your output is based on plan and the rest is coming from ad hoc requests, you are not working efficiently. On the other hand, if 80% of your output is plan output, you’re doing pretty well.

There is often a lot of collaboration and review that has to happen during the create phase. Any technology that communicates the hard lines in the sand of ideation, planning, and budgeting to others involved in the creation phase keeps the creative phase focused and enables more flexibility around creative options within those hard guidelines.

Technology alone does not guarantee success through this kind of communication and collaboration. People have to comply and work together to make the process work properly. That doesn’t happen because of technology; the technology is effective because of the people.

Part of having an effective process is having someone responsible for the overall effort. Someone steering this process correctly is an important success factor.
“You can’t effectively deal with a bottleneck if you don’t have the workflow visualized so that you know where it really is.”

When you reach the create phase, it’s impossible to eliminate bottlenecks completely. The theory of constraints tells us that every system is going to have at least one bottleneck, and there’s nothing you can do about it. That’s why visibility is so crucial at this point in the cycle. You need to be able to see where the bottleneck is and then optimize the rest of the system around it. Too often organizations see a process that seems to be getting stuck in one general area, so they throw more people or more money at it. But that’s actually not going to give them the process optimization they’re looking for. You can’t effectively deal with a bottleneck if you don’t have the workflow visualized so that you know where it really is.

Visibility into the creative workflow and output also helps avoid duplicate efforts. An agile process can help with this through sprint review meetings where everyone shows and tells what they did over the past few weeks. You can attend those meetings with other teams to see what they are doing. If you see something that is 80% of what you’ve been trying to do, you can build on that. A formalized process can avoid duplication of work and save time. It also helps to have a central repository like a digital...
asset management system. Review meetings in which everyone sees all the great work other teams are doing fall flat if it’s hard to get your hands on those materials. If you become frustrated spending a lot of time looking for something, you might easily decide just to make it yourself, even if it takes longer. A centralized repository improves efficiency and avoids duplication.

The ultimate goal of an efficient, smoothly running creative process is that you can maintain a predictable, sustainable pace of quality output. You don’t want people working all the time and getting burned out to the point of being unproductive or quitting. This damages your process in the long run. It goes back to process visualization and being able to see a smooth workflow from ideation out to publication and analysis. You should not have most of the workflow stuck in one phase at any point in time. You must watch the process and continuously optimize it.
Andrew Davis is a best-selling author and keynote speaker. He has built and sold a digital marketing agency, produced for NBC, and worked for The Muppets. Today, he teaches business leaders how to grow their businesses, transform their cities, and leave their legacy.

“A successful creative process releases content that is timely and that delivers on audience objectives.”

Andrew Davis, Keynote Speaker and Best-Selling Author, Monumental Shift

A successful creative process releases content that is timely and that delivers on audience objectives, whether that’s driving traffic, generating leads, or meeting other marketing objectives. If deadlines are being missed or the content contains mistakes, it’s time to regroup and figure out what the real issues are. The content you’re creating must actually add value to the business. The cost of bad content can sometimes be difficult to pin down. The content might be driving traffic, but it may turn out to be the wrong kind of traffic, or low-quality traffic that never converts. These kinds of performance metrics provide valuable feedback that strengthens the creative process.
“The creative team needs to review both its failures and its successes and learn from them.”

To be successful, the creative process must deliver good content on schedule. Numerous technologies can minimize the bottlenecks that are part of the creative workflow. It’s important not to get bogged down with technology to the point at which using it slows you down. Consider cost versus the value technology delivers to your process. The right technology can set individual deadlines and enforce them through automated reminders, which can make the entire creative cycle flow more smoothly.

Another way to streamline the creative workflow is to use strategies that optimize time utilization. For example, companies that want to leverage their internal experts in a content marketing strategy should never allow those experts to write their own content. It will take them a long time to produce one piece, and that piece most likely will not be well written. A better use of everyone’s time is to have a content marketing specialist interview the expert and write up the piece. This uses less of the expert’s time and generates better written content, and it’s likely you can repurpose the interview material into multiple content items.
Christoph Trappe, Chief Content Officer, Stamats Communications, Inc.

