THE CONTENT ADVANTAGE

[Clout 2.0]

The Science of Succeeding at Digital Business through EFFECTIVE CONTENT

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4 ANALYZE YOUR CONTENT, CUSTOMERS, AND CONTEXT

Understand your current situation so you can plan the right change.

CHANGE BRINGS OPPORTUNITIES. ON THE OTHER HAND, CHANGE CAN BE CONFUSING.

—Michael Porter

YOU CAN'T STOP THE CHANGE, ANY MORE THAN YOU CAN STOP THE SUNS FROM SETTING.

—Shmi Skywalker

In Chapter 3, we walked through envisioning your content future. Now, let's consider why and how to assess your content present.

WHY ANALYZE THE CURRENT STATE

Never advise or decide on a content strategy without assessing the current state. Sometimes, companies question whether the assessment is necessary, especially if they are eager to make a big change or do not have much existing content. You might question the need for such analysis or, if you're already convinced, face the question yourself. So I'm sharing a few reasons why your organization needs to conduct this analysis.

PREVENT YOUR CONTENT STRATEGY FROM FAILING

If I had to pick the top reason businesses fail at content, I'd say it's because they don't have an accurate understanding of their content situation to inform their strategy. Such organizations build their strategy on a house of cards that, sooner or later, collapses. For example, I once worked with an online retailer that reached out after they tried to do thought leadership content, or content to advise and guide potential and existing customers, but did not get results. The company assumed that because they knew how to develop great sales content, they could also develop great thought leadership content. In our analysis, we discovered that customers felt the thought leadership content was too pushy and focused on sales. The retailer could have avoided this misstep—which involved revamping hundreds of content assets—by analyzing the situation first.

Businesses often suffer from delusions of content grandeur or delusions of content failure—or perhaps both, if content stakeholders have different and conflicting perspectives. These delusions can lead to a content strategy that fails.

Delusions of Content Grandeur

Companies, or teams within a company, sometimes see the existing content through rose-colored glasses, thinking it's much more important or impactful than it is. For example, you would be amazed at how attached companies can become to mediocre corporate blogs. Inertia also comes into play here; people prefer to maintain the status quo rather than make a change, so they cling to any reason to do so.

A related delusion I encounter is about content capacity. Company executives repeatedly overestimate their ability to sustain a sophisticated content strategy over time without making changes to content operations, such as hiring the right people or improving processes. (Last I checked, content is still not created and delivered by the content fairy!) And content teams are feeling the pain of this delusion. In Content Science's 2017 study of content operations, 53 percent of participants (content team leaders and members) reported that they did not know the budget for content. How can a company plan realistically for a new approach to content without knowing the existing budget and planning how it will change?[1]

Although an extreme delusion of content grandeur can lead to misguided content decisions, a slight delusion can be helpful. Research shows that one key to a successful long-term marriage is being *slightly* deluded about how amazing your spouse is.[2] (My spouse must be deluded to stick with me for 20 years, which I'll be the first to say I do not deserve.) The slight but not extreme misperception helps us gloss over minor shortcomings and do the work to stay connected through hardships. In a similar way, if a business has an affinity for some existing content, that business is more likely to care about maintaining and improving it over time.

Sometimes, businesses suffer from the opposite delusion: failure.

Delusions of Content Failure

Occasionally, I come across an organization, or a team within it, that thinks the content situation is much worse than it is. The organization wants to scrap everything and start over. But usually there are strengths and lessons to learn even from content that seems underperforming. For example, in the case of the online retailer I mentioned earlier, we found that the topics covered by the thought leadership actually were the right topics—topics that interested customers and were not covered well by competitors. So the strategy focused on adjusting the tone and substance of the thought leadership, not on starting over from scratch.

Nothing corrects these delusions other than sound analysis of the content situation. I have never seen a content situation that is 100 percent "good" or 100 percent "bad." You will likely see a mix of expected and unexpected strengths and weaknesses.

ALIGN YOUR TEAM AND STAKEHOLDERS BEFORE CHANGE

Whether or not your company is under a delusion, you will be much more likely to unify your content team and stakeholders by starting your content efforts with analysis. Involving your stakeholders in the analysis process and sharing the results gives everyone a common understanding of the current state. When your stakeholders agree on the current state, it will be much easier to engage them to support change later.

