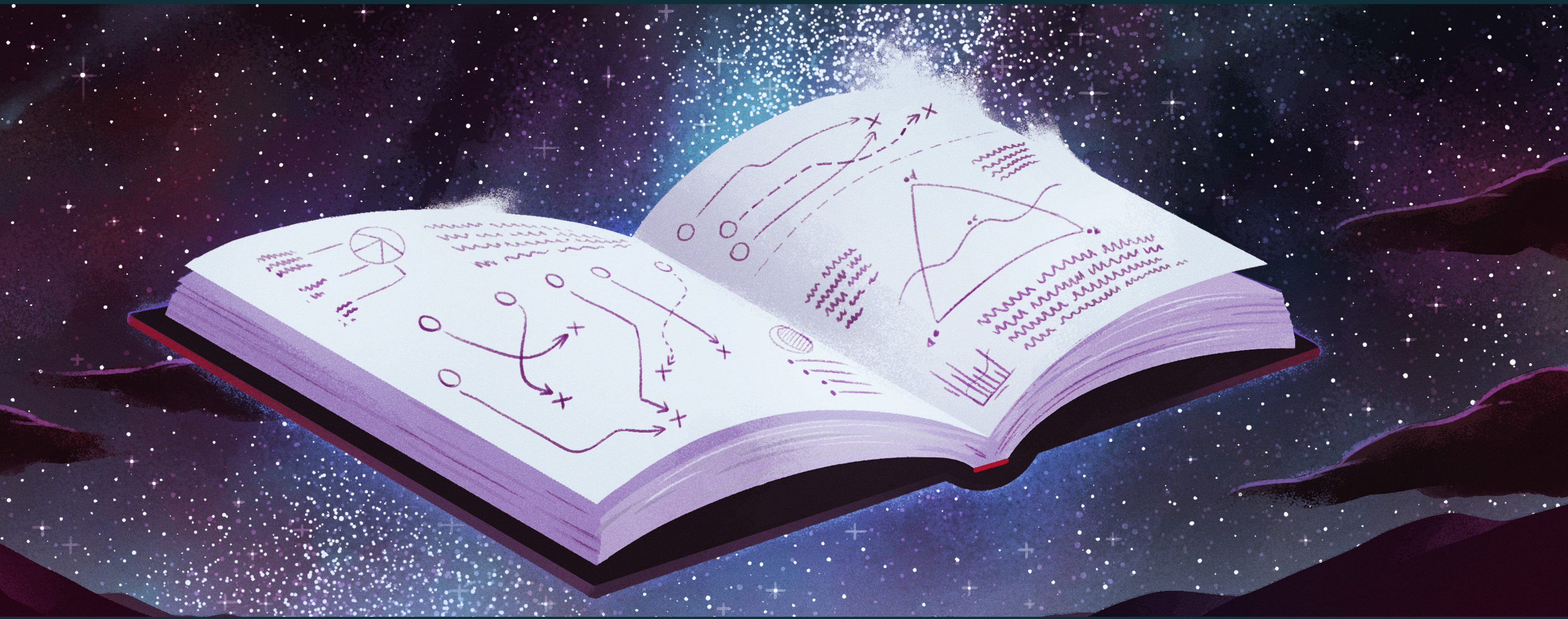
Contently

The Ultimate Content Strategist Playbook No. 5:

Measuring and Optimizing Your Content Marketing



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By Joe Lazauskas

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I read about two things obsessively: basketball and content marketing. So when I explain how metrics should be used in content marketing, I often wind up talking about the Miami Heat and their smart, data-crazy young coach, Erik Spoelstra.

There's a good chance you already know about LeBron James. But Spoelstra was the one who dictated the strategy for James and his teammates to succeed. Without him, the Heat may never have won anything.

Long story short, everyone expected the Heat to dominate from the get-go when James joined the team in 2010, forming a superstar trio with Dwayne Wade and Chris Bosh. But they struggled to play cohesively, and it took time for their coaches and players to evaluate what strategy worked best for their personnel. Eventually they won two championships and made four straight trips to the NBA Finals, but the team wasn't a dynasty from day one. They had great players from the start, but they needed to learn how to optimize.

Coach Spoelstra was the one who got them thinking about data the right way.

He didn't panic when the team struggled in their first season together and sportswriters openly wondered if the team was doomed. He didn't pressure team president Pat Riley into making a hasty trade and ship off one of his stars. Instead, the young coach, an infamous data cruncher, turned to advanced stats to understand what went wrong—and what the Heat could do to get over the hump.

To the casual observer, the Heat didn't appear to be a drastically different team between their first and second year, but those who studied the intricacies of the game saw just how important Spoelstra's adjustments were. He got the team to play an aggressive, unorthodox style of defense that complemented their athletic yet undersized roster. On offense, he turned one-on-one gridlock into a system of spacing and efficient corner shooting.

The story of the Heat's dominant run usually focuses on James, but in many ways, the unsung star was Spoelstra—the nerdy, lanky coach who would blend right in at a marketing conference and used smart analytics to tweak his strategy on the fly, giving the Heat the advantage they needed to rise to the top. He was half coach, half data scientist, and always looking for new ways to succeed.

