



Small Business Guide to

Building a Content Marketing Framework



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Small Business Guide to

Building a Content Marketing Framework

Every business, no matter how small, needs a solid content marketing plan. Effective content marketing is the key to building successful marketing campaigns, engaging your prospects and customers, and keeping your brand top of mind even if your audience doesn't always buy from you.

Whether you're brand new to content marketing or have been doing it for a while and need to refine your approach, this guide is for you. It's designed to help you build a content marketing foundation from scratch or refine an existing one with fresh messaging ideas and new inspiration.

What is content marketing?

Content marketing is the art and science of communicating with your target audience to build a relationship that doesn't focus on hard sales pitches. A content marketing plan gives businesses a structured yet flexible way to tell their brand story and values in a way that's both organic and organized. To the audience, your content should seem free-flowing and conversational. But, behind the scenes your content, messaging, and promotional activities are far more strategic and deliberate.

What is a content marketing framework and why do you need it?

What it is: A content creation framework offers a well-planned structure for creating and distributing your valuable content across multiple channels.

Why it's important: All too often, smaller businesses tend to improvise communications like emails and social media posts instead

A content marketing plan gives businesses a structured yet flexible way to tell their brand story and values in a way that's both organic and organized.

of spending time creating a strategic plan. However, by creating a content marketing framework you provide a more consistent way for prospects and customers to engage with you.

Think of it as an ongoing dialog. As with any dialog, there's plenty of room for improvisation and responding creatively to new opportunities and information. However, a content marketing framework helps you guide the conversation in a more strategic way with a coherent, consistent, and engaging brand story.

How to build a content marketing framework

Whether you're building a content marketing framework from scratch, or retooling your existing approach, the tasks ahead can seem daunting, especially for small business owners who have plenty of other hats to wear.

However, building a content marketing framework can be as simple or as complex

as you want it to be. For small businesses that don't have a marketing team (or the budget to hire one), know that with some planning, successful content marketing can be easily incorporated into your workflow — even if you're new to the process.

Step 1: Align your content marketing strategy to your business goals

Although a content marketing framework is more about building customer relationships and brand awareness, you want to make sure

it aligns with your business goals. Remember to make sure that your goals are **SMART** (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) so you allocate the time and resources needed to attain them.

Step 2: Perform a content audit

A content audit is the process of categorizing and analyzing all of the content on your website, including web pages, blog posts, graphics, videos, surveys, downloadable files, and more. This may sound daunting, but a Google search will turn up many content audit

templates to make this process as quick and easy as possible.

Once you've chosen a **template** and populated it with your existing content inventory, you can then analyze how that content has performed in the past with existing customers and prospects. You can also determine if some content is overly repetitive (such as multiple blog posts on the same topic) or could benefit from better search engine optimization (SEO) to improve search rankings. For instance, optimizing your meta descriptions could improve searchability

6 STEPS TO BUILDING A CONTENT MARKETING FRAMEWORK



1

Align your content marketing strategy with your business goals



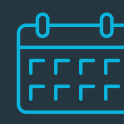
2

Perform a content audit



3

Understand your target audience or "buyer personas"



4

Create a long-term content plan with achievable goals



5

Refine your content ideas



6

Reuse and repurpose your content

(or you can start adding those if you hadn't done so previously).

A content audit is also a great way to clean up your site by fixing broken links or removing pages that are no longer relevant. Beyond that, you can use tools such as [Google Analytics](#) to analyze web pages according to key performance indicators (KPIs) such as [bounce rates](#), conversion rates, page views, and more.

The ultimate goal of your content audit is to ensure your content maps to both customer needs and your business goals. Reviewing your current content helps ensure that it's optimized and relevant, and provides a baseline for you to launch future content initiatives.

Step 3: Understand your target audience or “buyer personas”

Whether you're new to creating buyer personas, or you're a pro at using [customer relationship management \(CRM\) tools](#) to analyze customer demographics and sales trends, the key here is to know your audience so you can create the most engaging content. In addition to understanding their demographics (geography, age, income level, etc.), it's also helpful to know their pain points, purchasing habits, and relevant interests so you can determine how each aligns with your business offerings.

For this content framework, we'll use the example of a small business that sells locally grown cut flowers. The company, which normally sells to individual consumers, small retail shops, and restaurants, wants to expand its customer base and revenue by entering the highly competitive and crowded wedding industry. The company's business goal is to land five wedding contracts within the next 12 months. Understanding this new target



audience can help the company shape its content marketing framework to engage these prospective buyers.

