



HOW TO BUILD A CONTENT ENGINE

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INTRODUCTION

Back in the early days of content marketing, when most people didn't know what the phrase meant and many companies were just starting to consider a blog, there seemed to be a clear formula for creating successful content. **It went something like this:**



It worked for many marketers, because there wasn't much competition yet. If you were a software company answering questions about email marketing, chances were good that you were one of the only companies actively using content that way. The Internet was yours to claim. Google loved you. Your analytics showed clear results. Life was good.

The game has changed.

Now everyone and their mom is doing content marketing, including all of your competitors. Big companies, tiny companies, brand-new startups — everyone in your industry is using blog posts, guides and infographics to fight for the same audience.

But that doesn't mean the playing field is equal. Quality is what sets people apart. What you publish is 10 times more important than how often you publish. Because there are SO many answers now to every question online, the best content is what rises to the top. You can't compete just on publishing volume. To succeed at content marketing now, you have to publish the best, most helpful, most creative content that breaks through the noise.

Today's best content marketing teams do that using two key ingredients: **Good ideas and a proven process.**



In this guide we'll walk you step-by-step through how to harness good ideas and how to build a process to get those ideas in front of the right audience. We'll talk about how to:

[START WITH A STRATEGY](#) ↗

[UNCOVER YOUR BEST SOURCES FOR IDEAS](#) ↗

[MAP OUT A RELIABLE PROCESS](#) ↗

[ASSEMBLE YOUR DREAM TEAM](#) ↗

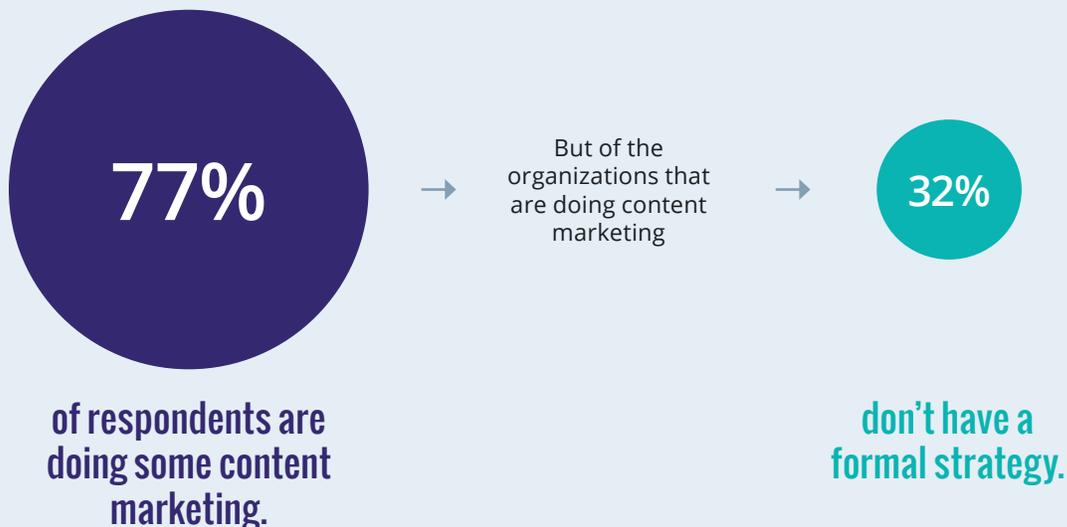
START WITH A STRATEGY

I've worked with all kinds of content teams, in a ton of industries, and I've found one thing to be true: Everyone gets stressed out about the S word, "strategy."

Maybe it's because marketers are biased toward action. Executing feels proactive. Clicking "publish" feels like progress. But sitting back and considering the "why"? Less exciting.

We recently surveyed hundreds of marketers about their content strategy. Here's what we found:

Source: Rep Cap Content Marketing Survey 2017



In a crowded market, having a strategy is crucial. Pumping out content won't move the needle if you haven't answered a few important questions about why you're publishing.