To execute a successful content marketing operation, you need to embrace your inner Erik Spoelstra. Because for all the talk about "big data," many marketers still struggle to translate numbers into action. Part of that struggle is not knowing which metrics matter, but the other part is not doing the work on a daily basis to create the most successful content possible. If the Heat were coached by a stubborn, old-school guy who just stuck with a preconceived plan, there's a good chance James would have left South Beach without a title. Likewise, content marketers who stubbornly stick to their preconceived content strategies will never reach their full potential.

The good news: It's easier than ever to make smart, data-driven decisions. When armed with the right tools and an understanding of how to measure content in a way that reflects your goals, you can create a powerful system that keeps driving your content marketing forward.

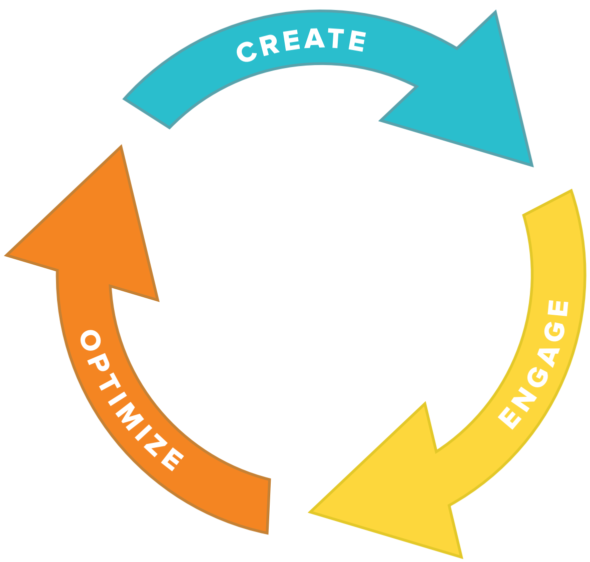
Continuous improvement is a challenge that every publisher faces today. The hard truth is that even after you've done everything we've covered in our first four playbooks—evangelizing a content program, crafting a content strategy, staffing and launching a publication, and putting an audience-growth plan into action—you still need to get better day after day.

It's an important step in the process that you need to get behind immediately. As Jay Baer told me in a recent interview, "It's really hard to figure out the metrics after. It's like pinstriping a car once it's moving." Edelman Chief Content Strategist Steve Rubel goes as far to suggest that brands should think about content distribution first, and everything else later.

"Brands need to put distribution thinking ahead of content development, which sounds completely backward. The history of the content industry is make something great—and that bar's going up by the way—and then think about how you distribute that great thing," he said. "What BuzzFeed and others have taught us is that you need to think about all of the different pathways that people take to find great things. You need to identify what those brands do, and what those content creators do, to get their content out there. It should not impede your creativity, but it should inform it."

If the Heat were coached by a stubborn, old-school guy who just stuck with a preconceived plan, there's a good chance James would have left South Beach without a title. Likewise, content marketers who stubbornly stick to their preconceived content strategies will never reach their full potential.

At Contently, it's a challenge we've tackled internally as well as with hundreds of brand and media clients. Over the past few years, we've come up with a solution, one that has the very executive-friendly acronym of C.E.O.: create, engage, optimize. Contently co-founder Shane Snow likes to visualize it with what he calls the flywheel (yes, it's actually a pinwheel, but flywheel sounds so much cooler):



The premise is simple. If you want to continuously improve the quality of your content and grow your audience, you need a secret weapon that tells you what content to create, how to effectively distribute it, how to measure the success of each piece, and then how to use those conclusions to fuel your next round of publishing.

This is a process that top digital publishers like BuzzFeed and Refinery29 have mastered, as Amanda Walgrove covered in a recent feature piece on The Content Strategist. However, the vast majority of brands still struggle with this process, in part because they're new at publishing, and in part because measurement is far less straightforward for brands than it is for publishers that sell display and native advertising based on impressions and pageviews. Brands have to deal with a slew of other metrics to measure success.

But that's why we're here. In this playbook, we'll cover exactly what metrics you need to use, then explain how to use those metrics so you're continuously employing them to create better content and engage your audience in the most effective way possible.

2. What to Measure: The Pageview Problem

For the past two decades, the pageview has been the dominant metric of success on the Internet. This makes sense: Publishers have largely generated revenue from display ad impressions delivered through sheer mass of pageviews. As brands have slowly embraced online publishing this decade, many have adopted pageviews as their primary metric for success as well—despite the fact that it has little to do with their ultimate goal.

After all, brands don't really publish with the goal of selling as much display advertising as possible; they want to build relationships with people in the hopes that some of these individuals will buy something one day. On their own, pageviews are a pretty poor metric for measuring those relationships.

Let's use an analogy: Relying on pageviews is like inviting a bunch of people to your company conference and then only tracking how many times someone passed through the front door. You have no idea what they did when they got there. Did they stay the whole day and tweet about how is was the #BestConferenceEva? Did they throw a vase on the floor and walk out three seconds later? Did they politely leave after five minutes because they were bored and the hotel had a hideous design straight out of the '90s? These are things you want to know when measuring whether your conference was a success and figuring out how to improve next time.

Relying on pageviews is like inviting a bunch of people to your company conference and then only tracking how many times someone passed through the front door.

