Content Planning: Establishing an Editorial Structure and a Disciplined Approach to Planning Content

59% of marketing executives surveyed by Forbes Insights report they are heavily involved in controlling the planning and creation of marketing content in their company. The marketing executives interviewed wanted help managing, directing and collaborating with a growing number of stakeholders inside and outside of marketing to ensure all content contributors are operating within an editorial structure and governance model. They were also looking for better ways to plan content and balance the urgency of product launches and campaigns with the discipline of a well thought out editorial process and long term content calendar. According to Judith Bitterli, the CMO of AVG Technologies “Marketing has changed more in the last five years than it has in the last fifty years. So as a marketer you not only have to have the marketing strategy, the technology, but also content. Content drives us – especially as we link into CRM, and into social media, phone-enabled mobile content. It is so critical that I have taken on the role of the editor in chief as well as chief steward of the brand. I manage the editorial process, we have an editorial calendar, we agree on the message of the week, we have a daily five minute (stand up) call to see if anything has happened in our world that we need to respond to or react to is there a position we need to put it out.”

Leading marketers are looking to adopt the editorial disciplines from the publishing industry to solve these problems.

What is Content Planning? Content planning involves putting in place an editorial management team, structure, and process to facilitate cross functional content planning, investment, and collaboration across the enterprise.

Why is it important? Building an editorial structure is important because as the volume of content contributes grows, these executives will need to find different ways to work with stakeholders inside and outside of marketing to ensure all content contributors are operating within an editorial structure and governance model. In addition, an editorial structure provides the CMO an additional lever to control content quality, consistency, and compliance to brand standards. A clear and focused editorial agenda is a practical but potentially very powerful mechanism to translate messages, themes and standards developed in corporate marketing down to the more tactical content production and execution processes that lay outside direct the control of the CMO. “A clearly defined editorial voice is critical to successful Brand Publishing, no matter what format, customer touch points, or how many content contributors you have. You must offer readers a tightly focused lens through which to view the world, the voice must be unswerving, unambiguous and unapologetic. Publishers that do not put forth an unequivocally clean and authentic voice will be niche-picket to death by more nimble brands” according to Lewis Dvorkin, the Chief Product Officer at Forbes.
Adapting the Editorial Structure to a Corporate Marketing Organization

Content Planning Best Practices

Leading marketers are taking these steps to establish an editorial structure and a disciplined approach to content planning:

1. Establishing an editorial calendar and agenda for the business
2. Systematizing content planning with publication calendar and workflow collaboration tools
3. Assigning an Editor in Chief to own content
4. Establishing a cross functional editorial board
5. Partner subject matter experts with writers
6. Assigning editors to specific aspects of the editorial agenda
7. Optimizing content planning with a data-driven content strategy and editorial inputs
8. Systematizing content audits and alignment
9. Building internal and external contributor networks
10. Integrate more content contributors into the marketing organization

These best practices are outlined below and cataloged in a practical action plan at the end of this report. Any references to specific enabling technologies are expanded upon in the section entitled: The Keys to Enabling Content Planning with Technology.
1. **Establishing an editorial calendar and agenda for the business:** Many of the marketing executives interviewed identified the lack of consistent upstream planning as a “pain point” for many marketers. For example, 3M is in the process of moving from “the knee jerk, ad-hoc creation of content to a more strategic map of what content gets produced and why”. Today, 50% of the marketing executives surveyed have established an editorial calendar to support the planning, sourcing and scheduling of strategic content assets across the enterprise.

2. **Systematizing content planning with publication calendar and workflow collaboration tools.** Many marketers are putting in place systems to help them streamline and automate the creation, planning and management of the editorial agenda using Content Marketing Platform s and modularized content processes. There are many technology providers who can enable the execution of a strategic editorial calendar across large complex organizations with many content contributors and stakeholders in the publishing process. Many leading marketers reported they are using best of breed Content Marketing Platform s such as Kapost, Percolate, Contently, Oracle, and NewsCred to streamline the management of the content calendar and efficiently facilitate collaboration and creativity across many different content contributors, sources, evaluators, editors, and subject matter experts needed to create effective marketing content.

3. **Assigning an Editor in Chief to own content:** 95% of the marketing executives surveyed report their organization is involved in the planning and creation of marketing content across the company. But only 11% of CMO’s report they have a specialist dedicated to the managing content across the enterprise. Best in class marketers are assigning a single person or team to establish, own, and define the editorial agenda across the enterprise, reporting to the CMO activating in a publisher capacity. Many of the marketing executives interviewed in the study had created an “editor in chief” function accountable to the CMO, or were planning to do so. Many were hiring managers with editorial and journalism experience from publishers like Time, Inc., broadcasters like CNN, or analyst firms like Altimeter Group. Others like Ricoh, 3M, and Cox Communications found internal candidates by recasting the head of Corporate Communications into the role of editor in chief by adding editorial leadership and message definition to their responsibilities.

