

Best Practices

Content Strategy - Part I

FS

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What is content strategy?

What is content strategy?

Content strategy can mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people. But any strategy should be about more than just what content you plan to deliver.

Content Strategy for the Web by Kristina Halvorson and Melissa Rach said it best:

What you need to know

- 1 Voice & tone
- 2 Your audiences

“ Content strategy guides your plans for creation, delivery, and governance. Sometimes content strategy may focus specifically on the editorial, structural, or technical aspects of content. And sometimes, it may be an enterprise-wide effort that’s directly tied to high-level business strategies. In either case, content strategy helps us to find ways to better understand all aspects of our content, which means we can make smarter, more informed decisions about how we’re going to select and execute our tactics.

Voice & tone

What is voice & tone?

On the web, content is king. A beautiful design will help you stand out, but the design is only as good as the writing and imagery it presents. Keeping aligned in your voice and tone will enable a consistent writing style. Voice and tone are the two main components of writing style, as explained in *Nicely Said: Writing for the Web with Style and Purpose* by Nicole Fenton and Kate Kiefer Lee:

Voice & tone keywords

- Formative
- Warm
- Inspiring
- Pragmatic
- Confident
- Open/Transparent
- Adventurous

“ People often use the words voice and tone interchangeably, but they’re not the same thing. Your voice is your company’s public personality. It doesn’t change much from day to day. Like your own individual personality, it comes through in all of your content and influences how people perceive you. On the other hand, your tone changes to fit the situation. While your voice is more about you, your tone is more about your readers and how they feel. Together, your voice and tone make up your writing style.

Formative

MICA is a place where intelligent, creative individuals from around the country and the world come together for a brief moment in their lives. A student who comes to MICA will be forever changed by their experience. Take the opportunity to highlight the transformative nature of the academic programs, faculty, the community, and the resulting student outcomes.

Warm

A prospective student is making a decision about where to spend the next several years of their life, often away from their parents for the first time. Amongst all the talk of tuition, portfolios, and application deadlines, prospective students are also looking for a place to feel at home, a new community to become a part of. When talking about campus life and housing, keep that emotional side in mind. That sense of community should be present in the way MICA talks about academics and support services as well.

Inspiring

MICA plays an important role in the Baltimore and the national arts community. When visitors arrive at the MICA website, they should feel compelled to wander, explore, and take action. Hold their attention with vibrant imagery and captivating stories. Inspire your users to take action, whether that's attending an event, applying to a program, or simply exploring the art.

Pragmatic

It's easy to see art school as something frivolous—getting an education outside of the STEM fields can earn students lots of unwarranted criticism. However, an education at MICA is more than just studying the abstractions of art, it is deeply rooted in using creative thinking and structure as a launching point for any number of careers. When MICA speaks about itself, it should be with a practical tone that indicates the real world value of the skills and experiences students will have as part of their education.

Confident

MICA knows that what has to offer is valuable, to both its student body and its wider community. Writing with confidence is willing to state bold ideas plainly, to know that the school's experiences and knowledge are valuable in the world today. Don't shy away from strong statements about your values, your point of view, and the reasons it makes sense to attend.

Open/Transparent

MICA is not a place that has any intention of hiding who it is. It is a place that values honesty, both as individuals and as an institution. Being open and transparent means being plain and direct about your intentions and reasoning, and giving your community access to the internals of the organization—especially its people and process.

Adventurous

College is an exciting time, a time of exploration and learning about yourself and the wider world. MICA catalyzes that exploration by bringing together diverse people into a safe environment that encourages them to explore. When describing the opportunities that MICA offers to its students, infuse it with that sense of adventure, excitement, and potential.

Knowing your audiences

Who are your primary audiences?

Primary

- Prospective Students (Graduate, International, Open Studies, Transfer, Undergraduate)
- Current Students (Graduate, Open Studies, Undergraduate)
- Alumni
- Parents
- MICA Employees (Faculty, Staff)

Persona journey maps reminder

The audiences outlined here are from the Creative Brief. These are the groups of people that we collectively identified as important audiences.

It is important to remember that each have different motivations, backgrounds, wants, and needs.

Refer to the persona journey maps for more detail about some of these audiences.

Who are your secondary audiences?

Secondary

- Influencers
(Art Teachers, Cultural Influencers, Guidance Counselors)
(Presidents, Provosts, and Deans from Art and Design programs)
(Rating Guides like US News & World Report)
- Baltimore Arts Community
- Donors
(Corporate, Private)
- Prospective Employers
- Professional Organizations
- Business Community
- Cultural Explorers

What are people trying to do?

Individuals usually fall into one of 3 mindsets when they are visiting the site.

User mindsets

- 1 Explorers
- 2 Information seekers
- 3 Doers

Explorers are getting to know you

Not every user who comes to the website will know exactly what they are looking for. Some users are explorers who want to discover as much about you as possible. The goal of pages oriented toward explorers is to make their journeys as enjoyable and fruitful as possible. Write content and user components that encourage discovery and organic, non-linear explorations through the site.

Information seekers are looking for answers

Information seekers come to the website to find answers to specific questions. Page content for these users should be focused and as helpful as possible. Users will always look to the main content on any given page for actionable and relevant information. Short, directed paragraphs, sensible and straightforward headings, lists, and useful links will help them find what they're looking for. Other rich content types can be used to enrich pages, but they should always be secondary to the main content.

Doers want to complete a task

Doers come to the website to accomplish a task. They may want to begin an online application, donate money, or find a specific document. Rather than exploring or absorbing content, their goal is to be efficient. Content for doers should be focused and direct, with a careful eye toward reducing distraction. Page titles and callouts should be clear and easy to understand. Forms should be laid out in a manner that is easy to scan and fill out.

In short, don't put obstacles in the way and avoid offering enticement to leave the page unless this completes the task.

Roles involved

**Maintaining content well
takes a team — and when
you work in a team, everyone
should have a role.**

Roles & responsibilities

Roles and responsibilities do not have to correspond with job titles, and might change depending on which content is being discussed. One person can fill multiple roles or, alternately, the responsibilities within each role can be split among multiple people. Just be sure that everyone is on the same page.

Roles

- Champion
- Content Lead/Editor
- Owner
- Writer/Creator
- Subject Matter Expert
- Reviewer/Approver
- Curator
- Proofer
- SEO Specialist
- Accessibility Specialist

**Together we can create a
living, breathing, compelling
online presence for MICA.**