

Contently

# The Ultimate Content Strategist

## Playbook No. 1:

Evangelizing Content and Setting Yourself Up for Success



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**“Content marketing is the atomic particle of all the rest of a brand’s marketing campaigns.”**

**—REBECCA LIEB, ALTIMETER GROUP**

# Marriott's first foray into content is the stuff of marketing legend.

Seven years ago, Kathleen Matthews, the hotel giant's EVP of communications, walked into Bill Marriott's office with an idea. After 25 years as a reporter and news anchor for an ABC News affiliate in Washington, D.C., she knew the power of a good story—especially when it came from a compelling figure. So, naturally, she wanted Marriott to have a blog, and she wanted Bill Marriott to write it.

**“Why the heck would anyone want to read a blog from me?”** Marriott, then 76 years old, responded.

Matthews quickly convinced Marriott he was the best person to tell the company’s story, even though he didn’t use a computer. And for the past seven years, he’s been telling that story—one weekly “On the Move” blog post at a time. Meanwhile, Marriott has expanded his content operation, building a 65-employee studio to power their far-reaching content operation, which is led by former ABC executive David Beebe. The hotel giant only started building their content studio in the fall of 2014, but the early results are extremely impressive, a successful TV show, “The Navigator Live”; a touching short film series, “Year of Surprises”; a personalized online travel magazine; and even exciting forays into virtual reality with Oculus Rift.



# Why This Guide

For most brands, however, content marketing doesn't go this smoothly. Just as most millennials can't walk right up to the boss and ask for a job like their grandfathers once did, most marketers can't walk into the CEO's office and pitch the idea of building a small media company within a large corporation. Instead, most content marketers are faced with a task of consistently and persistently evangelizing the practice of content marketing while creating a strategic roadmap that will ensure success once they get the resources to start executing.

This isn't easy. In fact, it's incredibly difficult, and while there are thousands of bits of advice out there about how to "do content marketing" effectively, there's no comprehensive guide for getting started. That's why we've decided to create the Ultimate Content Strategist Playbook, a five-part guide to evangelizing a content marketing program, creating a roadmap to success, and executing and optimizing your content program over the long haul. We'll be revealing our own secrets to

success at Contently, and we've also tapped the smartest and most successful content marketers on Earth to share their insights. Over the next two months, we'll tell you everything you need to know to truly succeed by building an audience and tying your content back to concrete business goals:

- Ultimate Content Strategist Playbook: Content Roadmap
- Ultimate Content Strategist Playbook: Content Execution
- Ultimate Content Strategist Playbook: Growing Your Audience
- Ultimate Content Strategist Playbook: Optimization and ROI

### **3. Content Marketing: Why**

Evangelizing a content marketing program starts with a fairly simple question: "Why content marketing?"

Content marketing is a popular practice right now, and when you look around the marketing landscape, it's easy to see why. Interruptive advertising simply isn't working, and as a result, creating content people actually choose to read, watch, and interact with is becoming an increasingly attractive alternative for brands.

**.1%**

AVERAGE CTR FOR  
BANNER ADS

**.04%**

AVERAGE CTR FOR  
468X60 ADS

**.35%**

AVERAGE CTR FOR  
MOBILE ADS

## Traditional Advertising Faces Monumental Struggles

If you're reading this e-book, you're probably familiar with these notorious stats: The average click-through rate for banner ads is just 0.10 percent, and the standard 468x60 banner ad has a CTR of just 0.04 percent.

The news isn't much better on mobile, where Internet usage is becoming concentrated. Mobile banner ads see just a 0.35 percent CTR, and half of those clicks are accidental. Even more troubling, 85 percent of display ads are clicked on by 8 percent of people, some of whom may actually be bots. That results in some stark realities: You're more likely to survive a plane crash or join the Navy SEALs than click on a banner ad. On a related note, 86 percent of consumers exhibit banner blindness, unable to recall the last display ad they saw. And of those who did recall the ad, just 2.8 percent found it relevant to their needs. While it may be easy for consumers to totally ignore banner ads, it's impossible for marketers to ignore these problems.



The news is getting worse for TV advertising as well. Seventy-six percent of U.S. households now use DVR, Netflix, or VOD, and one-third of millennials claim they watch no broadcast TV, according to *The New York Times*. This year, an additional 4.9 percent of people aged 25–34 are expected to cut the cord, as are 2.9 percent of American pay TV customers overall, including the 25–34 demographic. Plans to cut the cord are on the rise 16 percent year-over-year, resulting in an increasingly shrinking market for TV advertising—which, thanks to the rise of second screens, is becoming increasingly easy to ignore.