The creative process also needs to reliably deliver good content. Deciding what is “good” ultimately comes back to measuring the effectiveness of the content, and that depends on metrics related to the content objectives. You may find that only a small percentage of your content would be considered outstanding in the way it is picked up and read or viewed. This may be because of something unique about how that content was created and just the luck of being in the right place at the right time. The creative team needs to review both its failures and its successes and learn from them.
“Sometimes bottlenecks arise because people focus on their own siloed goals at the expense of larger campaign or business goals.”

A key part of streamlining the creation process is cross-team collaboration. The reality is that different groups such as digital, social, and content work in their own silos. Sometimes bottlenecks arise because people focus on their own siloed goals at the expense of larger campaign or business goals. Representatives from these different groups need to develop a shared understanding of the overall plan you’re trying to accomplish across the marketing organization. That ability to have cross-silo, cross-functional team collaboration and conversations is important. If everybody understands what the bigger priority is, they understand how they need to manage their own requests and bring the bigger goal into their group.

Technology can give people line of sight into progress and show where things are getting stuck, and with whom. That visibility can help you make adjustments to the team or process. For instance, if there’s a subject matter
expert approver who’s committed to another project, even though the person understands the importance of your project, there are only so many hours in the day. How do we adjust to ensure that everything continues to move forward?

This technology can also indicate that a team or process is not working well. For instance, if it takes longer than it should to create content, or if there are more revision cycles than should be the case, something in the process is not working. It could be that the goal was not clearly understood or that early groundwork around ideation and planning were not well executed. Sometimes people rush through these stages so they can get started on creating the content. If you front-load your time so that everyone understands audience objectives and the plan for achieving them, everything else that happens after that is clearer, more efficient, and more cost-effective.

“Visibility can help you make adjustments to the team or process.”
KEY POINTS

- Too often teams jump from idea to create without adequate planning. This can result in churn in the creation process.
  - **Status Quo:** Content teams get a request, find a plan that fits, and ideate ways to put content into that plan; their budget is driven by all the content they can fit into the plan. This process is backward.
  - **Cost of Status Quo:** Content teams work all the time, getting burned out to the point of being unproductive, all to churn out as much mediocre content as possible.
  - **New Approach:** Begin with ideas, build a detailed plan, and build an outcome value budget before starting creation. This makes the create process more efficient and the content more successful.

- Leveraging technology can use content assets more efficiently and reduce duplicate efforts.
  - **Status Quo:** Many content teams are unaware of or unable to find existing content assets, so they re-create them.
  - **Cost of Status Quo:** This results in expensive duplication of creative effort and message drift.
  - **New Approach:** Creative processes need to leverage technology that provides access to existing content assets wherever they exist in the organization, and that provides visibility into cross-team and cross-silo creative efforts.

- Understand success metrics, and use them to inform the creation process.
  - **Status Quo:** Planning fails to define content KPIs, or creative teams don’t understand them.
  - **Cost of Status Quo:** Content teams don’t receive audience feedback, which causes them to continue to produce mediocre content.
  - **New Approach:** Performance KPIs need to be defined in the planning phase, creative teams need to understand what they are and design content with those performance objectives in mind, and actual performance data needs to come back to the creative team so they can make informed adjustments to content assets.
Creating great content can be a wasted effort if it is poorly distributed. The content fails to find its intended audience, it lands at the wrong time, and it fails to fulfill its business goals, which can be a costly failure. We explored how organizations can ensure their content is distributed better by asking our experts the following question:

**What are the best ways to ensure that your content is delivered to the right places at the right times?**

In discussing content distribution, several themes emerged:

1) The importance of using keywords to manage search optimization;

2) Determining the right channels for reaching the target audience with your content;

3) Being able to evaluate if those who are engaging with your content are the people you want to reach. Here’s what the experts had to say.
Effective distribution comes down to understanding your target audience. Who are they? Where, how, and when do they access content? What kinds of content are they consuming? A C-level executive is probably not going to read a 20-page white paper. If you take a white paper, eliminate all the copy, and just leave in the graphics, the visuals, and the captions, you have something that a C-level might actually flip through. Content distribution isn’t just how many impressions you get or how many emails you send out to promote. Distribution relates back to the audience, what they care about, and what they’re willing to do.