SET A "BEFORE" BENCHMARK

Few things persuade people more than a clear comparison of before and after. The evidence is indisputable. The analysis of your current state can give you a number of "before" benchmarks—such as content effectiveness, content operations maturity level, or even the number of content assets—that set the stage for a compelling before and after story. As an example, Scott Rosenberg began a content consolidation effort at Intel in 2015 by documenting the proliferation of content assets, including

- 12,500 Intel.com web pages
- 715 microsites
- 38 mobile apps

This benchmark enabled Rosenberg to document and communicate progress effectively, such as showing the consolidation of 1500 web pages in less than a year.[3] That progress helped him sustain momentum for change at a complex enterprise.

UNCOVER DETAILS FOR REALISTIC IMPLEMENTATION PLANS AND ESTIMATES

When you conduct a thorough analysis, you document items that will not only inform content strategy but also aid in planning the implementation and execution. For example, I find that content assets are a lot like the mogwai in the movie *Gremlins*. If you break the rules about caring for mogwai, they multiply and go rogue. In a similar way, when organizations don't have a strategy and good practices for creating and managing content assets, the content proliferates uncontrollably. Consequently, most organizations have significantly more content than they think they do.

Simply understanding what content you have and its key characteristics, such as its format, goes a long way toward making more accurate estimates for activities such as migrating content into a new platform. There's a meaningful difference between migrating 50,000 assets and 150,000 assets, for instance.

As another example, understanding the quality level of your current content helps you plan to what extent the content needs to change and, consequently, the level of effort needed to change it. There's a meaningful difference in effort between changing the value proposition explained in a product and replacing a product name with the most current name.

BEGIN A SYSTEM OF ONGOING CONTENT INTELLIGENCE SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO MOST OF THIS AGAIN

If you're smart about your content analysis approach, then you can use your methodology and data sources to start setting up a system of content intelligence. I explain content intelligence in depth in Section IV, "Prudence: Develop Content Intelligence." My point is that conducting content analysis in many companies involves a significant amount of money as well as setup work and grunt work—especially if content analysis has not been done recently or ever. That work can give you repeatable value in a system of content intelligence. The next time you want an insight about your content, it should take a few hours or days, not weeks.

I hope by now you're convinced why content analysis is important. Now, let's look at how to do it.

HOW TO ANALYZE THE CURRENT STATE

When analyzing your current content situation, focus on the three C's: content, customers (or users), and context (**Figure 4.1**).

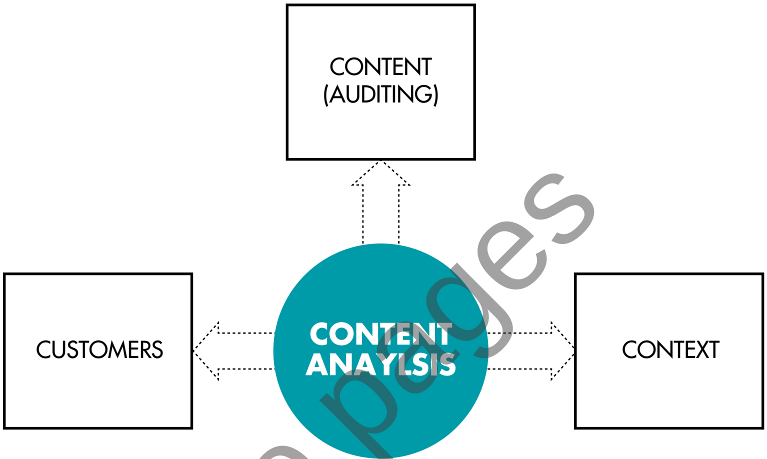


Figure 4.1: Analyze your content, customers, and context.

Some people might tell you that a content analysis or audit can take only a few hours[4], especially when they're offering to do it for you. Some people might tell you they have some great swampland in Florida to sell you too. Don't fall for it! I have conducted or overseen hundreds of content analysis efforts. If you have not analyzed your content, customers, or context recently, then expect the effort to take one to three weeks, at least. For large and enterprise companies, expect at least four weeks.