But coming up with a content strategy doesn't have to be complicated or stressful. Through a lot of trial and error, I've learned:

A good content strategy IS NOT:

- ✗ Long.
- ✗ Complicated.
- ✗ Buried in a list of personas, historical data and vision statements.
- ✗ Full of complicated charts and data points.

A great content strategy IS:

- ✓ Simple.
- ✓ Just a few sentences.
- ✓ Visible to everyone on your team.
- ✓ Flexible enough to evolve with your business and your customers' needs.

YOUR HOMEWORK

Write a one-paragraph content strategy. Answer these five questions:

1. Who is the very specific audience you're trying to reach?
2. What channels are you going to use to reach them?
3. What action do you want them to take?
4. What impact do you want this to make on the business?
5. How will you measure that impact?

FIND YOUR IDEA SOURCES

Once you know your content strategy, it's time to look for the big ideas that will help you power that plan. Here's a secret I've learned over the years: Many marketing organizations are missing the "big idea" part of the puzzle. That's why you see so much boring, flat, repetitive content out there. If you can find people with good ideas, you'll be way ahead of the pack. So look around and start to identify sources for big ideas. Look outside of your marketing team and talk to:

People Inside the Organization

THE FOUNDER OR CEO

Why and how did the company start? What was the original value proposition?

THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN AT YOUR ORGANIZATION THE LONGEST

What changes have they seen in the industry? How have customers' needs changed over time?

SALESPeOPLE & CUSTOMER SERVICE TEAMS

What questions do they hear from customers?

BOARD MEMBERS & COMPANY ADVISERS

What are their predictions about the future of the industry?

People Outside the Organization

SPEAKERS AT INDUSTRY EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

What are the new ideas that are shaping the future of the industry? Who's leading those conversations?

INDUSTRY RESEARCHERS & ACADEMICS

What's the latest research that affects your customers?