The cut flower business may already have a base of loyal customers interested in sustainable agriculture and supporting local businesses. However, to reach a new base of potential buyers such as wedding planners and floral designers, the company will need to identify some key aspects of their buyer personas.

How to create and engage with buyer personas

The business owner could start by creating 3-5 buyer personas for their key prospective customers. This, of course, will take some research to identify the most relevant aspects of these personas, but [this free template](#) can greatly simplify the process.

After creating your buyer personas, spend some time mapping out how they would engage with your business and how content

would drive their [customer journey](#). Depending on your resources, you can use past purchasing data, survey existing customers, review competitors' marketing collateral, or perform a market analysis to understand how these personas will engage with your business. Ultimately, you want to make clear, informed decisions that guide your content marketing efforts (and customer purchasing decisions) so you don't waste time simply guessing.

To better target content to these audiences, tools like [Clearscope](#) and [SEMrush](#) can help you identify which types of content are most meaningful to these personas, research relevant keywords, and optimize the final deliverable.

Step 4: Create a long-term content plan with achievable goals

The definition of "long-term" might vary, but your content marketing plan should typically cover a minimum of three months and up to a year. More importantly, your long-term content



Understand your target audience

plan should help determine the right cadence for creating and publishing new content. For instance, you might decide to publish two blogs per month, three social posts per week, one survey per quarter, etc. Ultimately, you have to ensure that the type and frequency of your content aligns with your SMART business goals and is routinely analyzed to ensure it meets your KPIs.

For instance, after stating the business goals and target audience, the cut flower business wants to create a 12-month content plan broken down into three-month quarters. Here's an example of what those goals might look like:

Goal #1: To increase leads by 12%, create four shareable/downloadable assets to capture contact information by December 31.

In the example of the cut flower business, the owner wants to create very specific yet detailed content to meet her business goal — and her time constraints. She's decided that, since the wedding industry typically has a long lead time, it would be great to create a body of educational content that can be downloaded and shared from the website and across social media and email.

As a result, she decides to create a series of four eBooks to increase organic traffic called "Seasonal Flowers for X Weddings" with "X" being Spring, Summer, Winter, or Fall. These guides, with minor updates, would remain on the company's website year-round, and provide a list of flowers that are generally available at different times of the year and include examples of various floral arrangements. This would give prospective wedding planners and couples-to-be a way to plan their floral themes around local flowers that are available at specific times of the year. After creating these guides, the business can then create timely blog posts and social

media and email campaigns to share them with prospects and loyal customers alike.

Use content creatively, but with purpose

Of course, for your own business, you can choose from nearly endless content types to meet your stated SMART goal, such as [videos](#), photos, [newsletters](#), surveys, eBooks, guides, infographics, customer spotlights, case studies, and more. It's important to choose the right tool(s) to engage your audience rather than get caught up trying to create tons of different content in different formats without a specific purpose in mind — which can be a costly mistake in terms of time and money if they don't perform well.

Goal #2: Create a 12-month blog calendar of two blogs per month, each aligned around a quarterly theme.

A great way to create blog posts is to schedule them around timely events, which helps ensure that your website and social media pages stay updated and fresh as you add new content. While shareable content serves a valuable purpose, it's important to keep your website continuously refreshed with new types of content to help improve your results in search engines (and stay relevant to your audience).

An editorial calendar is a must-have for any content marketer so you can schedule and track the varying types of content you want to create around an upcoming event or theme.



[Click here to view a sample content calendar template.](#)

Don't overlook the importance of blogging

Blogging should play a big role in your content marketing strategy. Not only is it inexpensive and relatively easy to do, for many companies, it's the [#1 source of Internet traffic](#). Organized and well-written blog posts that creatively use top search engine keywords can be one of the most effective ways to improve your company's performance in Google searches. This is because consistent and relevant blogs typically rank higher in search queries. This can also extend to guest blogging opportunities, which can help you improve your standing as an authority on certain topics.

Educational or "how-to" blogs are a great way to position your company as a knowledgeable leader. For the cut flower business, an example of an educational topic might be a blog post that highlights the benefits of choosing in-season, local flowers vs. flowers that are shipped from thousands of miles away.

Stay relevant with event-themed blogs

In addition to educational topics, highlighting timely events in your blog is also important. For the cut flower business, things like bridal expos, events that celebrate local agriculture, Small Business Tuesday, and other events are great things to highlight in blogs and social media posts — especially if and when the company attends those events. And of course, including links to those events is important as well.