Now that you have a realistic sense of the time involved in this analysis, let's walk through some common ways to analyze each area so you can develop your analysis approach.

CONTENT AUDIT

As you might guess, a content audit is a close look at your existing content. You also might include source material, such as books, brochures, or other material that could be a useful starting point for content on your website and other touchpoints. The content audit starts with a content inventory.

Inventory

The inventory assembles a list and description of the content assets—pages, images, documents, videos, components, and more—that compose your website or digital experiences. You might be able to simply export the inventory from your content management system. More often, especially when you're dealing with large sites or digital experiences, you will need to assemble the inventory from a combination of the following:

- A spidering tool such as CAT (Content Analysis Tool) or ScreamingFrog
- A report from the content management system, digital asset management system, or technology platform
- A report from the analytics tool, such as Google Analytics
- Manual review

You can assemble the inventory in a spreadsheet and track key characteristics of the content, including but not limited to

- Format (such as image or video) or type (such as article or report)
- Topic covered
- Size
- Length, such as character counts
- Metadata, such as titles and tags, currently associated with the assets

Simply completing this inventory is a valuable exercise for most companies to understand the scope and characteristics of their content. Also consider developing a report or dashboard that summarizes your insights (**Figure 4.2**).

Once you have an inventory together, you can audit the content quantitatively and qualitatively.

Quantitative Audit: Content Performance

The most useful quantitative audit, in my experience, is a performance audit. If you're not comfortable with numbers or complex analyses, I recommend having an experienced content or web analyst help you with this audit. To understand performance of the content, assemble analytics into your content inventory. I highlight a few examples in **Table 4.1**.

FINDINGS

Content analysis

The businesses offer different amounts of content for different audiences.
The basic content types and topics align with top user needs.

Amount of content

We reviewed a representative sample of content up to three levels deep in each website's architecture. Respironics by far has the most content, as the sample sizes suggest.

Business website	**Content sample size**
Respironics	227 modules
HeartStart	172 modules
Lifeline	120 modules
INR (part of RPM)	77 modules
Remote Patient Monitoring (RPM)	40 modules
Telehealth	18 modules

Content types

Respironics and HeartStart have the most variety in content types. The most common content types across all businesses include

- Links / menu / gateway
- Overview
- Promotion / call to action
- Contact information
- Benefits
- Features
- Testimonials

These types align with users' content needs.

Intended audiences

Content targets mostly either a business or consumer audience.

Business audience	**Consumer audience**
Respironics	Heartstart
Remote Patient Monitoring (RPM)	Lifeline
Telehealth	INR (part of RPM)

Content topics

Compared to other businesses, Respironics has more corporate content, including content for building brand or public relations. Some businesses, such as Lifeline, have brief content about health conditions. Content topics in common across businesses include

- Product / service
- Corporate
- Education / training
- Support / customer service

These topics align with users' content needs.

Figure 4.2: A sample summary of insights from a content inventory

Table 4.1 Content Inventory Analytics

CONTENT PURPOSE OR TYPE	SAMPLE CONTENT PERFORMANCE DATA
Content Marketing Hub/Blog/Magazine	■ Reach: Pageviews and document downloads ■ Engagement: Return visitors and subscribers ■ Engagement: Number of pageviews per session
Sales Content	■ Reach: Pageviews and document downloads ■ Engagement: Return visitors ■ Conversion: Add to cart/purchase/request for information
Support Content	■ Reach: Pageviews and document downloads ■ Engagement: Return visitors ■ Desired conversion: Self-service completion, such as paying a bill online ■ Undesired conversion: Calls or other undesired behavior
Content/Media Product	■ Reach: Pageviews and document downloads ■ Engagement: Return visitors and subscribers ■ Engagement: Number of pageviews per session

Common sources of this quantitative data are your analytics tool, your content management system, and your social media management tool. (In Section IV, you will find more details about data sources that can give you insight into content performance.) After you have the data assembled, you can sort and filter results to determine which content performs well and which doesn't.