4. **Establishing a cross functional editorial board.** To establish a more strategic content direction and plan for the entire enterprise, marketing executives are adapting practices from newspapers and magazines to create editorial boards made up of key cross functional stakeholders from inside and outside the marketing organization. To begin the process, marketers reported they included corporate communications and segment marketing teams into editorial boards. Over time, marketing leaders reported they are including some of the organizations that produce the most content – such as product marketing, training, and technical support - into the marketing and editorial structure.

5. **Partner subject matter experts with writers.** The marketing executives interviewed in the study view the separation of creation and packaging is important because creativity and insights are sacred when it comes to content production. According to Connie Weaver, the CMO of TIAA-CREF – “The subject matter experts and researchers need freedom to create great and compelling content. Don’t impose constraints on them in the name of efficiency. Don’t ask them to write to Lego blocks. You can do that later. You can work that into the process, and manage that with a middleman”. To improve the quality, leverage, and effectiveness of thought leadership content, leading marketers are partnering internal subject matter experts - such as product managers, analysts, and practice area leaders - with dedicated writing resources to create leverage, consistency and storytelling skills. “One of the things I have done in past jobs, and we are starting to do at VMWare, is to cultivate a stable of subject matter experts in the field and coupling those experts with real writers. This takes a little more work – the responsibility falls on
marketing to do the sourcing, developmental edits - but in the end you get content that is more targeted and relevant,” according to Jeff Spicer, VP of Content Strategy at VMWare.

6. **Assigning editors to specific aspects of the editorial agenda**: Marketers are assigning editors (or content strategists) to cover strategic content areas, including validation content, segment content, or thought leadership. For example, D&B dedicated people by content type – such as reference management, ROI models, content marketing and thought leadership. Others such as broke out content operations by customer persona. According to Swanson, CMO of The Hartford “All of our content experts are organized around the customer segment and persona”

7. **Optimizing content planning with a data-driven content strategy and editorial inputs.** To help optimize content planning, many marketers are incorporating data-driven tools: social listening, audience intelligence, and predictive topic modelling into the editorial and topic modeling process. For example, AVG technologies uses audience intelligence and competitive intelligence tools that provide predictive recommendations on topics that has made our blogs much more effective than the competition. Most Content Marketing Platforms, Marketing Cloud solution suites offer audience intelligence and social listening capabilities either as part of their solution, or with integrations with best of breed partners. Marketing leaders are using best of breed audience intelligence platforms such as Unmetric, TrackMaven, Idio, TrendspottR, and BrandWatch can provide real time audience intelligence, using big data for early prediction of content trends and audience sentiment to support content planning and editorial agenda with integration

8. **Systematizing content audits and alignment.** Many marketers are using technology to ensure the alignment and relevance and context of content by streamlining and automating content audits and coverage analysis, and content coverage heat maps. Most marketers interviewed report their content strategy starts with an audit and assessment of the relevance, alignment and compliance of existing content to determine how well they content they have supports marketing and sales activity, and aligns with the customer journey. However, content audits, inventories, and alignment analysis are labor intensive and need to be updated. Several marketers report they are using advanced content marketing technologies to automatically audit and map their content assets to their processes and editorial agenda. For example, the marketing team at Cisco created an algorithm to identify content that has not been eyeballed in a long period of time and slotted for “retirement”. This allowed them to retired millions of pieces of unused content without impacting customers.

9. **Building internal and external contributor networks.** Marketers are building an expanded extend editorial and content creation capacity through distributed authorship by building and managing contributor networks. According to A survey of 368 marketing executives, one quarter of sales and marketing content is generated or sourced from are from external sources, writers and agencies. Many organizations are seeking outside contributors and writers to supplement internal marketing teams or agencies who lack the capacity, subject matter expertise, or skills to deliver the content they need. For example, 9% of the content sourced by the marketing organizations surveyed in this study was created by external subject matter experts.

10. **Integrate more content contributors into the marketing organization.** A survey of 368 marketing executives found that 93% of CMO’s view themselves as publishers, but between one third to two thirds of content contributors in their organizations do not report to them. To resolve this disconnect, marketing executives from Ricoh, Juniper Networks, and Cisco report are exerting more marketing control and oversight over key content producers from product, communications, training and services. Others like Tata Consulting Services have incorporated these disparate constituencies into an editorial board.
According to Mike Marcellin, the CMO of Juniper Networks “One of the things that is noteworthy at Juniper –is that we have a broad charter in marketing. As the CMO I have responsibility for all the things you would expect such as PR, branding, advertising, and web site. But in addition to that we recently reorganized to include product marketing, technical documentation, and training for our internal sales engineers and partners. We did that because these organizations create the majority of content used by digital channels. For example, we brought in the information experience team that creates technical documentation because we recognize that 60-70% of the content on our web site is actually technical documentation for customers and partners. We included training because were creating a lot of important content for our internal sales engineers, and our partners because it is important - but it was not necessarily landing with the intended audience.”