

How to Build a Content Marketing Program at Scale



acrolinx

Six Must-Have Components

Over the past decade, content marketing has emerged as an essential strategy for companies to build their brand and earn their customers' trust. In fact, 78 percent of today's consumers prefer to get to know a company through articles rather than advertisements.¹ Meanwhile, 70 percent believe that companies that provide custom content are interested in building strong relationships with them. Content marketing has proven to be an effective way to enhance SEO, attract new leads, drive conversions, and demonstrate expertise.

With benefits like these, it's not surprising that 91 percent of B2B businesses report that they use content marketing.² And yet, more than 10 years after the so-called content marketing revolution began, just one-third of them describe their content marketing efforts as sophisticated or even mature. It turns out that running a successful content marketing program isn't easy. And, it's particularly challenging at large organizations, where scale is an issue.

Just one-third of B2B businesses describe their content marketing efforts as sophisticated or mature.



¹ Keran Smith, "Why is Content Marketing Important? Learn the Importance of Content Marketing for Your Business," Lyfe Marketing, January 16, 2018.

² "B2B Content Marketing: 2018 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America," Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs, September 2017.

The reality is that large enterprises have to overcome a number of challenges to drive successful content marketing programs. Beyond the typical hurdles that every business faces (securing resources, generating ideas, and differentiating themselves from competitors), large businesses also face pressure to:

- Enforce their brand and style guidelines across multiple content creation silos
- Maintain quality and consistency among hundreds or thousands of writers
- Ensure that all of their content speaks with one clear voice
- Create enough content to meet their business objectives
- Publish content efficiently
- Target their content for lots of different audiences, each with different needs
- Use the agreed-upon corporate and product terminology
- Translate content into multiple languages
- Correlate content effectiveness to business results

In the pages that follow, we'll take a look at how you can overcome these types of challenges to develop an effective content marketing program at scale. As we'll see, the key is to have all of the right components in place.



Content Marketing at Scale: Complexities and Challenges Abound

Large organizations can have dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of writers creating vast amounts of content. IBM, for example, has published over 100 million pages of content across its websites.

At large enterprises, content creators are typically distributed across many different departments, geographies, and locations (like agencies and freelancers who work outside the business). They also often speak different languages and are writing for very distinct audiences. Plus, they may have their own style and terminology, as well as unique processes and approaches to content creation. These and other types of variations create immense complexity, making it very difficult to operate efficiently or to manually implement enterprise-wide changes.

Here are a few examples of the kinds of challenges big content teams can face:



CHALLENGE

INEFFICIENCY

IBM has numerous content teams across 140 countries. Historically, those teams wound up creating similar or duplicate pieces of content, which wasted time and resources. Plus, since they didn't have a way to identify and tag high-value content, there was a lot of waste, limited content reuse, and too much low-quality content circulating around.



CHALLENGE

QUALITY ASSURANCE

VMware produces a huge volume of content – more than its five editors could possibly keep up with. In fact, the editors were only able to review less than 1 percent of all the content the company was creating. Further complicating things was the fact that there was a lot of volatility within the content team, with writers and editors coming and going. Plus, there was very little time to train new staff effectively.



CHALLENGE

CONSISTENCY

Rockwell Automation has a team of editors in global sales and marketing who review all of the company's documents and correct their use of terminology. Doing so was a highly manual and fragmented process that involved looking up and verifying the correct trademark information in a variety of spreadsheets. It was time-consuming and led to issues with quality and accuracy, which also had knock-on effects for translation.



“Being able to use technology to manage your content and content creators, mentor and teach your writers, and measure the success of your efforts should be the goal for every company.”

- James Mathewson, Program Director for Marketing Content Platforms, IBM



“There are lots of ways you can use editors once you free them [by using technology] from trying to cover enterprise scale.”

- Laura Bellamy, Director of Content Strategy and Operations, VMware



“The thing about our organization is that...we look for the right solution that meets the business need, that works for our employees, and that ultimately serves our customers. In this case...Acrolinx was the best solution to meet our needs.”

- Kathleen Ruggeri, Manager, Information Architecture and Content Quality, Rockwell Automation



The Components of Effective Content Marketing at Scale

There's no silver bullet when it comes to content marketing. There isn't a single recipe or formula you can follow to guarantee results. Your specific industry and target audience are just a couple of the factors that will dictate what will and won't work in your particular situation.

Having said that, effective, large-scale content marketing programs typically have a number of things in common. Having worked with dozens of them over the years, we believe they all share six key components:



Let's take a look at each of these components in more detail.



1

A Well-Crafted Strategy



At the core of any effective, large-scale content marketing effort, there needs to be a sound, documented content strategy. That strategy should outline your goals and the specific tactics you'll use to meet them. It should also give you the focus you need to stay on target and work on the most important initiatives for your business. Plus, it will help align your team, so that everyone is working toward the same objectives.

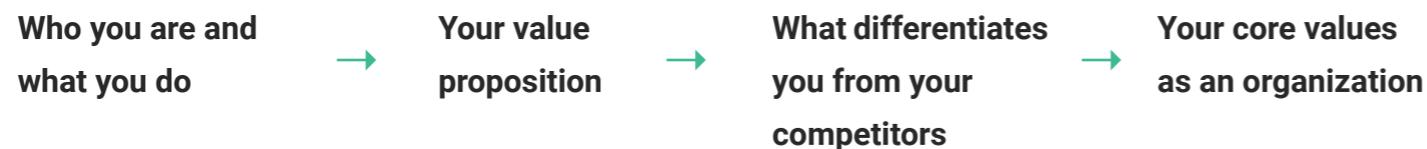
Specifically, a comprehensive strategy should include the following elements:

SMART goals.