So what metric measures how well a brand builds relationships with readers? This is something we've thought about in great detail at Contently—especially since we developed our Insights analytics dashboard designed for brand publishers last year. The truth is that there's no single metric that will do the trick, but there are a handful of proxy relationship metrics that, in combination, paint a picture of how well you're building that rapport.

Relationship metrics: The thing you study every day

Your core metrics are easy-to-understand stats that should be examined on a weekly—if not daily—basis, no matter what industry you're in. They evaluate how well you're building relationships with your readers, and those relationships are the key to driving a substantial long-term return on investment.

READERS:

Obviously, it's fundamental to know how many people you're reaching with your content. But you also want to know a number of other things about the reading experience, such as...

TOTAL ATTENTION TIME AND AVERAGE ATTENTION TIME:

Did a story actually get people to pay attention, or did they leave immediately? How much time did they spend clicking, scrolling, and highlighting the text? The amount of time readers spend with a story is crucial. According to Chartbeat, if a reader spends three minutes with a story, there's over a 50 percent likelihood that person will return sometime in the next week. The total attention time and average attention time (per user) a story generates is a great barometer of health.

ENGAGEMENT RATE:

What percentage of readers stay for at least 15 seconds? A low engagement rate is a big warning sign for a piece of content, be it due to a faulty paid traffic source, a misleading headline, poor design, or a terrible lead sentence.

AVERAGE FINISH:

What percentage of the story did the average reader finish? If the average reader drops off at the quarter-way mark, that's not good. If the average reader makes it through two-thirds or more, chances are the piece is pretty compelling.

AVERAGE ENGAGED STORIES:
Did a story actually get people to pay attention, or did they leave immediately? How much time did they spend clicking, scrolling, and highlighting the text?

SOCIAL ACTIONS:
How many times did someone share your content with their social networks?

NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIBERS:
What percentage of readers for each story converted to an email subscriber?

When looked at together, these metrics create a proxy measurement for the value your content is delivering to people.

ROI metrics: Optimizing for business results

Content doesn't drive business results overnight. You need to continuously deliver value to your readers—measured by the above relationship metrics—before you can expect your readers to give something back to you, be it in the form of a lead, a sale, or just an increase in brand affinity.

While it makes sense to measure and optimize for your relationship metrics frequently, ROI metrics are more of a monthly or quarterly affair.

"What you have to understand is that the companion to content marketing, and the companion to utility, is elongating your time-horizon for success," Jay Baer told me. "The whole idea is that you give away things of value and that you trust—and that's the magic word—that some portion of customers and potential customers will reward you for that eventually. But 'trust' and 'eventually' are the big words there."

Therefore, while it makes sense to measure and optimize for your relationship metrics frequently, ROI metrics are more of a monthly or quarterly affair.

BRAND AWARENESS / AFFINITY

Brand awareness is the new self awareness: Everyone wants it, but everyone has a different method for quantifying it.

In truth, relationship metrics are a fantastic indicator of how your content is contributing to brand awareness, measuring not only how many people you're reaching with your content, but also the depth at which you're reaching them and the positive actions they're taking in response to your work.

There are probably another 200 ways you could calculate some semblance of ROI, but, as Jay Baer explained, "In some cases you've got to ask yourself, 'What's the ROI of calculating ROI?' There's a lot of work and expense involved in doing so."

With that in mind, there are three metrics that are definitely worth calculating.

As Jay Baer explained, "In some cases you've got to ask yourself, 'What's the ROI of calculating ROI?' There's a lot of work and expense involved in doing so."

PR SCORE

One of the great things about content is that when you do it well and make news, publishers with valuable readerships will write about you. It's one of the big reasons we conduct and publish original research at Contently (along with our nerdy/obsessive curiosity about media/marketing issues). Probably no one is better at creating positive PR of late than GE Reports, which keeps feeding the science blogosphere with its GIF-heavy reveals of wild technology.

Best of all, most brands already have a methodology for measuring positive press. Our internal scoring process focuses on how well the publication reaches our target audience (*The New York Times* or Jeff.com?) and the prominence of the press mention ("Why We Love Contently and You Will Too" or a mention in the eighth paragraph that incorrectly describes us as the blog of an Australian fishing company?). The key is to make sure the press your content generates gets credited in your company's PR score—even if that means you have to infiltrate your company's PR department Rambo-style.

For a detailed look at how we structure our content score, check out this post by our communications manager, Ann Fabens-Lassen.

SEO

Content marketing drives great SEO, and dominating key search terms is the best awareness your brand should aim for. If people are searching for key terms related to your company, chances are they're interested in you. And the more your content dominates important keywords, the better your business is going to be. In the best-case analogy, you're like the only beer vendor on spring break.

This chapter of Moz's guide to SEO is the industry-leading resource for calculating the SEO value of your content. For comparing your SEO market share with competitors, check out SpyFu.

BRAND LIFT STUDIES

Measuring brand lift isn't something you can master quickly, but if you're in an enterprise company and struggling to prove why you need a larger share of the marketing budget, these studies can be hugely successful. BuzzFeed's case studies on its sponsored content campaigns with brands like Virgin Mobile present an interesting template for showing how content improves brand affinity (how much customers like you) and brand consideration (how likely those customers are to buy from you)—metrics that will get your CMO all hot and bothered in a good way.

