

How To Measure Content Marketing:

A Universal Framework For Success

Over the last few years, the complexity of the content ecosystem has grown exponentially, with an explosion of social networks, distribution channels, formats, partners, and creators, all generating massive amounts of data. While all marketers know you can't improve what you can't measure, it can be extremely challenging for teams to develop a measurement framework at all, let alone do so in a way that sets them up to succeed.

Effectively establishing a measurement framework is the single most important foundational step for any content organization

Content is a unique type of marketing that has to be measured in the right way. Relying on paradigms from paid ads or website measurement tools that focus on basic metrics like page views or clicks insufficiently captures the value content creates and will lead your team astray.

Our experience has led us to develop a measurement framework built explicitly for content. It has been battle tested for years across leading organizations in the content space, from Fortune 500 brands to the world's largest digital publishers.

The Content Measurement Framework

There are two steps to measuring content:



1. Selecting business-appropriate metrics across four types of content goals



2. Creating a content taxonomy that captures the unique dimensions of your content and reflects selected content goals

The Four Types of Content Goals

The first step in any marketing activity is deciding what your goals are. Whether you're planning an always-on content strategy or an activation around a specific campaign, it is essential to establish your goals at the outset. The goals you pick influence the metrics that you focus on, which in turn affects the way you evaluate individual content items.



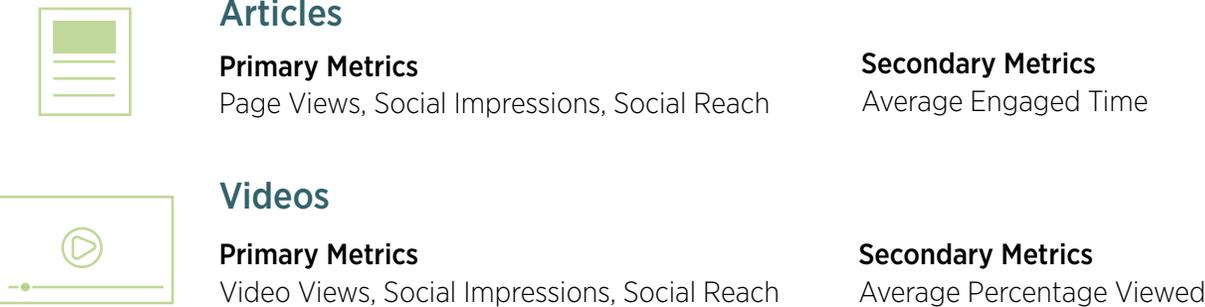
Choosing goals for your content program is entirely a function of your broader marketing goals and any specific mandates given to the content team. For example, if the expectation for the content team is to drive leads, then the goal to focus on would be conversions. When it comes to specific content items, the context and format of the content must be taken into account when selecting its goals, as not all content is ideal for all types of goals. For example, longform articles can do a great job of creating engagement, but tend to not drive social activity.

Once you've selected a goal, use the graphic below to find the metrics that matter for that goal. Since the first rule of any analytics platform is "that which gets measured, gets improved", the metrics you choose will inform much of your team's day to day activities.



Awareness

With awareness, the goal is to maximize the total eyeballs in a target audience that are exposed to content. As a result, the metrics that become most important are volume metrics - Views, Impressions, and Reach.



Page Views and Video Views are the most important metrics to focus on. Impressions and Reach are valuable in understanding how often posts or ads linking to the content were seen, but Views is the metric that captures awareness.

Potential Pitfalls

When awareness is the primary goal, it is an easy mistake to completely ignore engagement metrics like Average Engaged Time and Average Percentage Viewed. In the world of content marketing, this is a mistake marketers cannot afford to make, else they'll generate thousands of valueless interactions. The unique value of content comes from the time users spend with it, so generating Views and Impressions that don't result in a meaningful quantity of engagement are a waste of the format.

Engagement

Engagement is one of the most ill-defined metrics in the content industry. The general concept of engagement, readers actually consuming content at some level of depth, is one of the biggest reasons for the growth of content as a marketing channel. It's really important to get this right.

Articles



Primary Metrics

Average Engaged Time, Scroll Depth, Social Actions, Social Shares

Secondary Metrics

Page Views, Content Length, Content Format

Videos



Primary Metrics

Average Video Duration, Video Quartiles, Social Actions, Social Shares

Secondary Metrics

Video Views, Video Length

There is no single metric that is the most important in capturing and explaining engagement. Average Engaged Time and Average View Duration are the best measures for understanding the time users spend with the content, while Scroll Depth and Video Quartiles are excellent compliments, capturing the amount of the content the user interacted with. Social metrics like Actions and Shares augment our understanding of engagement by explaining whether users were motivated to introduce the content to their social circles, which is as strong a vote of confidence as there is.