Search optimization is important, but there is a difference between enabling people to find your content and aggressively putting it in front of their eyes. There are ways you can use keywords and tag content to have it be more discoverable and to increase its ranking. But content marketing today has a higher bar: if you feel bad interrupting your prospects to put the content in front of them, the content isn’t good enough. You should be creating content that your prospects might be willing to pay for. It’s not just the content that is valuable enough to use to interrupt your target audience.
audience. You need to go from being interruptive to being irresistible with your content. When people see your content in their inbox, they should be excited to open it.

Digital asset management technology plays an important role in optimizing your distribution strategy. Part of it is getting the right message in front of the right prospect at the right time. A digital asset management solution ensures that content goes out at the right times to support all the different points of evidence and triggered events and buying signals that need to happen. Lots of if-then statements can happen on the back end to make that possible.

If you think about the currency of marketing today, it’s not about having bigger lists or having more people fill out forms. It’s about sustained attention. If you can get and keep the attention of your prospects, you’ve found gold. Not every prospect is going to be ready to buy right away. But when they are ready to buy and ready to engage, you want to have that warm conversation already underway.

Not getting distribution right is an opportunity cost. If you know the economics of your funnel, you can reverse-engineer the opportunity costs of missing someone. So for every one of our target prospects that doesn’t engage with this content, we just lost $40, so you could do the backward math on that. And maybe that opportunity cost translates into a potential $4,000 sale down the line. Now you can decide if it’s worth spending a small percentage of that $4,000 to more aggressively try to get your audience to engage with the content. It helps you see the cost of missed opportunity, but it also helps you decide whether to throw more money at the problem or cut your losses.
“Some channels and communities perform better than others for the same content, and you want to go for the most exposure to the right kind of audience.”

Distribution of content is a big piece of the puzzle that many people miss. They just created this great product they’re going to put it out there, and they think the whole world’s going to love it. But if nobody sees it, who cares?

There are many strategies for getting your content in front of the right audience. One involves keywords and indexing. Content today needs a keyword strategy to strengthen search performance and sharing.

This includes researching keywords, monitoring performance, and sticking with keywords that generate more traffic. These can be specific to the topic or channel. You also need to check your competitors to see how their pages are performing and make adjustments to improve your standing relative to them. It really comes down to competition.

Another area that is important to distribution includes channels and communities. Some channels and communities perform better than others for the same content, and you want to go for the most exposure to the right kind of audience.
Shane Barker, Digital Strategist & Influencer Marketing Consultant, Shane Barker Consulting

You can also develop your own communities. There is great value in having communities that you own. You can pitch your content to other communities or Facebook and LinkedIn, but rules limit what you can do.

When you can have your own communities in LinkedIn, Facebook, Quora, Slack, and others, you own those communities, which gives you more control over the content you offer. It also enables you to build a more valuable target audience that delivers the right kind of traffic.

Having 10,000 of the right people is better than having half a million people coming to your site but only 1% being of interest to you.

The effectiveness of these strategies depends on testing. Once you see something that really works, that’s where you want to spend more time.
An early convert to the ways of Agile marketing, Andrea Fryrear is now the world’s leading expert on translating Agile principles and practices for marketing. She holds numerous Agile certifications, including Certified Professional in Agile Coaching (ICP-ACC) and Certified Agile Leader (CAL-1). She is also a sought-after speaker who shares her findings (and failures) from stages around the world.

Andrea Fryrear, President and Lead Trainer, AgileSherpas

“Successful distribution comes back to the planning phase and knowing who the content is for and how they want to consume it.”

Failure to effectively get content in front of the right audiences at the right times is like screaming into the void. You’re making a lot of stuff, but it’s not helping anybody, and it’s not doing what you need it to do. You may be seeing a lot of leads, but none of them convert. You may be reaching a lot of people, but they’re not the right people.