BuzzFeed uses Vizu, a Nielsen company, to test how people feel about brand affinity based on whether readers have been exposed to the brand's content or not. The results are quite striking: BuzzFeed's sponsored content typically generates a brand lift of between 150 and 400 percent. If you don't want to pay for a relatively expensive service like Vizu, SnapApp has a real-time survey product that will do the trick.

LEAD GENERATION / NURTURING

If you work at a B2B company, chances are the goal of your content marketing isn't just brand awareness, but also lead generation and nurturing. It's easy to see why. Brands that create 15 blog posts per month average 1,200 new monthly leads, and companies that excel at lead nurturing generate 50 percent more sales-ready leads at a 33 percent lower cost, according to Forrester.

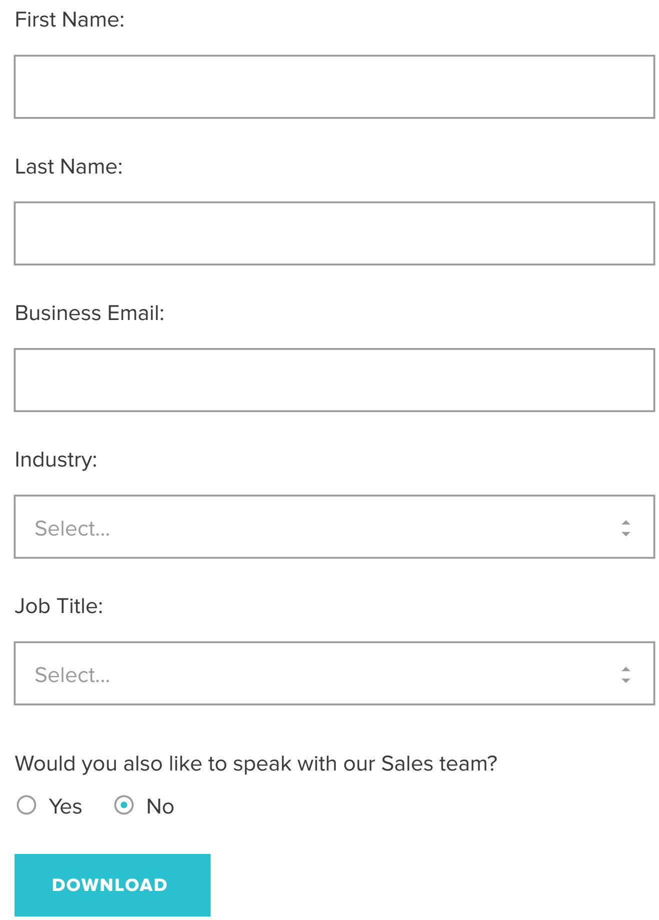
We use Marketo, a powerful marketing software program, to track how many leads our content drives.

LEAD GENERATION:

This is Marketo 101. If you're creating substantial longform content like e-books, white papers, and original research, consider gating those pieces with a lead form that requires an email address, like the one you filled out to download this playbook. Pro tip: To grade the quality of leads more easily, ask for additional information, such as a work-specific email address, industry, and job title.

LEAD NURTURING:

The beautiful thing about Marketo (if marketing software can be beautiful) is that when you integrate it with Salesforce, you can track the entire customer journey—from the first time someone finds out about you to the day they make a purchase and beyond—to evaluate the impact of your content.


First Name:

Last Name:

Business Email:

Industry:

Select...

Job Title:

Select...

Would you also like to speak with our Sales team?

Yes No

DOWNLOAD

TYING CONTENT TO SALES AND REVENUE

For most content marketers, tying content directly to sales and revenue is the holy grail. But it's a big challenge. As with all business metrics, there are many approaches—some simple, some complex.

The simpler approach begins with a basic understanding of the unit economics of your business, which varies greatly depending on your business. Let's say you're a SaaS company with an average deal size of $10,000, and you know that for every 50 marketing qualified leads (MQLs), 20 will commit meetings and demos, 10 will become opportunities, and one will close. That makes the raw value of each lead your content generates $200, since you need to create 50 leads to secure a $10,000 deal.

Of course, this is a rudimentary calculation that doesn't factor in expenses like salaries and general operational costs, which vary at every company and can reduce the value of the deal significantly. Let's say, for instance, that to turn 50 leads into that $10,000 deal, you're going to spend $5,000 on sales and operations costs. Then the net value of the deal is $5,000, and the value of each lead you're generating is $100.

Complicating things further is the lifetime value (LTV) of each customer. If you know that 80 percent of your $10,000 deals will renew, that adds another $8,000 of value into the equation, which you need to factor against customer service and operations costs. The good news is that there's a methodology for tracking and measuring this through traditional marketing channels at most companies.

At Contently, we prefer a simple, conservative, and effective approach that allows us tie a hard revenue number to a specific piece of content. In a recent blog post, our VP of content, Sam Slaughter, detailed exactly how we do that with a sample client:

The story concludes in March, with a contract signed by a new Contently client—a company that we'll call McDuck Enterprises. But it begins a month earlier, with a simple article. Using a powerful if often misused tool called Marketo, we're able to work backwards and track the whole customer journey... And what do you know: Content played a part almost every step of the way.

Sam goes on to break down how each piece of content played a role. First, in mid-February, the senior marketing manager at McDuck Enterprises checked out two Contently articles ("The 12 Best Content Marketing Blogs of 2014" and "How to Use Influencers to Build Your Brand's Owned Audience") that cost $700 total to produce.