Step 5: Refine your content ideas

After you've built out a rough content framework, it's time to dive a little deeper into your ideas. The goal here is not to inextricably commit to these topics, but to ensure your content is unique and dynamic across your long-term content plan. Of course, if a great content opportunity presents itself and you decide to replace another topic with it, that's great! The overarching goal of your content marketing framework is not to lock you into

topics, but to provide a detailed structure that can adapt as necessary.

After you've created your blog calendar, review it to ensure accountability. For instance, write out specific blog headlines and even a short summary attached to go-live dates. So instead of simply adding "April flower blog," make it more specific, such as "Flower Spotlight: Why Cornflowers Should be in Every Spring Bridal Bouquet."

Using A/B testing to further refine your content

Once you start generating content according to your plan, it's important to evaluate its performance through A/B testing (also known as split testing). A/B testing compares two versions of a web page, email, or other marketing asset to determine whether one performs better than the other. You can perform A/B testing with just about any piece of content, such as email and blog posts. You can also test more granular elements such

as headlines, calls-to-action (CTAs), images, blog length, best days and times to publish, and more. You will likely discover that certain types of content performs better than others, and this will in turn help you to continually refine your content calendar to ensure the best performance.

Step 6: Reuse and repurpose your content

As a small business owner, you may be thinking, I don't have time for all of this! But the great thing is that much of your content can not only be shared, it can be reused and repurposed into new content that does not require much time or effort at all.

For example, the cut flower business could create four blogs that drive readers to the seasonal flower guides on the website. These blogs could be quick summaries of the guides, and perhaps pull in some newsworthy topics, such as highlighting a new variety of a flower that's available that season.

Much of your content can be reused and repurposed into new content that does not require much time or effort at all.

You can also consider turning your written content into videos or podcasts (and vice versa) to appeal to people who prefer visual or audio content. You may also want to create an infographic out of a blog post that can be easily shared and promoted on social media. The idea here is that you don't have to constantly come up with unique content topics; by simply repurposing high-performing content into new types of assets you can keep your content fresh and engaging.

How to be creative on a budget

Not all entrepreneurs and small businesses have in-house creative design teams or video experts. But with the dramatic improvement of video and photo editing technology and simple graphics software, even amateurs can diversify their content offerings with photos, videos, graphics, webinars, and guest blogging. Podcasts are another great way to connect with your audience because they are easy to create, and reach those who prefer audio content over video or text.



Here's where you can get creative depending on your business and brand voice. Does vlogging appeal to you, or have you dreamed of setting up a YouTube channel that features regular how-to videos? Or how about using simple image and text editing software to create downloadable PDF checklists or shopping guides? Are there websites or channels you'd like to guest blog (or vlog) for?

The point is, we are all to some extent immersed in online content, whether through landing pages, social media, websites, email, streaming platforms, and more. Keeping your content dynamic, relevant, and engaging means it's time to start exploring new content formats to determine how to best engage your audience.

How to distribute your content

So, now that you have all of your great content ideas in place, how do you go about actually promoting them? Of course, your company's website and social media channels including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, LinkedIn, and others are obvious tactics. Creating targeted email campaigns to existing and prospective customers is another, and this can be a highly effective strategy especially if you already have a [marketing automation platform](#) in place.

DISTRIBUTE YOUR CONTENT

A plan to distribute and promote your content is an essential part of your content marketing framework. Here are some simple, effective, and free ways to promote your content:



Reach out to influencers on social media and ask them to share or comment on your content.



Add social sharing buttons to your content, which can generate up to 7x more social mentions.



Create snippets of your content and share them on social media.



If your budget allows, consider paying for sponsored ads on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.



Add links from your most popular content pieces to the new content.



Reshare the same content across multiple channels more than once. You may catch viewers who missed it the first time.



Submit your content to relevant communities.



If you created a written piece of content turn it into a video and share it on YouTube to appeal to a different audience (and vice versa).



Add relevant hashtags to your posts to make it easier for Twitter users to find your content. (The key here is “relevant.”)



Be sure to include SEO keywords in your blogs and social posts.



Run social media contests and promotions.

Conclusion

No matter where you are in your content marketing journey, hopefully this guide gives you some new ways to rethink your approach to engaging your audience with fresh and dynamic content. The world of digital content creation and analytics is constantly changing, and as such it presents both exciting possibilities and daunting challenges to small business owners who already have innumerable responsibilities. However, a good content marketing framework can actually make your job easier by driving engagement using [data-driven tools](#) and approaches, which eliminates the stress of guesswork and “flying blind.” More importantly, an organized approach to content marketing will pay off when you start to see increased engagement from both prospects and loyal customers — which will in turn convert to increased sales and revenues.



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8800 N Gainey Center Dr Unit 200, Scottsdale, AZ 85258