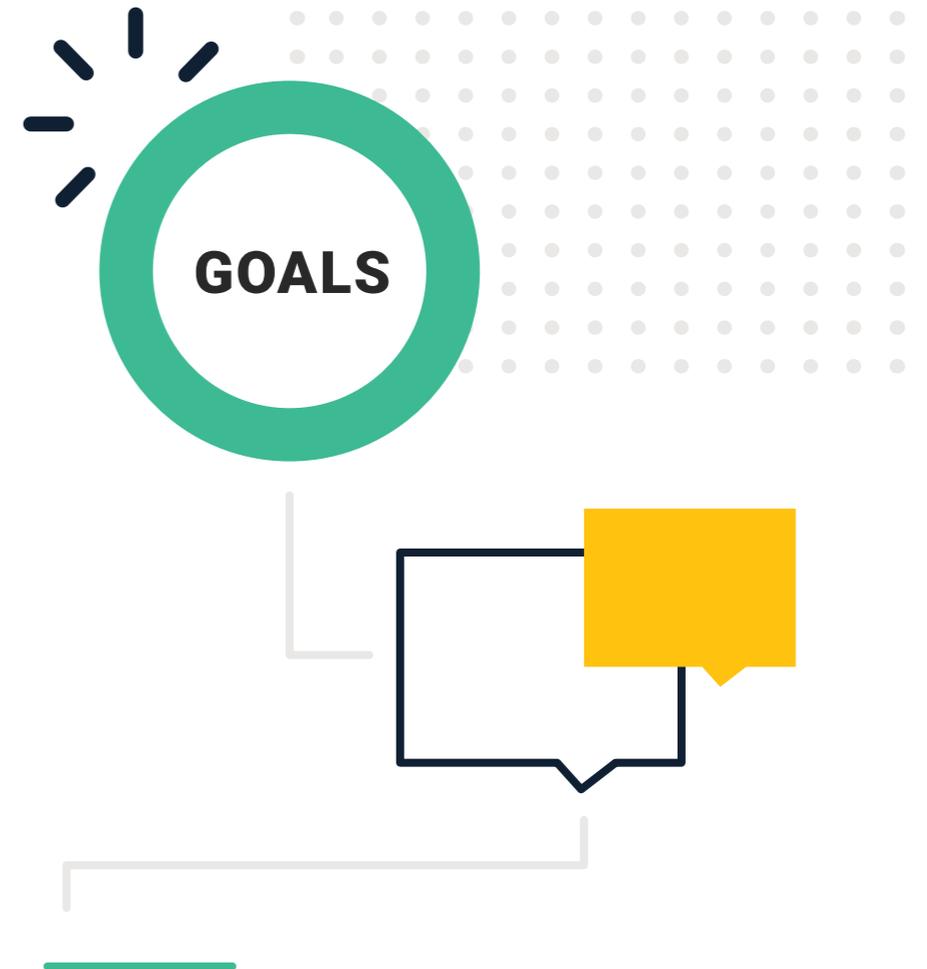
Having specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals (i.e., SMART goals) will help orient all of your efforts and give direction to your content program. Make sure to document both long-term strategic goals and shorter-term, more tactical ones to help you get there. Importantly, make sure that all of your goals clearly tie back to support your company's broader business objectives. This is critical so that everyone within the team can see how their work is directly impacting the success of the organization.

Brand story.

To help further orient your work, and your content more specifically, document the key high-level messages you're trying to communicate. These should include:



Make sure that you also cover the personality and tone of voice you want your brand to convey.



Want More Help Developing Your Strategy?

See the [appendix](#) for a list of great resources for each of the strategic elements we've laid out here.



Style guidelines.

It's going to be impossible to create good, consistent, high-quality content at scale unless you have documented style guidelines. These guidelines should explain how your content is supposed to come across in general ways, such as through tone of voice and visual language. They should also cover more specific areas, such as your use of particular words and phrases, as well as product and brand naming conventions, grammar, and punctuation.

Customer personas.

For any strategy to work, you'll need a thorough understanding of your intended audience. Take time to develop detailed personas that go beyond job titles and basic demographic information. Try to figure out what your audience really cares about. What pain points are keeping them up at night? How can you talk to them most effectively? What information do they need to make a purchasing decision?

Competitive research.

No strategy should be created in a vacuum. Instead, as you're crafting yours, take notice of what your peers and competitors are doing. What are they talking about? What kinds of content are they producing? What innovative content marketing techniques are they using to get ahead? It's important to know what your peers and competitors are up to, so you can benchmark and differentiate yourself.

Keywords.

To make sure your content is easy to find, figure out which keywords to target as part of your SEO strategy. Identify the best keywords for your particular industry and develop a plan for how you're going to try to win each one with particular content assets. To rank for the search words you care most about, take a disciplined approach to findability and chip away at it regularly. You can also partner with a digital strategist who's well-versed in the changing world of SEO.



Promotion & distribution.

Once you actually have some content ready to publish, what channels will you use to reach your audience? There are hundreds of options to consider, so figure out which ones will have the highest chance of leading you to your target audience.

KPIs.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) are a final and critical part of any strategy. You need a way to measure what you're doing to determine whether or not it's working. Have clear metrics that you're aiming for and be disciplined about tracking your progress against those metrics.

Of course, simply having the elements above isn't enough for an effective strategy. You also need to find ways to make it actionable and ensure compliance. As we'll see, technology can play a big role here. So, too, can basic steps, such as communicating clearly, making all of the elements available to your team, and regularly planning and tracking to help ensure alignment.

It's also important to review your strategy on a regular basis. We recommend reviewing it quarterly to make adjustments as needed. More holistic reviews should happen on an annual basis, so you can make more fundamental changes based on the direction of your business.



2

People

Good talent is expensive, so you need to choose people who bring the right mix of it to your organization.