Then, two days later, she came back again and read another two articles ("12 Startup Blogs That Are Killing the Game" and "These 4 Companies Prove Content Marketing Is Essential to Startups") that cost another $700 to produce. Two days later, that content started to pay off: Webby went to our homepage and filled out a lead form to talk to sales. She also read a couple of case studies (which each cost $450 to produce). And then she got on the phone with our sales team and scheduled a demo.

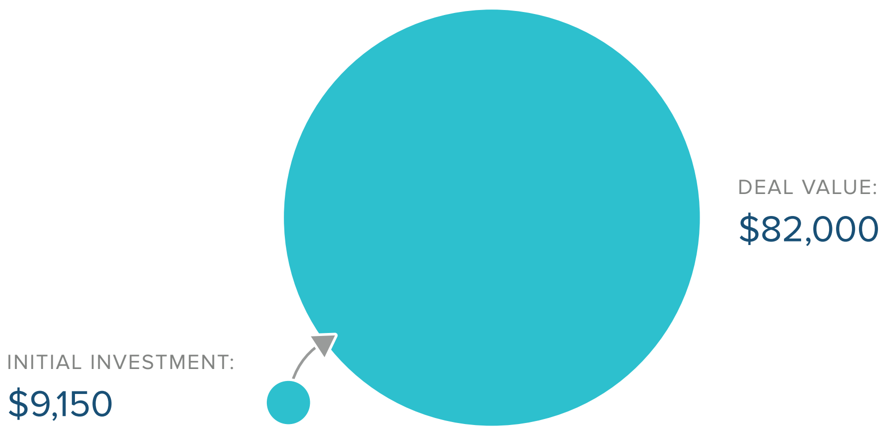
Fittingly, it was the final piece of content, "Build vs. Buy: Why Top Brands Are Leaning on Freelancers to Build Hybrid Newsrooms," that put her over the top to sign a deal for $82,000.

Sam breaks down the math in more detail to show how we attribute each piece of content to revenue:

DEAL BREAKDOWN:

MCDUCK ENTERPRISES

TOTAL ROI: 21.8X



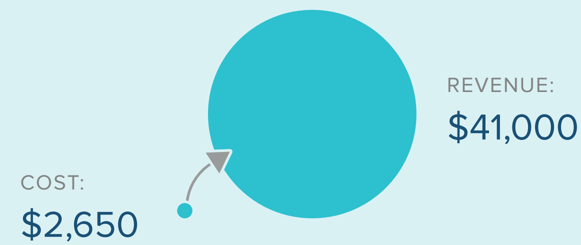
Between the time she came in the door and the time she was ready to sign a contract, Webby read five articles and two case studies. She visited seven pages of our website, and spent a total of about five hours on the phone with our sales team. Attribution is tricky, and there's no set standard, but here's a quick back-of-the-envelope calculation:

We decided to attribute 50 percent of the revenue to content and 50 percent to sales, since the first touchpoint came from an article (for outbound leads, sales would get a higher percentage of the credit).

DEAL BREAKDOWN:

CONTENT ROI

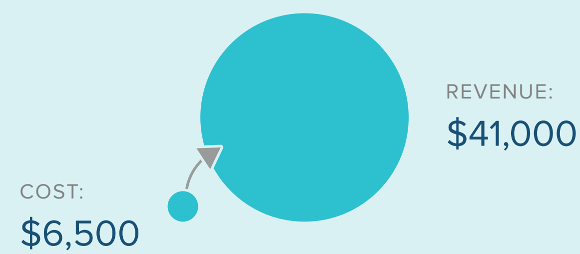
ROI: 15.5X



DEAL BREAKDOWN:

SALES ROI

ROI: 6.3X



BREAKDOWN:

CONTENT ROI

by Article

REVENUE:

$41,000

COST:

$2,650

TCS ARTICLE

12 Best Content Marketing Blogs

$8,200 (23x ROI)

20%

TCS ARTICLE

How Brands Use Influencers to Build Owned Audiences

$3,280 (9.4x ROI)

12%

TCS ARTICLE

12 Startup Blogs Killing the Game

$3,280 (9.4x ROI)

12%

TCS ARTICLE

These 4 Companies Prove Content Marketing Is Essential to Startups

$3,280 (9.4x ROI)

12%

TCS ARTICLE

Case Study #1

$8,200 (7.3x ROI)

12%

TCS ARTICLE

Case Study #2

$3,280 (7.3x ROI)

12%

TCS ARTICLE

Build vs. Buy

$3,280 (7.3x ROI)

20%

This methodology allows us to see exactly how much revenue a piece of content is driving—and keep in mind that this is only the ROI that a given piece of content has on one deal. In truth, a lot of our pieces have an impact on several deals—that "Build vs. Buy" piece, in particular, plays a role again and again—and thus have a much larger ROI.