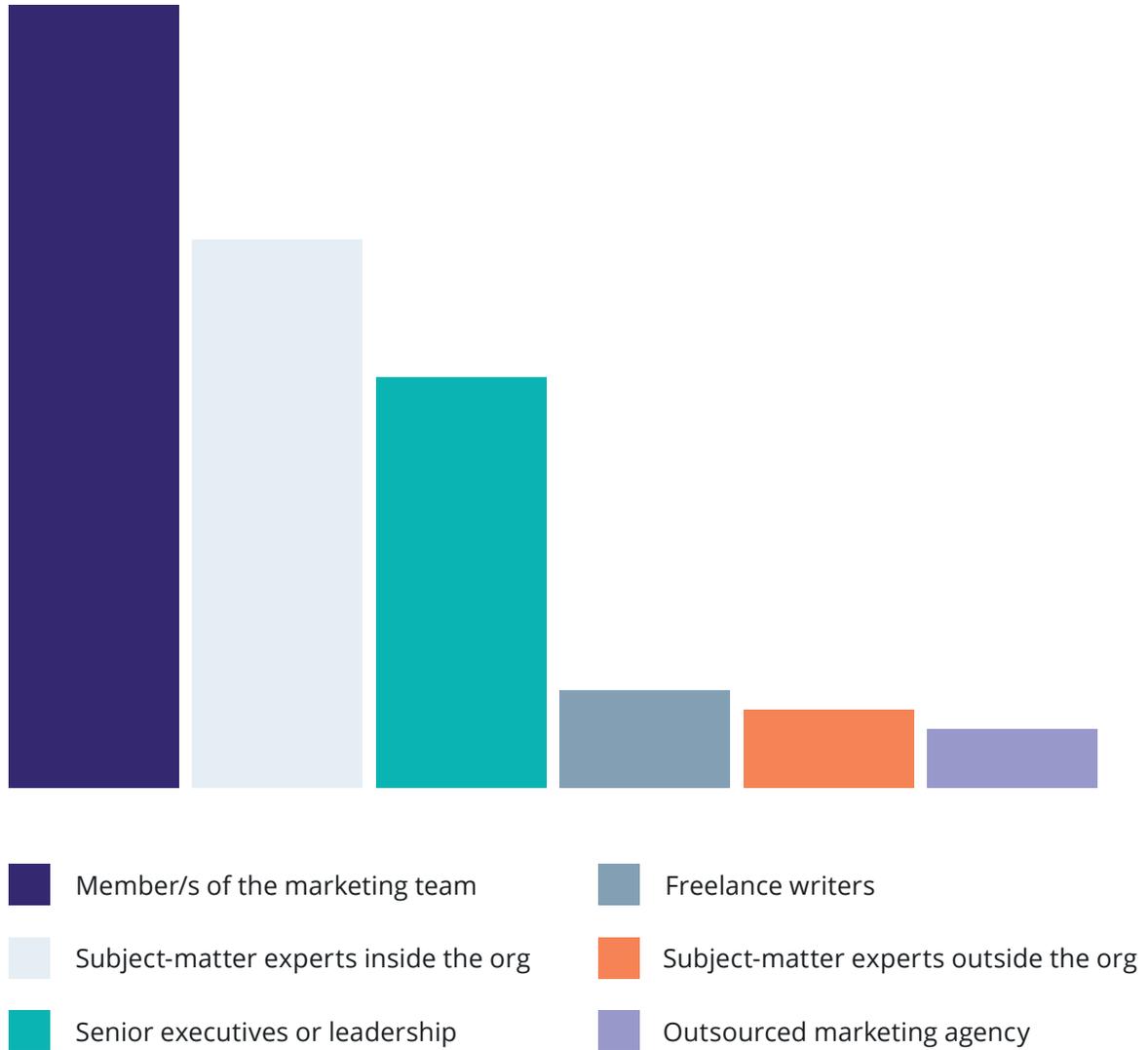
CUSTOMERS & PROSPECTS

Make it a point to have big-picture conversations with the people you serve.

Where Marketers Get Content Ideas

In the past 12 months, which of the following has been the primary source for ideas on your organization's blog?

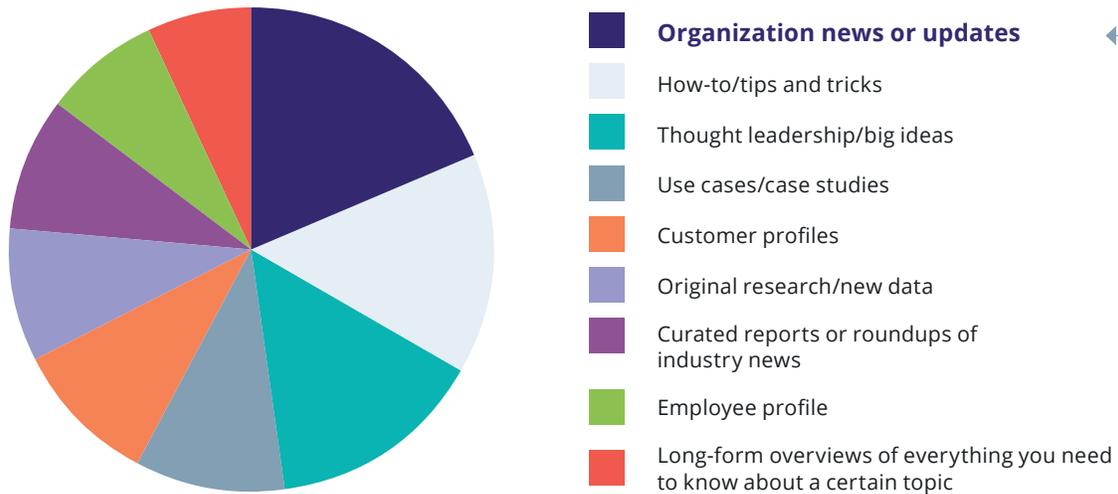
Source: Rep Cap Content Marketing Survey 2017



Marketers Need Fresh Ideas for Content

What of the following types of content have you published on your blog in the past 12 months?