Your people are your most valuable content marketing resource. And since they're expensive, you need to be selective about who you hire and what skills they bring to your content marketing mix. Depending on the size of the organization, you may find a variety of roles including:



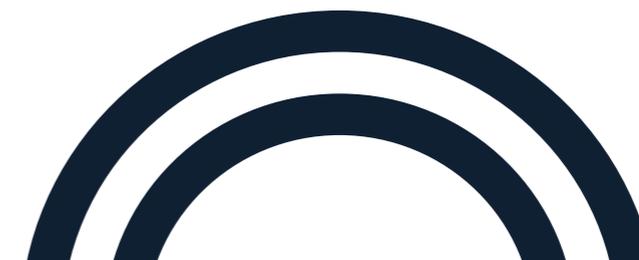
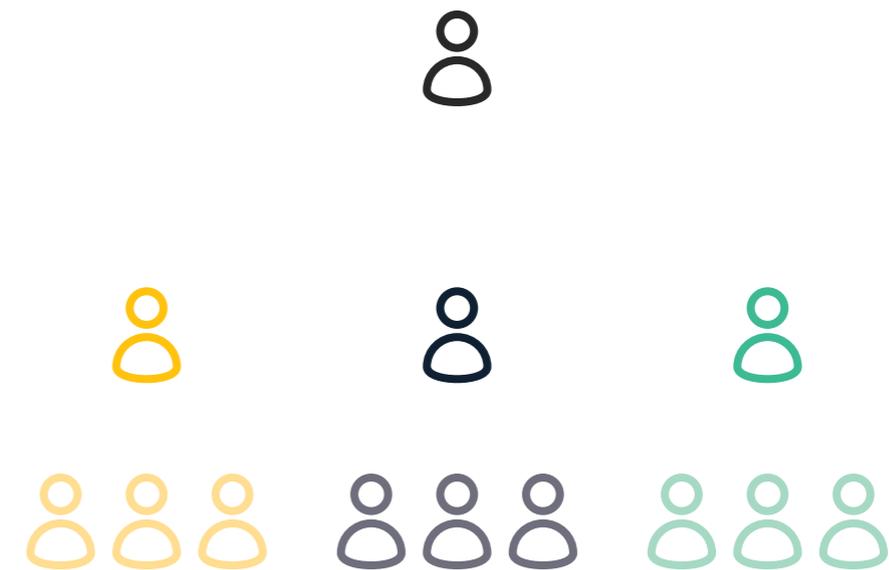


Large enterprises may have multiple people in most of these roles, including dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of writers. Typically teams are either divided up by business line or functional area, or by the type of content they create. For example, you may have part of the team focused on short-form content, and another part that only works on long-form pieces.

Depending on the industry you're in, you may find that it's better to build a team of generalists or specialized experts. Either way, you'll want to find people who understand your business and are capable of communicating effectively about it. That could mean looking for people who don't have traditional marketing backgrounds. For example, a marketing-savvy IT professional might be the best fit for your marketing technologist, while you may want to look for people with backgrounds in journalism, storytelling, or research to help round out the team.

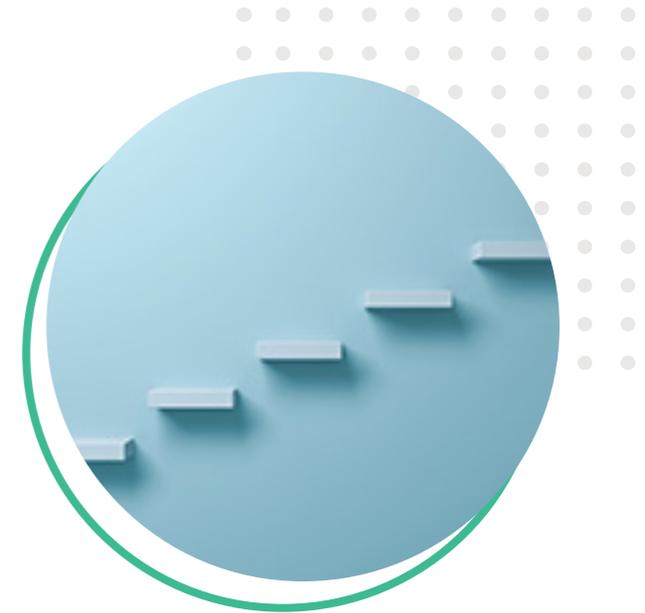
Bigger Isn't Necessarily Better

Simply growing your team isn't a smart way to approach scaling your content marketing efforts. That's because it's not just about having more people to do more work. You also need to ensure your team is well-organized and set up for efficiency. It's critical to find ways to make your team as productive as possible, so you're not stuck duplicating efforts or having to fix other people's work. As we'll see, having the right processes and tools in place can go a long way toward helping to ensure your team works smarter, not harder. That's critical for efficiency and ensuring you're making the most of your budget dollars.



3

Processes



Beyond having a strategy and the right team, you need a good framework for managing what that team does. Having documented and clearly defined processes brings a number of benefits that are essential for successful content marketing at scale. These include:

- Promoting greater efficiency by ensuring that everyone is aligned and understands how processes work and what role they play in them.
- Making it easier to onboard new staff and maintain continuous operations, in case key personnel leave the team unexpectedly.
- Ensuring that projects remain on schedule and that any issues are dealt with in a timely fashion.

While it's important to have clear processes in place, that doesn't mean you want to micromanage every aspect of content creation. The idea is to make everyone's life easier, not to stifle creativity or frustrate team members. Among the types of processes you should consider documenting, include:

How your content gets created.