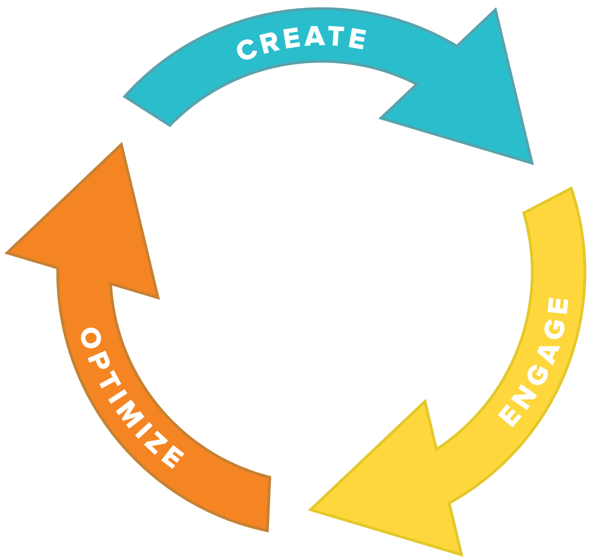
Each quarter, we calculate the total impact all our content has on our sales and weigh that against a lot of the content marketing costs not factored in here—stories that don't impact the sales funnel, our own inflated salaries, and the cost of the software we use to manage the process—and calculate the ROI of our whole content marketing operation.

While proving the ROI of your content marketing is crucial for getting a bigger budget, what really matters is using content analytics to constantly improve.

But the important thing here is to understand which specific pieces of content are driving a high return on investment so we can optimize for future rounds of publishing, doubling down on what works. While proving the ROI of your content marketing is crucial for getting a bigger budget, what really matters is using content analytics to constantly improve.

3. Optimizing the Creation Process

Let's return again to the flywheel. As we discussed earlier, your content metrics can't just be isolated. They need to work together to propel your content marketing to greater heights.



Let's start by looking at how to use content metrics to optimize the creation process. As we detailed in "The Ultimate Content Strategist Playbook No. 3: Staffing and Launching Your Content Marketing Program," there are a few important elements that go into that process:

1. The types of stories you tell. For reference, this is how our suite of story types looks:

QUICK HITTER

250–500 words to introduce breaking news, research, or a cool visual component like an infographic or video.

WEB-SOURCED IN-DEPTH

500–1,200 words based on web sources; includes a complex level of analysis.

BASIC REPORTED STORY

400–800 words with between one and three sources.

LONGFORM FEATURE STORY

1,000+ words with a compelling narrative focus and multiple primary sources.

INFOGRAPHIC

Graphic visual representation of information, data, or knowledge that communicates key industry topics.

VIDEO

A story up to five minutes long about storytelling, including interviews with thought leaders and/or brief news updates.

COMIC

Single or multiple panel illustrations lampooning the content marketing industry.

E-BOOK

3,000–10,000-word guides and industry reports, usually downloadable in exchange for an email address.

2. The topics you cover. Here are ours:

BRANDS

News, trends, and analysis of the branded content movement.

MEDIA

Journalism, native advertising, and the future of the media business.

ROI

Best practices for tying content to business results.

SOCIAL

Strategies, tools, and tips for spreading content through the social web.

VOICES

Thought leadership, opinions, and perspectives on the future of content.

3. The writers you use.

At Contently, we use the content platform and Contently Insights to tag each piece of our content with these elements and then examine how each element, or combination of elements, correlates with success.

This plan of attack lets us answer questions like:

Are infographics driving a lot more results than longform reported stories?

Are longform reported stories about brands resonating with our audience more than longform reported stories about media?

Are specific writers resonating with our audience more than others? If so, do these writers deserve more work?

We create our content using about a dozen regular freelance contributors in addition to our in-house staff. Since I don't want to publicly pit any of our writers against each other, I broke down the healthy competition inside our office between Contently co-founder Shane Snow and me to show we evaluate writers internally.

Here's a partial view of our dashboard that shows how our work has resonated with our audience so far this year.

WRITER PERFORMANCE:

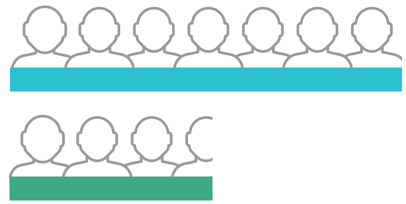
SHANE SNOW VS. JOE LAZAUSKAS

THE SHOWDOWN

Per Story

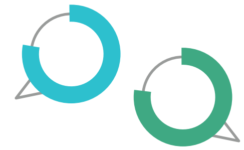
People

SHANE	JOE
1,477	760



Engagement Rate

SHANE	JOE
78%	77%



Attention Time

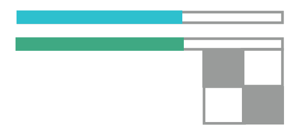
SHANE	JOE
4,922m	2,617m

Avg. Attention Time Per Person

SHANE	JOE
2m 17s	1m 59s

Avg. Finish

SHANE	JOE
62%	63%



Overall

PEOPLE

SHANE	75,000
JOE	160,000

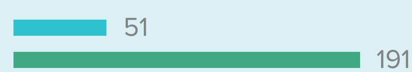
ATTENTION TIME

SHANE	259Km
JOE	682Km

AVG. ATTENTION TIME PER PERSON

SHANE	3m 28s
JOE	4m 15s

TOTAL STORIES



Thanks to the compounding return of content marketing—which we discussed in our third playbook—a lot of stories Shane or I wrote before January continue to draw readers this year. "The Best Branded Content of 2014 So Far," a story I wrote last April, was my third most-read story in 2015. Overall, people read 51 stories written by Shane, and 191 written by me—a gap that's mostly explained by the fact that Shane has other responsibilities like running a company, while I just get to screw around and make content all day.