In my experience, the results often validate the Pareto principle, or the 80/20 rule. Usually, 20 to 40 percent of the content drives 60 to 80 percent of the performance. At Content Science, we like to work with an organization to identify a threshold of acceptable performance and use that to identify content to consider deleting or retiring. We can also calculate the predicted impact of deleting or retiring that content on performance factors, such as the amount of traffic.

By the end of a performance audit, you will likely have a rather complex spreadsheet that is incredibly useful but not something many stakeholders and executives will review in detail. (Over the past five years, I have encountered more executives who do like seeing these nitty-gritty numbers, so I see this trend changing over the next five years as more companies become data-driven. And you'll be ahead of the trend.) So consider developing a report or dashboard summarizing the audit insights. In **Figure 4.3**, you can see that a small percentage of the content is driving the performance, revealing a number of opportunities to streamline the content.

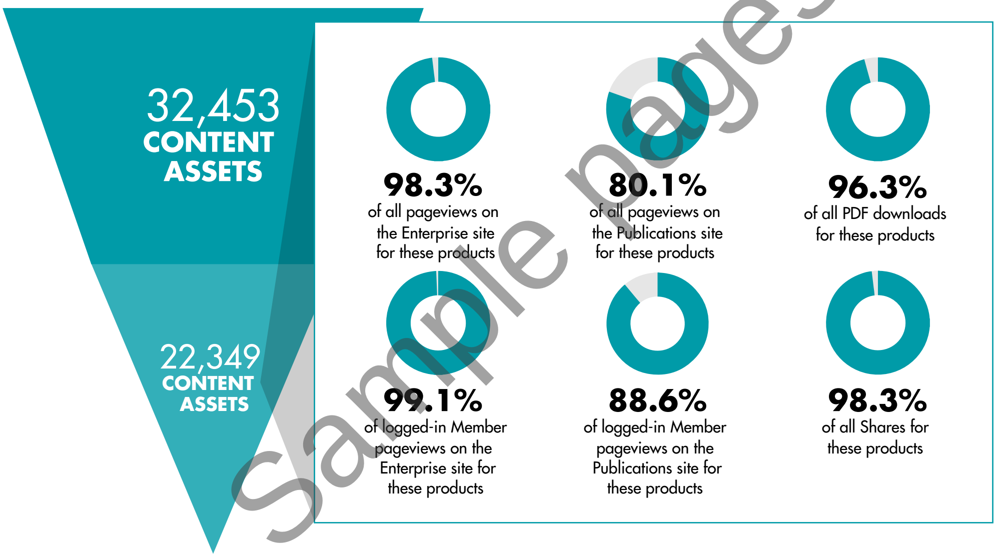


Figure 4.3: A sample summary of insights from a performance audit

A quantitative inventory and performance audit can give you valuable insight into what content you have and how it's performing. A qualitative audit can complement those insights with more nuances. Let's walk through two useful approaches.

Qualitative Audit: Content Quality

Reviewing the content quality can help shed light on why content performs as it does, how customers perceive it, and whether it meets your company's standards for user experience, brand, accessibility, compliance, and more.

The process is straightforward.

1. Select a content sample.
2. Choose your review criteria.
3. Review the sample or have a content expert review it.
4. If needed, identify areas for additional review.
5. Summarize and share insights.

Select a Sample

Consuming content parallels consuming food, in many ways. Miguel Cervantes wrote in *Don Quixote*, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating. By a small sample we may judge of the whole piece." In the same spirit, if you're dealing with a large set of content, you can gain a tremendous amount of insight about the set by reviewing a sample. Select a representative sample to review. I recommend a 20 percent sample that cuts across *common* examples and *critical* examples (such as content that supports sales for a priority product or service). This sampling rationale is not only intuitive but also grounded in science—specifically, qualitative research methodology.[5]

Furthermore, your quantitative performance audit can inform your sampling choices. For example, you might want to investigate extremely high-performing content to identify potential reasons for its success. You also might want to review extremely low-performing content to understand its potential for improvement or to confirm that it should be deleted or archived.

