

THREE FIRST STEPS FOR

# Operationalizing Your Content Marketing



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**Lionbridge**  
Global Marketing Operations

Locally  
Optimized.  
Globally  
Consistent.

Executive Summary

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You invest time, money and resources in developing, creating and curating content for your digital presence, but for reasons unbeknownst to you, your content is inconsistent, off-message, out-of-date, and poorly targeted. Your website has become a graveyard of failed initiatives. If markets are conversations, your organization has a stutter. It is time to learn that short term initiatives such as task forces and website redesigns do not produce long term results.

## Content is one of your most strategic assets. Are you treating it that way?

Success with content marketing lies in the ability to develop and deliver the right message to right audience at the right time. Falling into the common trap of focusing too heavily on the creative process at the expense of effective execution can be a lethal injection for any content marketing program.

The demands on the marketing organization are rapidly changing and the pressure has never been greater. An unprecedented array of skills and activities now stand between the development of content and its consumption by an audience. To be successful in today's global, digital economy and reach multiple audiences across multiple channels, you, and your organization, must do more than simply adapt - you must transform - and operate like a publisher.

Transforming your marketing operational capability means aligning operational capacity with strategy and establishing metrics to support continual improvement, accountability and transparency. Initiatives such as tagging for targeting, search engine optimization, localization, instrumentation for analytics, and performance measurement are a start, but to excel against your competitors content development needs to evolve from an episodic project to a continuous program.

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Most companies see the value of having an effective marketing program, but few have implemented the organizational change necessary to develop one.

New skills and capabilities need to be acquired. Roles need to be expanded with new responsibilities. Content development needs to evolve from an episodic project to a continuous program.

There are a number of organizational attitudes that obstruct change. Here are a few scenarios that may sound familiar.

*"We are not in the content business"*

### Unconvinced Leadership

Content marketing strategy has never emerged as a topic worth focusing on. Higher levels of management doubt the effectiveness of content to grow the business and prefer to rely on trusted activities like face-to-face sales. Executives wrongly think that content was taken care of two years ago when the website was re-designed. Ad buys on trade magazines are automatic now and don't require a second thought. Even if the effectiveness of these channels is steadily declining, they feel safer than committing to a new strategy.

While this attitude is becoming extinct, you still see it from time to time. In these cases, the most compelling argument is usually search results placement. No executive wants to see her competitors listed ahead of her company. The initial reaction will be an order to buy ad words or bring in a search engine guy to fix it. Look for a reputable expert who will tell the truth: SEO is a long process that requires developing content that people genuinely find useful. You can't trick Google over the long term or tell it what to do. If you develop the kind of content that your audience wants, Google will send traffic to you. The best way to do that is by developing and executing a content marketing strategy.

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*"We need a blog. An app.  
We have to get on \_\_\_\_\_.  
No, \_\_\_\_\_. No, \_\_\_\_\_."*

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*"We never get anything done."*

## Scattershot Leadership

While non-supportive leadership is bad, scattershot leadership is worse. These leaders are attracted to the latest shiny object with no regard for strategic value or attention to results. Simply getting there is considered enough; there is no thought to maximizing the value of being there. These leaders leave behind a trail of dead blogs and brand pages that embarrass more than enhance their corporate image.

A content marketing strategy will help you decide if there is a worthwhile reason to justify the sustained effort of maintaining and leveraging that presence. Going in, you will know what kind of execution is required for success. Execution capabilities will help you achieve operational efficiency to sustain programs past the time when the novelty wears off. Continuous measurement will identify failure so you can either adjust or gracefully terminate the initiative.

## Weak Execution

Your organization may have a content marketing strategy or perhaps the seeds of one, but fail to execute it. There are a number of causes, but they all boil down to resources. You may not have enough people or everyone may be too busy with other things. Available resources may not have the right skills.

The resource problem occurs when the content marketing strategy is too ambitious for the budget; or when people are not fully committed to the strategy and don't follow through when it is time to execute. Assuming that you accepted your real constraints when you developed your strategy, you will be able to execute if people expect the outcomes to outweigh the investment.

If you are just getting started, this is quite a leap of faith. And if people don't fully make that leap, the failure that results will justify the hesitation. To succeed, you need to make the initial commitment as small as possible and be able to show outsized results. Choose an initiative with a high likelihood of success and measurable results that matter. When people start to see success, they will build habits to repeat it.