At first glance, it may appear that I'm the true star of Contently Media; in total, my stories drew 85,000 more readers, and each story averaged 332 more attention minutes than Shane's stories. But digging deeper, that's pretty easily explained by the fact that I've written a lot more stories for The Content Strategist than Shane. On a per-story basis, Shane kicks my butt; his average story draws almost twice as many people and twice as much attention time, and people stick around Shane's stories 18 seconds longer (+10 percent) than mine on average.

As a result, whenever there's a situation where Shane and I are both free to cover a big story, it's going to him. It also tells me that I should harass Shane to write more in general—I've been at this job for 17 months and he still hasn't yelled at me for being annoying, so that's probably a failure on my part.

Without a doubt, Contently Insights makes this content analysis incredibly simple for us. But even without internal data software, adopting a similar strategy is just a matter of categorizing your content and tracking it, something that can be hacked together using any analytics platform and a Google spreadsheet—and, ideally, a type-A intern.

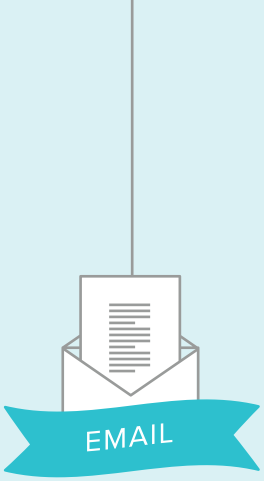
4. Optimizing the Engagement Process

After optimizing the kind of content you create, it's time to optimize how you distribute that content. All too often, new publishers spend an incredible amount of time and resources pushing content out through a specific channel even though it's driving pitiful results. That's why you absolutely need to keep a close eye on how each channel is performing so you can focus on what works.

Our fourth playbook covered how to build an audience through major content distribution channels. Now it's time to look at how to measure the impact of those channels. Most analytics platforms, including Google Analytics, will automatically capture traffic from major referral sources—Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, other publishers, etc. They won't track email traffic automatically, but there's a simple fix for that. For each newsletter campaign, just take 30 seconds to create custom tracking links using Google's custom URL builder tool. Also, each social network platform has its own robust page of analytics, which you should combine with your internal metrics to get a holistic sense of how your content is performing.

All too often, new publishers spend an incredible amount of time and resources pushing content out through a specific channel even though it's driving pitiful results.

To see how this works, let's dive into The Content Strategist's April data for our five major distribution channels: email, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google+.



OVERALL

PEOPLE	ATTENTION TIME
25,000	158Km

AVG. ATTENTION TIME PER PERSON

6m 11s

AVG ENGAGED STORY

ENGAGEMENT RATE	AVG. ATTENTION TIME PER PERSON
71%	2m 47s

OVERALL

PEOPLE	ATTENTION TIME
16,000	45Km

AVG. ATTENTION TIME PER PERSON

2m 45s

OVERALL

PEOPLE	ATTENTION TIME
4,605	12Km

AVG. ATTENTION TIME PER PERSON

2m 37s

OVERALL

PEOPLE	ATTENTION TIME
33,000	93Km

AVG. ATTENTION TIME PER PERSON

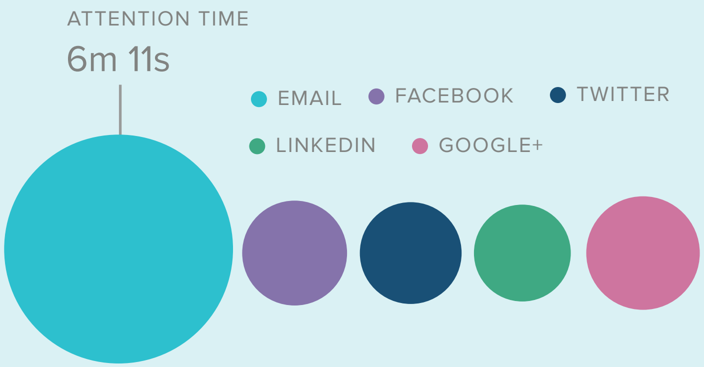
2m 50s

OVERALL

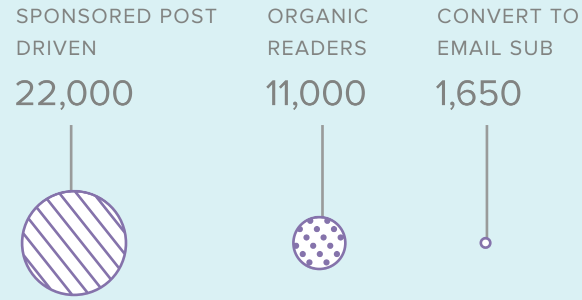
PEOPLE	ATTENTION TIME
175	538m

AVG. ATTENTION TIME PER PERSON

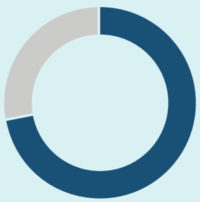
3m 04s



Email is an incredibly valuable channel, as it offers a healthy amount of readers who spend a lot of time—over six minutes on average—engaging with our content. Growing and optimizing our newsletter should be a huge priority moving forward.