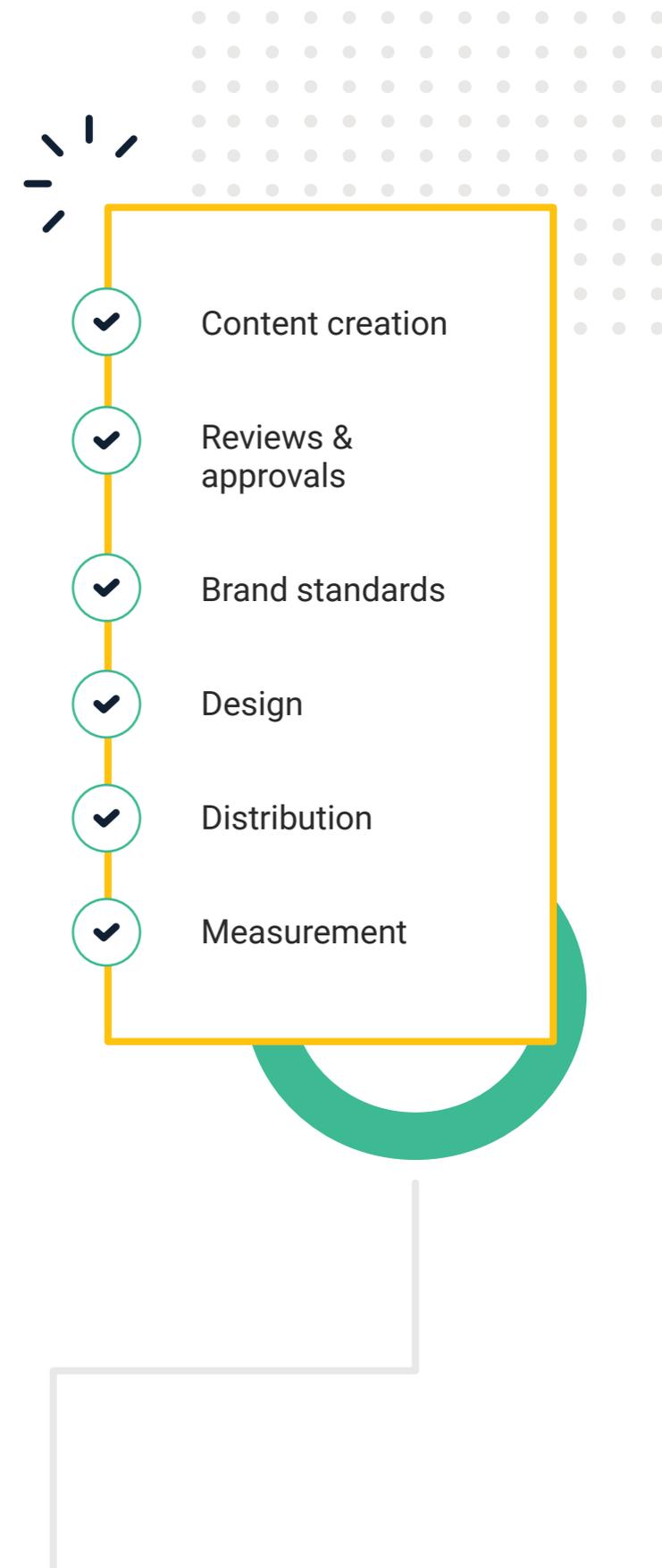
Since different types of content are created in different ways, you may need a different process for each. Focus on creating workflows for content creation and documenting how long it should take to create a piece of content.

Reviews and approvals.

What steps do you need to ensure that the right parties are seeing your content at the right times, and that it's legally compliant before it's published? Try to set realistic turnaround times for approvals and to get all relevant stakeholders to agree to them.

Brand and other standards.

You'll need style guides that document what you should be writing and how. Plus, you'll want to have brand guides that dictate how to visually represent your company through the use of color palettes, images, fonts, logos, and more.



Design cycle.

Document the process for moving content into design. Decide when the optimal time is to engage designers, how best to communicate objectives, and how long turnaround times should be.

Distribution.

How will different pieces of content be distributed? What channels will you use and how much of a push do different types of content deserve? Document what your standard process is for every content type, as well as what additional steps you can take to give really important pieces an extra push.

Measurement.

Determine what metrics you'll track and how often, as well as how you'll report back on them and in what format. Likewise, document how you'll use this information to help inform and improve your content marketing program.

Remember that for processes to work, you need to communicate them to everyone they apply to, and revisit and refresh them periodically so they stay optimized. Most importantly, be sure to embed them into your team's culture, so people respect and adhere to them. This support helps to ensure your processes drive efficiency and alignment, rather than simply become a source of frustration.



4

Great Content

Creativity, originality, and substance are critical ingredients of great content. But so too are the mechanical aspects of writing, such as clarity, quality, accuracy, tone, and findability.



It should go without saying that a critical component of any successful content marketing program has to be great content. Without it, it's impossible to gain traction with your audience and get them to take the steps you want as they make their way down the path to purchase.

Specifically, to be effective, your content has to be:

Original.

While there will almost always be others creating content about the same topics as you, that's no excuse to copy what they're doing. Instead, look for ways to create content that's unique and original by, for example, trying to identify a unique perspective or point of view. That may mean bringing a new angle to the topic, finding creative formats for your content, or a combination of both.

Valuable.