**16%**

YEAR-OVER-YEAR INCREASE  
IN CUTTING CABLE

**2.9%**

PLANNING TO CUT CABLE  
THIS YEAR, ADDITIONALLY

**1/3**

OF MILLENIALS CLAIM THEY  
WATCH NO BROADCAST TV

## Content Marketing on the Rise

Meanwhile, the stampede towards content marketing is impossible to ignore. Consider:

**86%** & **77%**  
**B2B Marketers** & **B2C Marketers**

are now using content marketing in a strategic fashion

**76%** & **69%**  
**B2B Marketers** & **B2C Marketers**

are creating more content than they were a year ago.

**15** → **1,200**  
**Blog posts per month** → **Avg new monthly leads**

companies that excel at lead nurturing generate 50% more sales-ready leads at a 33% lower cost

Content marketing's impact also extends to social media, where brands that don't have compelling content to share struggle to make an impact. TrackMaven recently released an incredibly comprehensive study about brands experiencing declining social media effectiveness and came to a clear conclusion:

**"We've reached a tipping point where there is a greater burden on digital marketers to create better content. Smart content can overcome bad distribution, but smart distribution cannot save bad content."**

Simply put, high-quality content marketing positively reverberates through every aspect of a brand's marketing efforts. As Altimeter's Rebecca Lieb puts it, "Content marketing is the atomic particle of all the rest of a brand's marketing campaigns."

The impact of content marketing also goes beyond the numbers, as Altimeter explains in their excellent "Culture of Content" research report:

"Companies that evangelize, reinforce, and institutionalize the importance of content throughout and beyond the marketing organization are more successful not only across their marketing initiatives but also with other internal and external success benchmarks, such as sales, employee advocacy, customer service, audience engagement, thought leadership, and hiring.

**When content becomes an ingrained element of an enterprise's culture, the culture functions like a well-oiled engine, producing, circulating, and begetting content, creating numerous efficiencies in the process."**

## 4. Content Marketing: When

Figuring out if content marketing is right for your business.

While that broad case for content marketing is strong, each brand needs to make the case for themselves on an individual basis. The biggest mistake a brand can make is deciding to “do content marketing” and simply making content for content’s sake. You need clear documented goals with your content marketing, a robust strategy for making it happen, a detailed road-map to guide you forward, and a plan for how to staff and execute your efforts. You also need to plan how you’re going to take a data-driven

approach to optimizing and distributing your work so you can create better content and continuously build a bigger and better audience.

The numbers bear this out. CMI’s 2015 survey found that just 53 percent of marketers have a documented strategy, but 54 percent of those marketers with strategies identified their efforts as effective, compared to a 35 percent average overall.

## Defining Business Goals

**Successfully evangelizing and planning a content marketing operation starts with deciding on what business goals you want to achieve.**

Do you want to build brand awareness, trust, and affinity? Do you want to drive more leads? Boost SEO? Do you want to influence current clients in some way? Successful content marketing requires significant resources, and very few chief executives will green-light and sustain a content operation if it doesn't drive significant results.

Wait, you might be asking, can I even measure any of those things? The answer is yes. Content marketing has a troublesome reputation as being hard to measure, but in many ways, that reputation is outdated now that marketing automation technology has gotten better.

We'll dive into the depths of content marketing measurement later in the Content Strategist Playbook series, but here's a quick primer on how to tie your content to the most common goals identified by today's marketers in CMI's recent survey:

## **MOST COMMON GOALS**

*as identified by today's marketers in  
CMI'S recent survey:*

### **BRAND AWARENESS**

A combination of widely used content metrics such as readers, return readers, shares, and engaged time spent reading can be combined to create a detailed brand awareness score. For a more precise score, simple reader survey widgets can pinpoint a definitive brand lift number. For instance, BuzzFeed does this for [their sponsored content campaigns](#), identifying a 230-percent-plus lift in sentiments like “Virgin Mobile is a brand that I’d investigate for my next phone” and “Virgin Mobile is a brand that understands me and the things I like.”

### **LEAD GENERATION**

Through the use of marketing automation software such as Marketo and Salesforce, one can easily track and attribute how content marketing helps generate leads.

### **LEAD NURTURING**

Content marketing is considered the [most effective tactic](#) in lead nurturing. Smart content tracking will let you see how many pieces of content a lead consumed during their purchase journey and will attribute a monetary value to the impact a piece of content had in moving them through the funnel. The impact of content marketing can be further determined by comparing the close rate for leads that consumed multiple pieces of content versus those who did not.