Source: Rep Cap Content Marketing Survey 2017



Marketers are still primarily covering their own news and updates. Even though content marketing has been around for years, the most common strategy is still “me, me, me.” The strongest organizations will focus more on answering their audience’s questions and adding to conversations in the industry, instead of touting their own news and accomplishments.

YOUR HOMEWORK

Brainstorm your idea sources.

Make a list of 10 solid sources for content ideas, at your organization and beyond.

MAP OUT A DETAILED PROCESS

Now that you have a broad range of people you can tap for content ideas, it's time to think about execution. I've seen that one-person marketing teams and massive marketing organizations all struggle to actually get content out the door.

- **Half written blog posts linger in the CMS.**
- **E-book ideas come up but never turn into published content.**
- **Social media strategies get planned in meetings, but the execution doesn't meet expectations.**

That's usually because teams are missing a reliable content process.

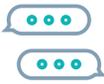
That process is a series of nitty-gritty tasks that turn a nebulous idea into a published piece of content. Those tasks matter, because they're what hold so many people back — and keep ideas stuck inside our heads and rough drafts.

The details may change, along with who does which part, but the following steps are all essential:



Plan

What is the core idea of this piece? What questions do you need to answer? Who do you need to talk to?



Research

Interview sources (inside and outside your organization). Find research and stats that show overarching trends. Read what others have written on the topic. Conduct your own original research and surveys.



Write

Give your writer (whether it's you or an internal expert) time to work through their thoughts, but set a clear deadline so the draft doesn't languish forever.



Edit

Someone other than the writer should edit the draft, asking questions and poking holes in the arguments.



Design

Turn the draft into content that's ready for the world. That might mean putting a blog post into WordPress with images, call-out quotes and a call to action. Or it might mean designing a full e-book or white paper.



Publish

You made it!



Promote

Distribute the content to your target audience — on social media, in email, to the sales team, to customers. Create a schedule that wrings long-term value out of the piece.



Revisit and Update

Periodically review the content to make sure it's still accurate and reaching the right audience. You might find in six months that it's time for a refresh or a response to your original piece.

Finally, make the process transparent to everyone, including the subject-matter experts whose help you want. If they can see your final publish date and the steps that need to happen to get there, the process will be less mysterious and overwhelming. They'll see their contribution (the ideas) as one initial step in a collaborative effort to create amazing content.

YOUR HOMEWORK

List the steps of your content process.

Think about the content channel you spend the most time on — like your blog, for example. Write down every step that goes into producing a single blog post, from the strategy and planning to the promotion.

ASSEMBLE YOUR DREAM TEAM

The key to executing a smooth content process is having the right team behind it. One person doesn't have to own every step. If you're overwhelmed by one part of the process, or you're seeing consistent bottlenecks, figure out who you could pull in for help.

- **Do you need an outside editor?**
- **Could you more closely partner with your social media team to streamline promotion?**
- **Do you need to find a ghostwriter to get ideas out of your executives' heads?**

Adding others to the process holds you accountable and takes all the work off one person's shoulders.

When Brendon Schrader, founder and CEO of Antenna, wanted to increase his company's blogging frequency, he looked at what writers he had available — both on staff and outside his organization.



After trying to do it all in-house and not being able to create the volume we wanted to accomplish our goals, we realized we needed outside support.

He created his own custom content dream team — part internal employees, part external agency help — to make his goals a reality.

YOUR HOMEWORK

Identify who will help you execute your content process.

Look at the content process you defined earlier. Now assign a person to each step in the process. Maybe one person is responsible for almost every step. Maybe you look to other teams or outside agencies or freelancers to own some of the steps. Assign an owner to every task.

READY TO BUILD YOUR ENGINE?

If your content marketing needs a tuneup, or if you just need a boost creating relevant and quality content, we'd love to help.

Rep Cap is a marketing consulting firm that specializes in creating and executing digital content strategies to drive growth for B2B companies. Our team of writers, editors, designers and marketers can help you create a content marketing strategy that will connect with your audience.

To find out how Rep Cap can power your thought leadership, email hello@repcapitalmedia.com.

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