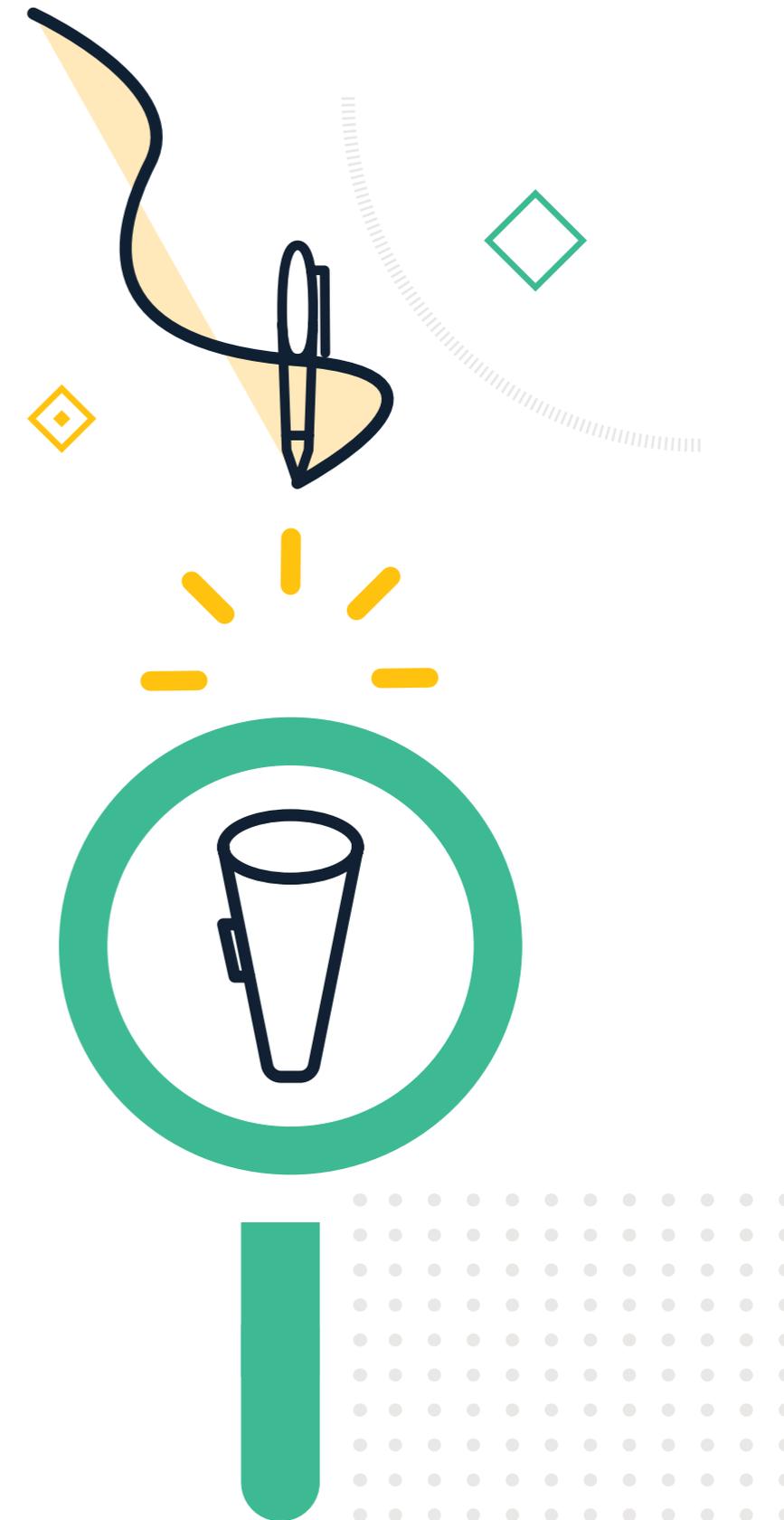
Your content can't just serve your needs. To be successful, it should meet the needs of your customers too. That means it has to educate them about something they care about, help solve one of their problems, or make them aware of an issue they need to know about. Remember, your customers' have limited time, so it's important to make sure every minute they spend consuming your content is time well spent.

Compelling.

To inspire action, your content needs to be engaging. Depending on your audience, that could be as simple as using evocative language, or going further by enhancing your content with data to help drive home your key messages. No matter the case, make sure your content is compelling enough to ensure your customers take action.

Clear.

Make sure your content has a clear message and point of view. You don't want to confuse your audience by being vague or imprecise. Likewise, it's essential that your writing be clear and to the point. If your writing meanders or is difficult to follow, you'll not only test your audience's patience, but also leave them confused.



Consistent.

Don't make the mistake of thinking about your content as individual assets. Instead, think of it holistically as one giant body of work, any part of which your buyers may choose to consume. To make a strong impression when they do, your content needs to be consistent in terms of style, voice, terminology, and the messages and overall impression it conveys.

In the Right Tone.

Different audiences respond in different ways to various styles and tones of voice. Make sure that all of your content is written in the best tone for your particular audience. If you're a giant law firm or financial services provider, for example, you may have a much more formal tone, then if you're a scrappy startup with a product aimed at teenagers. Adopting your tone of voice to resonate with your particular audience will help increase engagement and engender a sense of familiarity and trust with your customers.

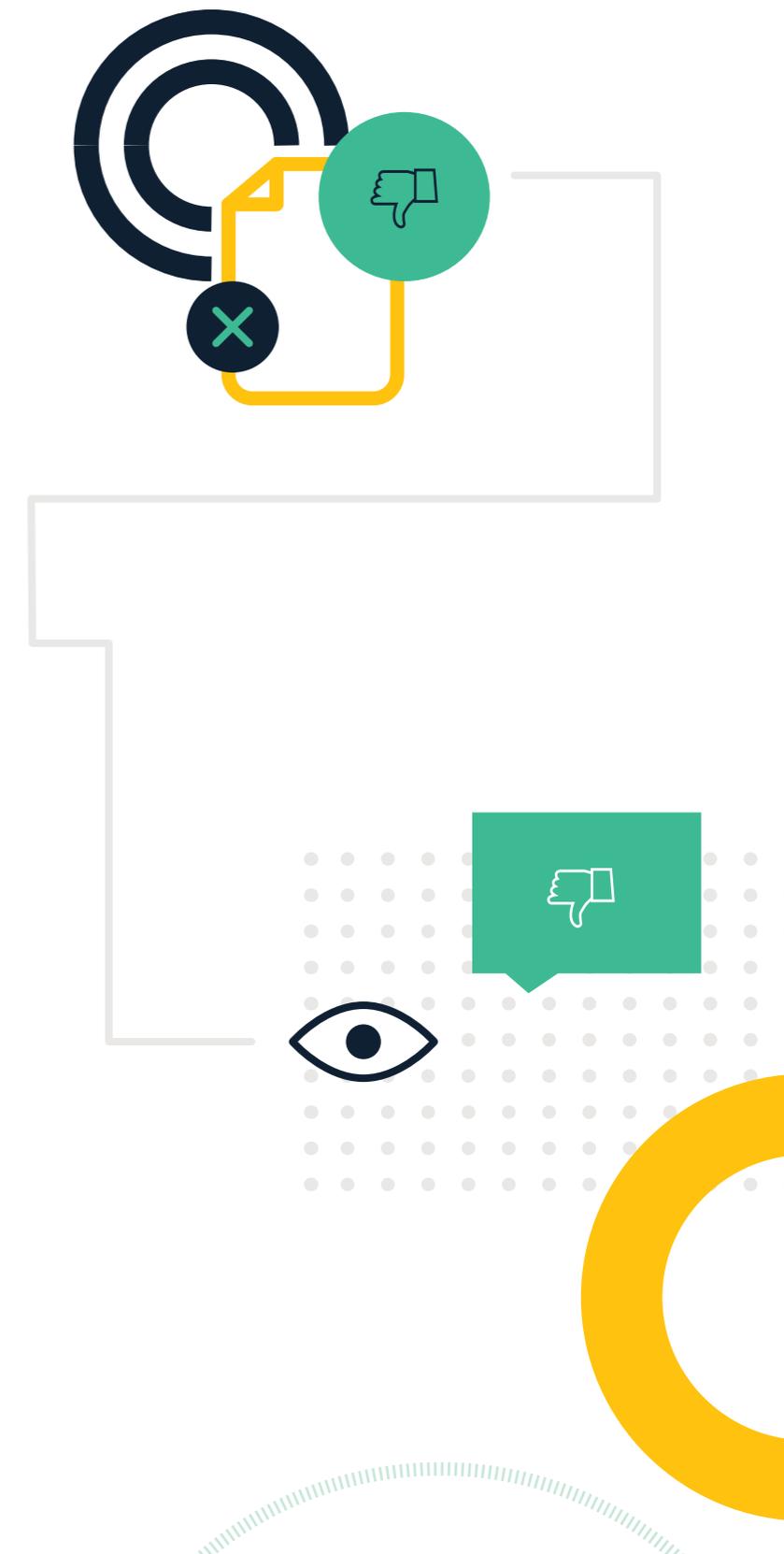
Well-Written.