Successful distribution comes back to the planning phase and knowing who the content is for and how they want to consume it. Audiences now have high expectations about receiving information that is personally relevant to where they are in the buying journey and optimized for the channels where they prefer consuming it. The old fire hose approach of putting everything out on every channel just doesn’t work anymore.

For example, effective content marketing often employs user stories. Doing that well requires content creators to think about who they’re targeting and what that person’s going to be able to do after they consume a particular piece of content. The key idea is who you are serving with this piece of content and what benefit they are actually going to derive from it.
Andrea Fryrear, President and Lead Trainer, AgileSherpas

Then the content needs to be optimized, tagged, and indexed so that it reaches the target audience. This is where a centralized content repository, such as a digital asset management system, becomes incredibly valuable. When it comes time to access persona A at stage four of the buying journey, you can quickly access content already targeted to those people. You have content collected that’s been designed for particular channels and media.

Effective distribution also requires looking at data to determine if it is being consumed and if it is having an effect. For example, if the content is about how to bake a cake, you might expect the target audience to go out and buy ingredients needed to bake a cake. You need to know what your content is empowering people to do, and ideally there’s a capability for tracking that behavior.
Andrew Davis is a best-selling author and keynote speaker. He has built and sold a digital marketing agency, produced for NBC, and worked for The Muppets. Today, he teaches business leaders how to grow their businesses, transform their cities, and leave their legacy.

Andrew Davis, Keynote Speaker and Best-Selling Author, Monumental Shift

“Most people who are successful with content distribution and promotion focus more on where they are delivering it and less on when.”

When distributing content, keep in mind that every channel has its own half-life. For example, if you post something on LinkedIn, it takes all week for that content to be consumed by most of the people who will ever see it. On Twitter that might happen in 15 seconds.

One big mistake marketers make when distributing content is the everywhere approach: they get it out there on every social platform and buy ads for a day or a week, and its useful life is brief. Most people who are successful with content distribution and promotion focus more on where they are delivering it and less on when. They might start by emailing the content to customers and clients. Then they wait and watch how it’s consumed, and they make sure it’s valuable and that it works for the people they know. Then they do one social channel at a time. They might buy ads only when they see momentum on social media. And then finally they do PR.

In the “release everywhere” model, you’re maximizing exposure for a brief period of time. Somebody might see a tweet in the
morning, a post on Facebook in the afternoon, and a LinkedIn post later the same day and not click any of those. But if they get that email from a known source, they’ll click on it. They’ll see the Twitter post three days later, they’ll click on it and consume the content. And four days later, they’ll see it on LinkedIn, and now it has 7,000 views on LinkedIn because of the momentum you’ve built. People are much more likely to consume the content because it has social validation.

How you manage this distribution strategy varies by brand, channel, and even content type. Rather than putting something out one day on every channel, it might take you six weeks to go through the entire cycle for one piece of content. What you get out of that is a much richer and deeper content consumption experience on the audience side. You also increase the lifespan of the content, which reduces the pressure on you to be constantly creating content because yesterday you had a spike and now something new is needed.

Marketers often measure the wrong things. Search and discovery are important to ensuring that your content is discoverable, which is a necessity. But today that’s just table stakes. Your content needs to be discoverable, but it’s far more important to ensure that you’re actually adding value for the content consumer and that it’s actually moving them toward the sale. At the end of the day, if your content’s not generating revenue, there’s a problem. It’s easy to think your content is successful if you’re using vanity metrics. You must be able to actually qualify the people who are consuming the content as valuable to the organization. If they are not, you need to reposition, rewrite, re-create, or rethink the content, probably from the strategic level down.
KEY POINTS

- You need to use keywords to manage search optimization.
  - **Status quo:** Marketing teams focus on targeted channels while neglecting search optimization.
  - **Cost of status quo:** Content underperforms in generic searches and does not propagate as widely as it could.
  - **New approach:** A keyword strategy strengthens search performance and sharing. This needs to include researching keywords, monitoring performance, and sticking with keywords that generate more traffic.