## SALES

Similarly, using content marketing automation in conjunction with a cohesive effort between marketing and sales allows you to attribute the impact of each piece of content to a given sale. While an imperfect science, it's far more precise than attribution for most other marketing tactics. It's also worth noting that companies that excel at lead nurturing—largely thanks to their content marketing efforts—generate 50 percent more sales-ready leads at a 33 percent lower cost.

## CUSTOMER RETENTION & LOYALTY

The “always-on sales funnel” is a modern marketing cliché for a reason. Today's brands are in a constant battle for customer loyalty, and high-quality content is an incredibly effective way to keep that relationship strong. Tracking the effect that post-purchase content consumption has on future consumption makes the case for content marketing even stronger. Just consider the lifetime value of your average customer.

Whether you want to focus on SEO, lead generation, brand awareness, or a holistic approach combining all of the above, coming to your chief executives with a clear list of goals and a game plan for how to measure performance will get you the go-ahead. But there's more you need to figure out if you want to walk out with a green light to create great content.

# Good Content = Good SEO

**14.6%**

Close rate for SEO leads

**1.7%**

Close rate for outbound leads

Though not identified as a top concern in CMI's survey, it can't be ignored, since it's tied so closely to the concerns listed above. Consider that SEO leads have a 14.6 percent close rate, compared to just 1.7 percent for outbound leads. And in the wake of Google Hummingbird, high-quality, engaging content that people spend lots of time consuming is the biggest key to SEO success.

We asked Cyrus Shepard, the "Content Astronaut" and SEO sage at Moz, what's in store for SEO in 2015. "The

first thing that comes to mind," he says, "is less of an emphasis on pure technical perfection in terms of SEO and more of an emphasis on user experience. There's a lot of evidence to indicate that Google is looking at user engagement metrics and quality of your website—how long are people spending on the page, how easy it is to navigate."





## 5. Content Marketing: How

Planning for the road ahead.

Once you've identified your goals, there are four crucial steps you need to take to set your content marketing operation up for success. We'll go over all of these in great detail over the next two months in our Content Strategist Playbooks, telling you everything you need to know to complete each successfully.

## Internal Audit, External Audit, and Audience Identification

Many brands only audit the external media landscape when planning their content strategy, and that's a critical mistake. Be honest about what you're trying to achieve. What can you do and what can't you do? What roadblocks can get in the way of your effort to consistently publish high-quality content and act like a media company? What processes need to be in place with compliance and other stakeholders? Where are your strengths, and where do you need outside help?



A candid evaluation of your current capabilities is absolutely necessary if you want to set yourself up to succeed.

While you'll probably start examining your internal infrastructure, an external audit is needed as well. And we'll explain how to successfully execute both in our next Ultimate Content Strategist Playbook: Content Roadmap. At Contently, we advocate a "gap analysis" to pinpoint the content areas that are being underserved

**"The entire ecosystem is competing for attention from everybody else."**

**STEVE RUBEL**

and how a brand can succeed against the current competition. One key mistake brands often make is only considering companies in their industry as potential competition.

“The competition isn’t just, say, Samsung versus Apple or Unilever versus P&G,” Steve Rubel, chief content strategist at Edelman, explains. “The competition is for every minute of that stakeholder’s time. How do we create something that’s going to compete with that? And ‘that’ could be Hollywood, could be Bollywood, could be the traditional media companies or digitally native media companies. The entire ecosystem is competing for attention from everybody else.”

Not just any gap in the market will do. It must be one that allows you to create content that aligns with your broader business goals. For GE's wildly successful GE Reports online magazine, that target audience consists of company shareholders and the broader tech community alike.

"If you look at GE Reports, we are a science, tech, innovation online magazine, sort of in the vein of *Wired* or *Popular Science* or *The Economist's* science and technology section," explains the managing editor of GE Reports, Tomas Kellner. "Engineers—that audience is really big for us. Shareholders are potentially a really big audience. Most people will not buy a jet engine during their lifetime, but who knows what's going to happen in 10 years? Maybe they'll get smaller, and everybody will have a personal plane or a flying car."

**"We are a science, tech, innovation online magazine, sort of in the vein of *Wired* or *Popular Science* or *The Economist's* science and technology section."**

**TOMAS KELLNER**



## Content Execution Plan

How will you manage to create your content? Will you build an in-house team, rely on a combination of freelancers and in-house talent, or rely primarily on freelance talent? Are you in need of a technology platform to manage your editorial calendar, workflow, approval process, hierarchy, and consistent publishing cadence so that you can create content at the speed of news? Most importantly, how will you continuously produce better content and become more efficient over time?