Never underestimate the importance of good writing. Beyond simply being grammatically correct and error free, high-quality, well-written content is dynamic, pithy, and enjoyable to read and consume. If your content isn't of the highest quality, you can be sure your audience will quickly lose interest in it. Not only that, content that's poorly written calls into question the authority and trustworthiness of the organization producing it.

Findable.

Last, but certainly not least, your content has to be optimized for search so that people can find it online quickly and easily. This means making sure that you're incorporating the right keywords into your content in all of the right places. In today's content-driven world, winning the right keywords with great content can make a big difference in the success of your business.

At a time when there's so much content competing for your audience's attention, if yours isn't great, it's not going to stand out. While creativity, originality, and substance are critical ingredients of great content – and ones that you can't automate – many of the mechanical aspects of great writing, such as its clarity, quality, accuracy, tone, and findability can be enhanced with technology. And when you're producing content across a large organization, it's almost impossible to control these attributes and ensure the right outcomes. As we'll see, the trick is to have the right tools in place to make it possible.



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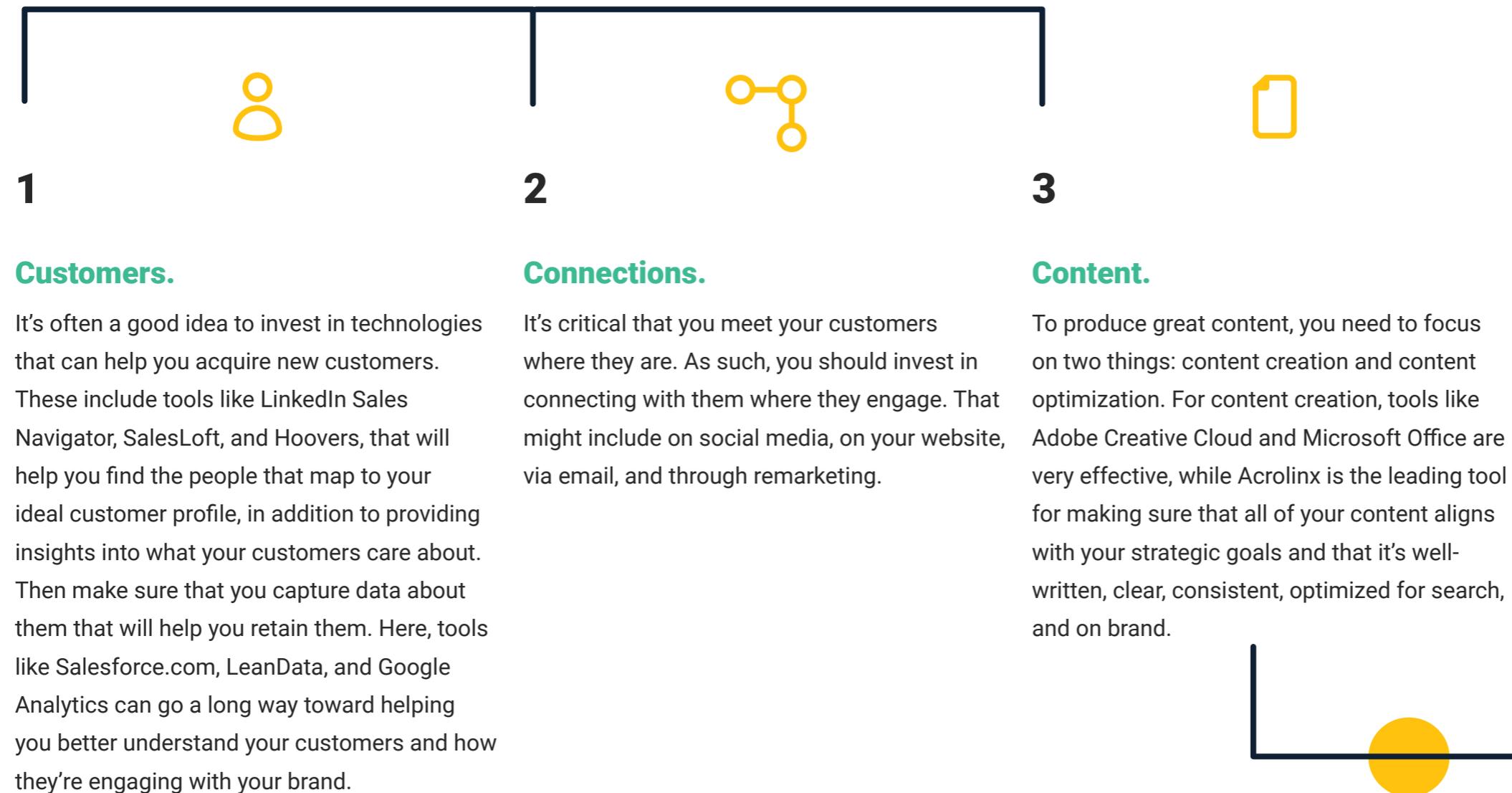
Technology

Use technology to supercharge your content marketing by selecting tools that help you in the right areas.