- You need to determine the right channels for reaching the target audience with your content.
  - **Status quo:** Marketers often use an everywhere approach when distributing content, getting it out there on every social platform and buying ads for a day or a week, but soon after that content’s life ends.
  - **Cost of status quo:** The cost of not getting distribution right is a lost opportunity. If you know the economics of your funnel, you can see the opportunity costs of missing a person or an audience.
  - **New approach:** Use channels to aggressively put content in front of your target audience. If you feel bad interrupting your prospects to put the content in front of them, the content isn’t good enough. Digital asset management solutions help make sure content goes out at the right times in the right channels to support all the different points of evidence and triggered events and buying signals that need to happen.

- You need to be able to evaluate if those who are engaging with your content are the people you want to reach.
  - **Status quo:** Marketers often measure things that do not tell them who is engaging or what the impact is.
  - **Cost of status quo:** Failure to know if you are reaching the people you need to reach can give you a false sense of success (high level of engagement with the wrong audience) and an inaccurate indication of content performance.
  - **New approach:** Adopt processes that qualify the people you are engaging and use metrics that measure their behavior after each engagement. This enables you to accurately assess and adjust content for better performance.
At the end of the day, do you know how well your content marketing program and campaigns are doing, whether they are performing as expected, or even if they are paying for themselves? This has always been one of the most challenging questions for content marketers to answer. We took a closer look at what the experts have to say about analyzing content performance by asking the following question:

**What’s the best way to use the data from the complete content lifecycle to measure performance and opportunities and reduce waste?**

The analysis discussions revealed several key ideas, including:

1) It’s important to measure why the audience is engaging with your content and not just if they are engaging;

2) It’s worthwhile to measure what people do after they engage with your content;

3) It’s valuable to measure the relationship between the content lifecycle and sales. Here’s what the experts had to say...
Robert Rose is the author of three best-selling books on content marketing. As founder of The Content Advisory, the consulting and education group of The Content Marketing Institute, Rose has worked with more than 500 companies over the past five years, including global brands such as Capital One, NASA, McCormick Spices, Hewlett Packard, Microsoft, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Measurement is critical, and the cost of not measuring the right things is ignorance. For example, you can create an amazing piece of content that suffers because it was poorly promoted. You can also have a horrible piece of content do okay because it was part of an amazing promotional campaign. Your insight, then, is that the horrible content is something you should do again, and this really great piece that suffered from a bad marketing campaign is something you shouldn’t do. That’s measuring how well the content was promoted and syndicated and distributed rather than how it moved the audience, and when you measure the wrong thing like that, you build a negative feedback loop.

Most content marketers measure exactly the wrong things. They mostly try to measure the quality and quantity of content they’re producing and how efficient or effective the higher quality content is. Content marketers should be measuring the content’s impact on the behavior change of the audience that is consuming the content.
The challenge with content is that it’s not a widget. It’s not like an ad, a brochure, or a piece of collateral where you can safely predict the cost on each subsequent widget. Content is different because there is a quality level we have to apply that is an unknowable number until we actually start creating it.

How much does a feature film cost? It depends on the story, what it is saying, and the value of the content. Media companies answer that by measuring how many tickets they sell. Content marketers need to do the same thing. They need to measure what the audience does. So, in creating a measurement program for content, the first thing to ask is what the goal is. What is the impact on the audience you are trying to achieve?

That could be many things. Let’s say, for example, you have a digital blog meant to build your first-party data that you will then expose to your personalized catalog or targeted ads. Let’s say you look at the conversion rates of anonymous people exposed to your catalog versus the conversion rate for your own first-party audience members. The gap between the two is the value of the audience impact. Any content that increases that gap in a positive way—making the first-party audience members more valuable—is a direct measure of the value and effectiveness of that content.
“Being able to identify and measure the correlation between content engagement and revenue is not easy, but it is essential.”

The most important measurements for the content cycle are those that show the impact that content is having on revenue. You can’t buy a beer with a click or an impression. Although content engagement is important, what happens after that content engagement is most important. Being able to identify and measure the correlation between content engagement and revenue events is not easy, but it is essential.