Potential Pitfalls

Just as awareness campaigns require monitoring of engagement metrics, engagement campaigns require monitoring of traffic volume. Without sufficient volume for the engagement to have made an impact, the engagement itself is likely valueless.

Engagement comes with further challenges in contextualization based on the format and length of the content. Naturally, a 10,000 word longform article should have different engagement expectations than a five question quiz or a listicle. Similarly, a 30 second video's completion rate shouldn't be compared directly to that of a fifteen minute mini-documentary.

Social Activity

Social focused content is all about generating a "conversation" amongst and between an audience. There are an array of metrics that come into play when measuring social activity.



Articles and Videos

Primary Metrics

Social Referrals, Social Actions, Social Shares

Secondary Metrics

Influencer Shares

The best mechanism for quantifying the "conversation" on social is through an evaluation of Shares, Actions, and Referrals by social network. Shares are the mechanism through which the content makes it to the network and are a strong vote of confidence from readers.

Actions measure the responses to the content on the network, the more actions, the stronger the response. Referrals quantify the outcomes created by the conversation, tracking how many readers reached the content via those social networks.

Monitoring shares from influencers is an excellent tactic to identify the right opportunities to extend the “conversation”, and by extension, its reach, through responses and interactions from brand social accounts.

Potential Pitfalls

Unifying measurement of paid and organic social activity into a single platform will drastically improve understanding of performance and ensure marketers react appropriately. It eliminates false positives, identifies the right opportunities for promotion, and creates opportunities for generating virality.

Conversions

In some cases, a marketing team is tasked with focusing on lower-funnel activity, often pushing users into some form of lead or email capture. Evaluating how content impacted those conversion actions can be a challenging, but ultimately very valuable, endeavor.



Articles and Videos

Primary Metrics

Total Conversions, CPA

Evaluating conversion focused campaigns is fairly straightforward. Marketers simply track how many conversion events occurred, and whether the cost of acquiring those conversions (usually measured as cost of paid distribution of the content) was above or below an acceptable level.

Potential Pitfalls

Measuring conversions from content can be complicated. Marketers will usually have a DMP or Multi-touch attribution system that is evaluating conversion events and a separate content measurement solution. The challenge comes in unifying the data from those two systems in a manner that allows for easy and useful analysis. An industry best practice is to enrich the conversion tracking system’s data with information from the content measurement solution. This process helps marketers understand the impact of factors like content topic or format on conversion events.

Creating A Content Taxonomy

Once you know what your goals are and how you’re going to measure whether you achieve those goals, the next phase is to establish the mechanisms you’re going to use to identify optimization opportunities. In other words, it’s time to create a content taxonomy.

You’ll accomplish this by creating a system of tags and categories that your team will assign to each content item in your content management system (CMS). Your content analytics tool will consume this taxonomy and allow you to filter, organize, and otherwise slice and dice your content data to identify the segments best driving the outcomes you care about.

Your taxonomy should represent the characteristics and components of the content itself, so that you can extract the unique aspects of each content item. This taxonomy will form the backbone of your content experiments and be the mechanism through which you discover why your top content works — and how to create more content like it.

You should consider the following attributes when developing your taxonomy:

Topic: The topic(s) covered in the content. What is the content about?

Theme: Provide as much context as possible about what is in the content. Does it feature a celebrity? Is it data driven? Does it use music?

Style: Describe the style that is relevant for how you think about content. Is it comedic? Educational? Is it highly art-produced?

Format: Describe the formats in a way that makes sense for your business. Article, video, infographic, listicle?

Elements: What is in the article. Does it have an interactive quiz? Are there multiple images? An embedded video? Does it include user generated content?

Goal: The objective(s) of the particular piece of content. Is it designed to drive awareness, engagement, social actions, or conversions?

Author: Who created the content and potentially their role. Were they in-house, or produced by an agency or freelancer?

Campaign: A campaign identification. Was this content item part of a specific campaign or initiative?

As you run content experiments across your activations and initiatives, you'll use this taxonomy to answer questions about the content that is, and isn't, reaching your goals. For example, you may find that the four best content items in your Awareness campaign were all comedic videos about cats, while the educational data driven videos from publisher partners failed to drive the awareness metrics you were measuring towards. Similarly, you may discover that highly art produced infographics promoted via Outbrain were 2X more successful in reaching your goals than when they were promoted on Taboola, but simply designed infographics were entirely unsuccessful.

Developing these types of insights is the lifeblood of any successful content organization. Each incremental learning should guide production and distribution decisions, which will reduce wasted efforts and contribute to improving the content ROI equation.

Conclusion

Establishing the right framework for content measurement is no easy task, but one that is essential for marketing teams. Focusing on goal-supporting metrics and implementing a taxonomy that makes it simple to find optimization opportunities will minimize wasted time on low-value activities and enable rapid experimentation and insight extraction, all of which are the keys to success for any content team.