Facebook—after search—was our biggest driver of total readers in April. However, this comes with a caveat: About two-thirds of those readers came as the result of targeted sponsored posts we ran to seed our content. The vast majority of the readers we're driving are engaged, staying for 15 seconds or more, and on average, they're spending more time with our content than readers who come organically from Twitter or LinkedIn. About 5 percent of new readers from Facebook are also converting into newsletter subscribers, so our Facebook strategy seems to worth the time and small paid media budget we put into it.

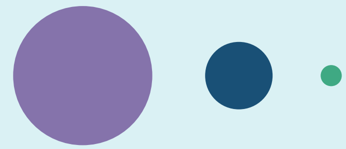


ONE WARNING SIGN:

Only 72% of readers engage with our content for 15 seconds or more.

Twitter accounts for only 0.82 percent of all traffic to publisher sites but drives about 8 percent of the traffic to our site, likely because media and marketing folks love to hang out on Twitter. While a lot of this traffic comes from readers sharing our content—rather than our own tweets—it's worthwhile for us to continue interacting with our 50,000 followers. Our media coverage of publishers like BuzzFeed, Snapchat, and *The New York Times* thrives on Twitter, and we should probably push that content more in our tweets. One warning sign: Only 72 percent of readers from Twitter engage with our content for 15 seconds or more, which makes me wonder whether our tweets are a little misleading, and is something we'll look into addressing.

LinkedIn readers as compared to Facebook & Twitter:



LinkedIn is a curious channel for us. Our content gets shared on LinkedIn more than on any other social network, and yet it drives a fraction of the readers as Facebook and Twitter. While the LinkedIn algorithm treats us right and our average post reaches about half of our 5,300 LinkedIn followers, our engagement rate hovers at 2 percent—significantly lower than Facebook or Twitter. Given how much our content is shared on LinkedIn, it's definitely an important platform for us to invest in, but there's also a good chance our strategy isn't optimal. It's something I'll dig into with our social media editor this month. One thing to note: Lighter content, like buzzword and stats roundups, perform better than our in-depth stories, so that's an important detail we'll consider when adjusting our approach.

175 readers from Google+. WTF.

Google+ is driving an irrelevant amount of traffic for us. If this was its only impact on our site, I would abandon it all together, and to be honest, it's been a C-level priority for us because of the low engagement. However, signs point to Google+ still having a huge impact on search ranking, with a few dozen engagements capable of rocketing you halfway up the page. Considering our audience of online marketers is probably the only demographic still using Google+, and since search remains the biggest traffic driver to The Content Strategist, we either need to figure out a strategy that works or abandon it altogether.

As you can see, the data isn't always blatantly prescriptive, but it can give you a very good idea of where to focus your time and energy, and which stories you should distribute through each channel. That way, every round of publishing will be better than the last.

Conclusion

Way back in our first playbook, we kicked off this series with the modern content marketing fairytale about Marriott and the story of one brave employee who marched into the office of an iconic boss who didn't even use a computer and insisted that he start a blog. Seven years later, Marriott has a young but thriving media company that sports a buzzworthy new travel magazine, a viral short film destined to dominate awards season, and a number of other successful new media projects. The company has ambitions to become one of the biggest travel publishers on the planet.

The blueprint is in your hands.

As new content studio head David Beebe told The Content Strategist: "If you add up all our own platform eyeballs, it's much larger than any publisher out there. We've got a media network just sitting here. We've activated it now."

Thinking like a true media company, Beebe even has plans to fund Marriott's content by selling sponsored content and native ads.

Reaching these heights may seem like a pipe dream, but it's worth remembering that Marriott started small. It started with a simple blog and a simple blog post. The company went on a journey, accumulated successes, and grew over time.

Over these last five playbooks, we've run the gamut, covering how to evangelize your content, create a killer strategy, launch an effective and innovative content marketing program, build an audience, and optimize every aspect of your content marketing. It's an exciting and arduous journey, but one that pays off in spades when you succeed. The blueprint is in your hands.

Unlike the hero of this playbook, Miami Heat coach Erik Spoelstra, you won't be left scrambling to pick up the pieces if your MVP leaves in free agency. After all, there are only a handful of 6'8'' athletes who can fly through the air, but writers and other creatives? There are tons of us out there, and we're ready to help you build something great.

Appendix

To help you keep track of your content goals, we created this basic handy scorecard. Happy optimizing!

KEY RELATIONSHIP METRICS (WEEKLY)	CONTENT OPTIMIZATION PRIORITY	SAMPLE GOALS	YOUR GOALS
Readers	High. More new and returning readers from your target audiences is crucial.	250K per month, 48% returning	
Social actions	High. Readers sharing content with your social graph is a great sign of brand affinity.	50K shares per month	
Attention time & average finish	Highest. Providing readers with content that they want to spend time with—and finish all the way through—is crucial.	800K attention time, 4:00 avg. time, 66% avg. finish	

ROI METRICS (MONTHLY / QUARTERLY)	CONTENT OPTIMIZATION PRIORITY	SAMPLE GOALS	YOUR GOALS
Content costs	High	1/3 of total budget	
Leads	Higher	3/4 of all marketing leads	
Revenue	Highest	75% of revenue	

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