Technology is critical. It can help you supercharge your content marketing by giving you unique insights into your audience and how your content is performing. It can also be used to help you work smarter and more efficiently.

There are literally thousands of technologies designed to support content marketing teams — far more than you'd ever be able to use effectively or afford. For that reason, you need to be really careful about what tools you include in your content marketing technology stack. We recommend taking a customer-centric approach to technology and organizing your technology around what we call the five Cs:





4

Collaboration.

Tools and technologies that help you get stuff done are essential, particularly for teams that are spread across different offices and locations. Simple things like using Google Docs and Trello can go a long way toward making it easier for people to collaborate across geographies, in a way that's simple and effective.

Having the right technology is essential for any content team that wants to operate at scale because it helps you gain insights, work more efficiently, and produce higher-quality content that gets better, and more consistent, results.



5

Competition.

Finally, you may want to invest in tools that allow you to track and monitor your competitors. Examples of these include tools like BuzzSumo, Mention, and Feedly that will help you monitor what content they're creating and how well it's performing.



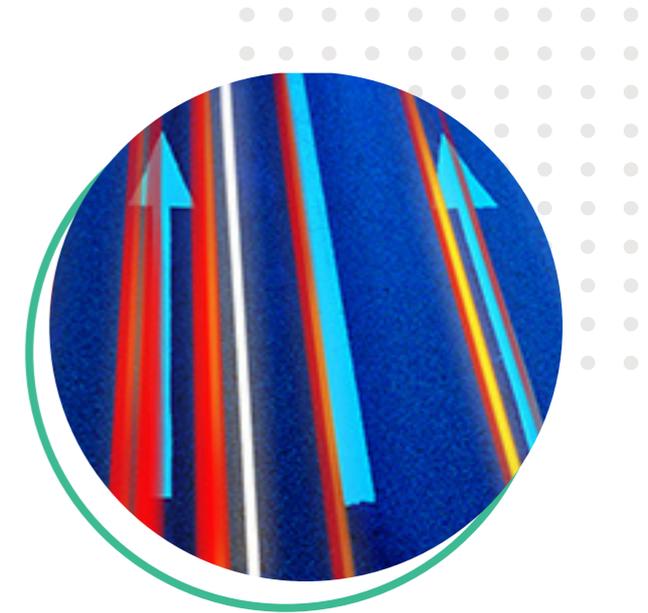
Customers
Connections
Content
Collaboration
Competition



6

Continuous Improvement

Don't run your content program on autopilot. Always look for ways to make your operations more efficient and to get better results.

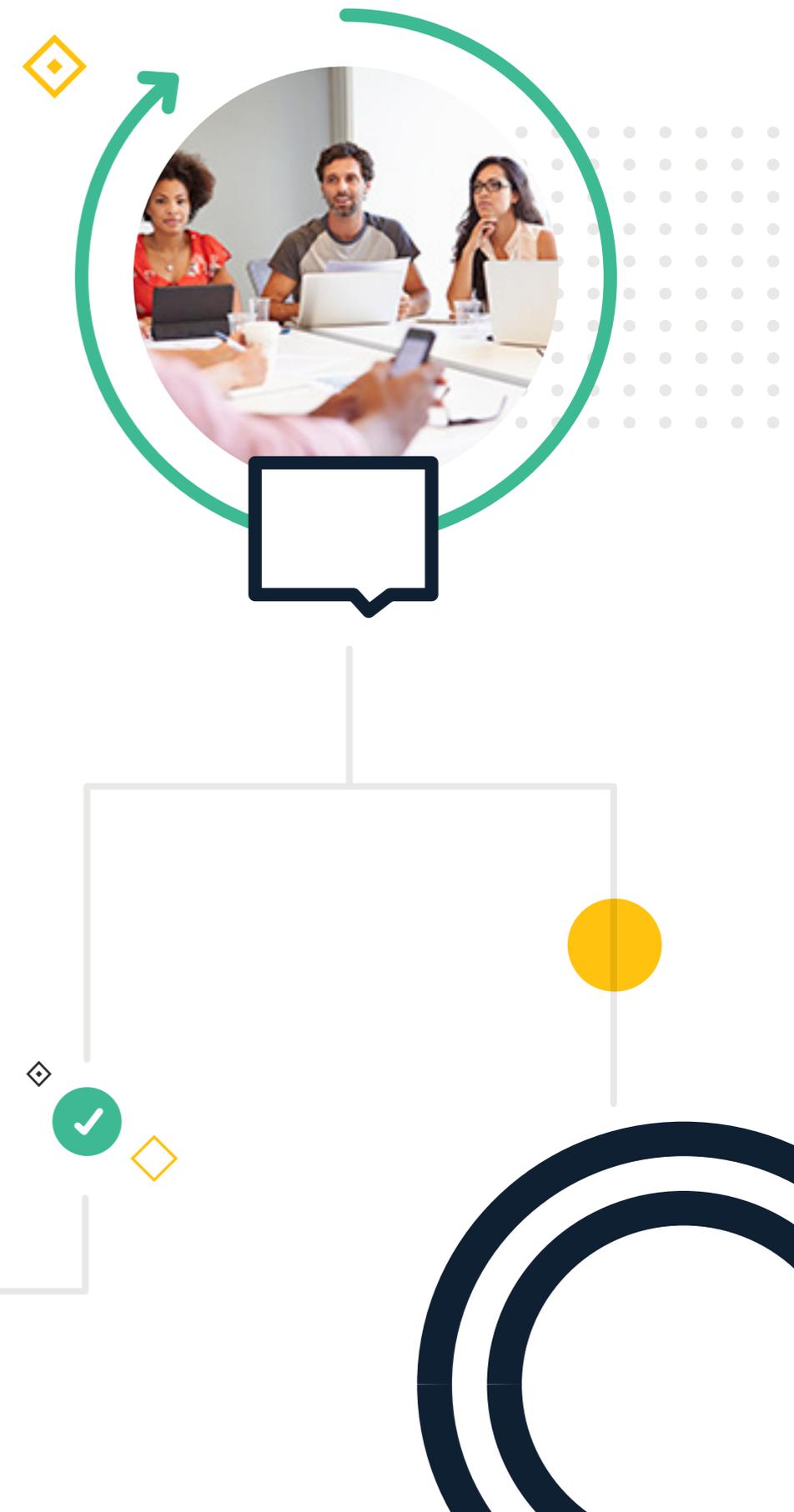


The final and perhaps most important piece of effective content marketing at scale is having a systemized approach in place to optimize everything you do. Specifically, that means not simply cruising on autopilot, but rather constantly looking for ways to make your operations more efficient and to get better results.