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Once you have found your way around those organizational obstacles and are committed to creating a high-performing digital marketing program, you may be wondering where to start.

Here are three recommended first steps.



## STEP 1: Set Your Goals

Start with the most basic question: “why?” Why do you have a website? Why do you want to engage your customers? Your answers should be very closely aligned with your business goals. For example, you may think that you have a superior product that people would buy if they understood its benefits. Perhaps you are creating a new product category that your market doesn’t understand yet. You might be trying to retain customers by helping them be more successful with your product. You might be trying to improve efficiency by introducing self-service support. Most likely, you want to achieve all of these results, but you need to prioritize what to focus on first.

When thinking of goals, consider how you will measure success. Key performance indicators will be different depending on the goal. For example, success in market education may be measured by traffic to resources that describe the product category and by market adoption (number of search engine results) of a term that you create.

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## STEP 2: Develop Your Strategy Around Audiences

Most business goals cannot be achieved without the cooperation of the prospects, customers, and other influencers that make up your audience. Segment and target audiences that are the most crucial to your specific goals. Take a little while to get to know these segments. What do individuals within these segments have in common? Developing personas is a useful exercise to help you understand and target the right audience segments. A persona is a fictitious character that represents an audience segment. Personas help you predict how an audience segment will respond to what you do. Take what you learn from actual performance data to refine your personas.

Once you have your target audiences in your sights, develop a content marketing strategy to reach them. There are several elements to a content marketing strategy:

- Message:* the types of information, themes, and topics you want to express.
- Format:* article, whitepaper, newsletter, infographic, video, etc.
- Channels:* your website, media website, Facebook, Twitter, email newsletter, app, etc.
- Markets:* countries and languages that you will publish into

A successful content marketing strategy will get useful and compelling content to the audience segments that matter most to your business.

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### STEP 3: Baseline: Where You Are

Before taking the first steps to operationalizing a content marketing strategy, you should have a baseline of how you are performing right now. This baseline will expose areas that you need to address first and help you measure your progress along the way. There are a number of benchmarks you can do, including the following:

#### *Search Engine Benchmark*

A Search Engine Benchmark will tell you the keywords that are important to your industry and how your websites perform against those keywords. Despite the growing importance of social marketing, a majority of traffic still comes through search engines. Most companies should consider extending search engine analysis to a Global Search Engine Benchmark that measures performance outside of your home market. In today's global economy, multi-market reach is becoming increasingly important. Most companies neglect their global presence and miss great opportunity.

#### *Website Governance and Compliance Audit*

While many companies have a style guide and policies for accessibility, these documents are often out-of-date and typically ignored. Websites read like a genetic record of evolving brand guidelines and rogue initiatives. This is particularly problematic for global companies that struggle to balance global consistency and local relevance. A compliance audit will uncover and quantify the inconsistencies that weaken your brand and confuse your customers.

#### *Usability Study*

A usability study will identify obstacles that stand in the way of your customers working with you. The study should focus on the personas and tasks identified in your content marketing strategy and should account for differences in language, culture, and platform. If your target audience is on the move, you better make sure you have interfaces that are optimized for mobile platforms. If you are trying to reach customers in different countries, you need to support the languages and cultural norms they prefer. Any kind of transactional functionality must account for regional differences.

#### *Conversion Rates*

Have an analytics expert review the data you have collected thus far. See what conversion information you can infer. Most likely, you will learn that you are not collecting the type of data you need. Think through the analytics story you want to be able to tell and identify metrics that will help you tell it.

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Without a marketing operations program to leverage it, creative work is wasted and can even be counter-productive.

We see evidence of this syndrome all over the Internet, with muddled and neglected websites and inconsistent messaging. The good news is that there is great potential for companies to stand out if they can master the execution side of their marketing programs.



### Get in touch

To learn how Lionbridge can help optimize your content and marketing operations, visit us online at

[www.globalmarketingops.com](http://www.globalmarketingops.com)

or, [contact us](#).

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Seth manages solutions for Global Marketing Operations at Lionbridge Technologies. Lionbridge supports customers at every stage of the Global Customer Lifecycle, helping them raise their online search profile, engage their global customers with locally-relevant content, and translate and test their products and applications.

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Ahava is the Principal and owner of Aha Media Group, LLC, a full service Web consulting firm that has been in operation since October 2005. Clients include Johns Hopkins Medicine, Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center, Washington Cancer Institute, Georgetown University Hospital, Franklin Square Hospital Center and Montgomery General Hospital.

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