These are all questions that much be answered, and in our third e-book in this series, Content Strategist Playbook: Content Execution, we'll examine how top brands structure their newsrooms, and provide a template for evaluating all the potential content marketing partners at your disposal.

For instance, Coca-Cola Journey is the beverage giant's online magazine, which attracts over a million readers each month. Managing Editor Jay Moye publishes 15 to 20 stories each month through a "virtual newsroom," as most of the team, including Moye, works remotely. They use the Contently platform to manage their editorial calendar and collaborate with freelance talent. "We've really tried to carve out a beat system with our Contently writers," Moye explains. "It's nice to know who we can go to for certain stories." Those beats include a sports writer, a food writer, and business writers.



**"We've really tried to carve out a beat system with our Contently writers."**

**JAY MOYE**

## Distribution Plan

“If you build it, they will come” may have worked for Kevin Costner in *Field of Dreams*, but it sure as heck doesn’t work in the modern media landscape. In 2015, there are more options for paid content distribution than ever—from recommendation widgets like Outbrain and Taboola to hyper-targeting on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter to emerging experimental options like Snapchat and chat apps [like Kik and WhatsApp](#). You need to simultaneously build your organic distribution channels not just on social media, but more importantly, via email and search.

For Tomas Kellner of [GE Reports](#), email is especially key. Kellner built the GE Reports subscriber list from scratch, but that list of 15,000 devoted daily readers is now a big way for each story to gain traction. “We love email. It

may sound like old school, but e-mail subscription is really a hard-wired link to your audience. For us, email subscribers are an extremely valuable audience that we want. Every day, 15,000 people get the blast from GE Reports that a new story is out,” he explains, adding that the number of email signups that a story drives is a key content metric.

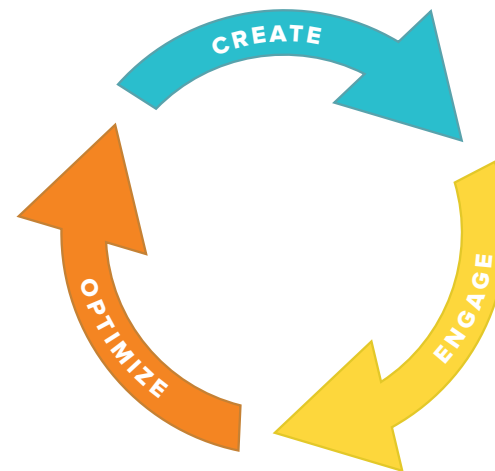
That link between distribution and key metrics is strong. Getting the most out of your distribution requires a data-driven approach in which you’re constantly testing and tweaking different combinations and iterations of content. Luckily, there are some secrets to success, which will be the subject of the fourth Ultimate Content Strategist Playbook: Building an Audience.

## Content Measurement and Optimization Methodology

Ultimately, most content marketing programs will be judged by whether or not they drive business results, and that's a scary proposition. According to CMI's 2015 report, only 21 percent of B2B marketers say that they're successful at tracking the ROI of their content marketing program. For [B2C marketers](#), that number sits at 23 percent. Those numbers aligns with our own research from this past summer, which found that only 9 percent of marketers are highly confident that [their key content metrics are driving business results](#).

As we outlined earlier, it doesn't have to be that way. It's very possible to tie content marketing to different metrics, and we'll show you how next month in our fifth Ultimate Content Strategist Playbook: Content ROI and Optimization.

Also remember that content measurement isn't just about reporting. Your key content metrics should be informing your strategy, execution, and distribution on a daily basis. It's something we call the Content Flywheel, the visualization of a process in which key content metrics are the core components that inform how you create content, engage your audience and gain new readers, and then optimize accordingly.





# Conclusion

Content marketing takes time, and it's a process of trial and error. Marriott's efforts started with weekly blogs from an iconic CEO, and it still took six and a half years of successes, duds, and lessons before the brand was ready to go all-in with its ambitious 65-person content studio.

In 2015, however, the pressure to launch and scale a successful content marketing operation is greater than ever before. The digital media landscape has never been more competitive as brands, media startups, and old-guard stalwarts alike compete for a finite amount of audience attention. For any new content endeavor, you can move past any early growing pains as long as you have a comprehensive plan in place and protocol for learning from your mistakes. But failing to put in place a cohesive strategy? That's unacceptable.

The smartest brand publishers on earth have their game plan figured out, and they're ready to compete and stand out in a crowded media environment. If your brand isn't there yet, that's okay. Take this e-book and start making the case for a content marketing within your organization, and over the next five e-books, we'll guide you through everything you need to know to build a powerful content marketing machine. Head here to ensure you get each one in your inbox the moment it's released.

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