In today's digital world, the data that's available can unlock tremendous insights in terms of how efficient we are at creating content, how that content is consumed, and what results it's driving. It's important to track all of that data and to analyze it over time for opportunities to improve. To really work, this needs to be done regularly and systematically, rather than on an ad hoc basis.

Specifically, we recommend holding biweekly meetings among the leaders of your content team to review and analyze all of the data coming out of your content program. Were there any big spikes or unexpected dips, or have your metrics flatlined? Are you on track to hit your goals and KPIs, or will you need to make radical adjustments to get there? By regularly assessing where you are, you can begin to make informed decisions about how you're going to adjust your approach. The idea should always be to look for ways to capitalize on your successes, while fixing (or even abandoning) anything that's not yielding the desired results. Creating dashboards to track and monitor results can be extremely useful. The key is to try to derive meaningful insights from the data that you can use to improve your content over time.

To ensure that these meetings run smoothly, be sure to capture all of the relevant data in one place, and have each attendee talk the team through his or her respective areas of work. Then agree to the activities that will come out of each meeting. Your goal should be to continually refine your content marketing efforts based on what you've learned from the data.



Setting Yourself Up for Effective Content Marketing



Being successful at content marketing at scale takes organization, effort, and a smart use of resources and tools.



Content is a critical tool in any company's battle for customers. And while building an effective content marketing machine is never easy, doing so across larger organizations is a particular challenge. That's because you have to find ways to work efficiently and to overcome the challenges and complexities of producing high-quality content, across multiple teams, product lines and brands, and for different audience personas.

Being effective at content marketing at scale takes a lot of organization, effort, and a smart use of resources and tools. But, if you can get it right, you'll not only save time, money, and precious resources, you'll also help position your business to acquire more customers and keep them happy.



How Acrolinx Can Help Your Business Scale Its Content

With all the challenges involved in scaling your content marketing program, Acrolinx can be very helpful by ensuring that the content you produce stays aligned with your well-crafted strategy.

Here's how it works: First, our AI-powered platform captures all the strategic elements we discussed earlier (things like goals, brand voice, product terms, style guidelines, and keywords). It then helps you analyze your content to identify issues with clarity, consistency, and compliance – pointing out all of the places where your content deviates from your strategy. Acrolinx then provides ongoing, real-time authoring guidance for all of your content contributors, so they can create engaging and effective content that accurately reflects your strategic goals.

Thanks to the unrivaled insight, efficiency, and process control our platform provides, Acrolinx ensures the seamless transition from strategy to scalable production of usable content. And, it eliminates all of the inefficiencies inherent in a wide-scale content marketing program.



Appendix

Resources to Help You Develop Your Content Strategy

For more information on setting goals, check out:

- [SMART Goals: How to Make Your Goals Achievable \(Mind Tools\)](#)
- [10 Content Marketing Goals Worth Pursuing \(CopyBlogger\)](#)
- [What Are 4 Key Goals in Content Marketing? \(JeffBullas.com\)](#)

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For more information on developing your brand story, check out:

- [How to Create an Authentic Brand Story That Actually Improves Trust \(Neil Patel\)](#)
- [Tell Your Brand's Story – The Beginner's Guide to Online Marketing \(Quick Sprout\)](#)
- [There's an Art to Telling Your Brand's Story: 4 Ways to Get It Right \(Entrepreneur\)](#)

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For more information about creating style guidelines, check out:

- [6 Steps to Creating Your Content Marketing Style Guide \(Content Marketing Institute\)](#)
- [Creating a Successful Style Guide for Your Brand \(Help Scout\)](#)
- [Building a Visual Language \(Airbnb\)](#)

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For more information about developing customer personas, check out:

- [How to Create Highly Accurate Customer Personas for Marketing \(NeilPatel.com\)](#)
- [The Complete, Actionable Guide to Marketing Personas \(Buffer App\)](#)
- [How to Create Detailed Buyer Personas for Your Business \(HubSpot\)](#)

For more information about conducting competitive research, check out:

- [How to Conduct Competitive Analysis to Step Up Your Content Strategy \(HubSpot\)](#)
- [The Guide to Content Marketing Competitive Intelligence \(Search Engine Journal\)](#)
- [How to Do a Competitive Content Marketing Analysis \(Content Marketing Institute\)](#)

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For more information about applying the right keywords to your SEO strategy, check out:

- [Beginner's Guide to SEO \(MOZ\)](#)
- [SEO: A Comprehensive Guide for Beginners \(Neil Patel\)](#)
- [A Complete Guide to Getting Started in SEO \(Search Engine Journal\)](#)

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For more information on promoting and distributing your content, check out:

- [Content Promotion \(MOZ\)](#)
- [17 Advanced Methods for Promoting Your New Piece of Content \(Neil Patel\)](#)
- [50 Ways to Drive Traffic to Your Next Article \(Orbit Media Studios\)](#)

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For more information on KPIs, check out:

- [8 KPIs Your Content Marketing Measurement Should Include \(Content Marketing Institute\)](#)
- [Content Marketing KPIs and Metrics: 15 Important Considerations \(Search Engine Journal\)](#)
- [5 Ways to Translate Your Content Marketing Goals into Key Performance Indicators \(Content Marketing Institute\)](#)



Acrolinx is revolutionizing strategy-aligned content creation. Our platform is helping large global brands, including IBM, Google, and Facebook, produce on-brand and on-target content, at enterprise scale. Acrolinx is a spin-off of Germany's DFKI, one of the world's leading research institutes in the field of artificial intelligence.

[Learn more at acrolinx.com](https://www.acrolinx.com)