The further up the funnel you go, the more difficult this becomes because the more steps there are between where that prospect is and them closing. But you can reverse-engineer your funnel to figure this out. You can calculate that every time you get a prospect to a particular stage, that prospect is worth X dollars. For example, if you’re selling something that costs $10,000 and your conversion rate on the opportunities to close deals is 25%, it’s worth $2,500 to get someone into an opportunity. Then you can do that backward math and try to understand what it costs to get

Matt Heinz, President, Heinz Marketing Inc

An author and award-winning blogger, Matt Heinz is president of Heinz Marketing, to which he brings more than 20 years of marketing, business development, and sales experience. He prioritizes measurable results, greater sales, revenue growth, product success, and customer loyalty. Heinz is a dynamic, engaging speaker and repeat winner of Top 50 Most Influential People in Sales Lead Management and Top 50 Sales & Marketing Influencers.
someone to that point through your various channels and paths. Now you’re able to decide which paths are most efficient, which ones seem to be working the best, and which of those paths may not be generating the most prospects, but the best prospects.

You can see if a content marketing team is measuring the wrong things by simply looking at what it is measuring. If it’s clicks and likes and retweets and content engagement, that’s a good first step, but what’s most important is what happens after that. You should be able to see some velocity and the prospects taking action. If they engage with something and don’t do something new, if they engage with content and that doesn’t change their behavior or mindset, you have to question whether that content was worthwhile. At that point it doesn’t matter how many retweets the content had or how viral it went. Did it add value to the customers? If you’re not measuring that, you don’t really know how it’s performing or how to improve it.
“If you are going to improve the content, it’s important to understand what problem to address.”

When measuring content, the number-one thing to look at is conversions. If you have a million people on the site and a 0.2% conversion rate, who cares about all those site visits?

Conversion rates are key, and it comes down to A: how many people are you bringing in? and B: how many of those people are downloading something, getting on the newsletter, filling something out for you, or doing something to take that next step? And out of those, how many leads are you getting, how many appointments are you setting up, and how many of those are turning into sales? You have to develop your basic set of KPIs.

Keep in mind several things as you measure content performance:

- **Be sure you are measuring the content and not a broken process tied to the content.** For example, if you have a sales team that has a terrible time closing deals and a content strategy generating tons of leads, it could be the content strategy is flawed and is not generating the right kind of leads. Or it could be the sales team is poorly trained. If you are going to improve the content, you need to understand what problem to address.
• **Look beyond single pieces of content.** When analyzing content, consider that some content influences the consumption of other content, and some content items are just repackaged versions of other content items, optimized for a different channel. Analyzing these things gives insight into how you can build on what you have out there, how you can add to it, and how you can shift emphasis to something that is working better than something else. There may be other ways you can reach people, and there are different ways that people take in content. Once you feel like you’ve exhausted the possibilities and you see through the numbers that there is some good traction, you may decide to push it a little further.

• **Not all content takes off right away.** You have to A/B test things. You might have one campaign that starts strong and other campaigns you have to iterate five times to find the right target audience and the right message. You have to give the content time to work and not pull the plug too early.
“In content today, everything is about measurement. This data becomes a guide for how to develop additional content.”

Using data to measure content performance is challenging because life is nonlinear. You can be going about your day and a friend calls you out of the blue to tell you about a meeting she just had in which a person’s name came up. After the call, you search that person’s name, and an article the person wrote comes up. The article has nothing to do with what your friend was talking about, but it’s interesting, and you spend a few minutes reading it. Maybe you recommend it to someone else you know was looking for that information. It’s difficult to track these things.

But in content today, everything is about measurement. Are people reading it? Do those consuming the content prefer certain topics, and do they prefer articles of a certain tone? And really, the most important thing, does the content convert readers, causing them to take an action? How many people click on the Call Now button? How many people email? This data becomes a guide for how to develop additional content.

Anecdotal evidence is important too, when the right person shares it. If an executive asks if the content campaign is working and a business manager says we have a lot of new customers who mention the content, that counts. It might not carry as much weight coming from a marketing consultant, though. Then if on top of that you can show a 50% increase in site traffic, those things taken together become very powerful.

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"Only one metric counts: the amount of revenue your content creates."

Measurement is the biggest content marketing challenge. The essential problem is that content marketers do not actually tie their content marketing efforts to revenue. It doesn’t have to be complicated. For each part of the content lifecycle, you should be able to ascertain a dollar value for the consumer who consumes it. And if you’re not able to do that, you’re probably reporting on the wrong metric. It’s great to measure a lot of things, but content marketers should only report on one metric: how much revenue this piece of content or this content campaign or this part of the content lifecycle contributed to the bottom line.

Not until then are you able to determine the return on a content investment. Deciding if the content was worth it is a great question to ask, but most content marketers fail to get to the first step: making that revenue connection.

It does not need to be a complex calculation. For example, if you can say that someone who subscribes to your email newsletter is worth $53 on average to your bottom line, the
cost of creating the newsletter and building subscribers becomes a pretty simple equation to determine if you should keep doing it. This can be a recursive calculation, meaning that as you go through the content lifecycle, if you can determine that a prospect who consumes these four pieces of content is now worth X dollars, all of a sudden you have a really good case for that lifecycle.

Too often CMOs in board meetings tout how many followers they have on Facebook and how many likes they get for their posts, only to hear a CEO or a board member say, but how many of those people buy our product? And they don’t have the answer. Only one metric counts: the amount of revenue your content creates. Whatever things you need to measure to get to that number are the right things to measure. The cost of not making that content-revenue connection is marketing churn, the loss of staff because you can’t justify the efforts for the cost, and ultimately damage to the business.
KEY POINTS

- **Measure why the audience is engaging with your content, not just if they are engaging.**
  - **Status Quo:** Most content marketers have some measure of audience engagement, such as pages views or clicks, but they do not know why people engage.
  - **Cost of Status Quo:** Failure to understand why people engage limits your ability to improve engagement.
  - **New Approach:** Content marketers need to measure what causes the target audience to engage with their content. This involves an ongoing test-measure-adapt process that continuously feeds the content lifecycle.

- **Measure what people do after they engage with your content.**
  - **Status Quo:** Content marketers often measure clicks, likes, retweets, and content engagement, but what’s most important is what happens after that.
  - **Cost of Status Quo:** If your content does not change audience behavior or mindset, you have to question whether that content was worthwhile.
  - **New Approach:** Plan and create content so that it includes measurable calls to action so that you can track what the audience does and develop behavioral metrics.

- **Measure the relationship between the content lifecycle and sales.**
  - **Status Quo:** Most content marketers try to measure the quality and quantity of content they’re producing and how efficient or effective the higher quality content is. These are exactly the wrong things.
  - **Cost of Status Quo:** The cost of not measuring the right things is ignorance, no visibility into how content is performing or how to improve it, marketing churn, loss of staff because you can’t justify content efforts for the cost, and ultimately damage to the business.
  - **New Approach:** Content marketers need to measure the content’s impact on the behavior change of the audience that is consuming the content, and they need to show the impact that content is having on revenue. Only one metric ultimately counts: the amount of revenue your content creates incomplete ideas to get early audience feedback.
AT&T

Aprimo Productivity Management and Aprimo Plan & Spend enabled the organization to streamline workflow and review processes within its various divisions, resulting in a 25% increase in direct marketing output, $2MM in reduced costs, and a $35MM reallocation of funding.

Background

AT&T is the largest telecommunications company in the world, with $164 billion in revenue and 273,000 employees, which also makes it the 11th largest company in the world.

Challenges

- Lack of centralized view of campaigns
- Need to streamline workflow and reviews
- Wanted a more collaborative platform for standardized operations
- Needed to centralize divisions, product lines and geographies

"We strive for continuous improvement in our processes – it’s vital to have a tool flexible enough for tweaks and overhauls as necessary.

Aprimo allows us significant flexibility in developing our campaign workflows, affording us the ability to both streamline our work as well as report out on how we’re doing against our key performance indicators."

Mike MacLaverty
Director-Marketing Management