Choose Review Criteria

The review criteria can be flexible and focus on what is important to you. You can keep it very simple and focus on flagging what content to keep as is, keep and edit, or delete/archive. Or you can add more detail to get more insight. For example, having your content reflect your brand might be critical to your marketing and customer experience strategy. So you might add brand to your criteria and flag which content reflects your brand voice and which does not.

To help you choose your criteria, you also can get a free content quality checklist at the magazine *Content Science Review*: https://review.content-science.com/content-quality-checklist/. This list covers a range of potential criteria to focus on.

Review the Sample and Share Insights

There is nothing quite like a person with content experience taking a close look at the content and putting together observations. A content expert, such as a content strategist, content marketer, or content designer, will see what best practices are applied or missing much more quickly than anyone else.

While the notes for the audit might take form in a spreadsheet, it's also important to summarize and share them. **Figure 4.4**, for example, shows the top opportunities identified from a qualitative audit.

Influence Audit Summary for Mobile Websites

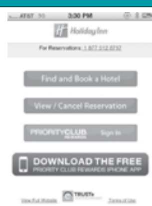
CHARACTERISTIC	PROBLEM OR OPPORTUNITY	EXAMPLE
Meaningful	• Home page branding is overshadowed by large ad for PCR iPhone app *(see example)*. • Promotions to download PCR iPhone app do not articulate meaningful benefits vs the mobile website. Most branded apps are free. • Photos descriptions are basic and do not point out hotel highlights or benefits.	
Relevant	• Promoting the pertinent brand's smartphone app would be more relevant than promoting PCR.	
Credible	• Customers who are not familiar with all of IHG brands are likely to perceive the home page branding as a confusing inconsistency.	
Actionable	• Some error messages would benefit from more instruction to help the customer act appropriately *(see example)*. For example the message at right could say "Check your dates. Your check out cannot be after your check in date." • On the home page, the ad for the PCR application is larger and more prominent than buttons that link to booking or managing a reservation, so it looks like the main action.	

Figure 4.4: A sample summary of insights from a qualitative content audit

Qualitative Audit: Content Automation Potential

As companies face intense pressure to deliver the right content to the right people at the right time 24/7, the smart companies are looking for opportunities to automate content operations. (I explain this trend more in Section V, "Power to Scale: Mature Content Operations.") So for large companies and organizations, I highly recommend reviewing content for opportunities to automate its creation, delivery, or maintenance.

I once oversaw a comprehensive content analysis for a large financial services company. In the course of the audit, we noticed that content describing the products and services was slightly different in different channels/touchpoints, such as the customer website, the advisor website, the whitepapers, the downloadable brochures, and so on. One down side to this situation is that each time the product description changes, it has to be updated manually in all of those channels and touchpoints. Not exactly an efficient process. We pointed out the opportunity to automate the delivery and maintenance of these descriptions. If the financial services company created a single source of those descriptions, those descriptions could be automatically delivered and updated to the channels/touchpoints.

As with reviewing content for quality, reviewing content for automation potential is faster and more accurate when an expert, such as a content strategist or a content engineer, does it. Such experts look for content that

- Is similar but delivered in different places (such as the product and service descriptions just mentioned), which might be an opportunity to consolidate into one version that is reused
- Would benefit from being personalized or being delivered in a personalized way, not unlike Netflix's personalized delivery of content or Amazon's personalized recommendations
- Could be created or edited dynamically, such as creating teasers describing an article from the article title and metadata

I'm only scratching the surface.

Analyzing your content well involves creating an inventory and then assessing the content quantitatively and qualitatively. The insights you gain will take you far in forming your content plans, but that's not all you need. Let's turn to analyzing your customer needs and perceptions.

CUSTOMER NEEDS AND PERCEPTIONS

As we discussed in Chapter 2, your customers (or users or audiences) have needs that they expect your content to address. Your customers also have perceptions about your company, brand, or offerings and your content. Understanding your customers' perspectives will help you

- Further understand why content is performing as it does
- Gain ideas for improving the content to consider in your strategy

Let's walk through three ways to better understand your customers' needs and perceptions related to content.

Updating Customer Journey Maps and Personas

If your company does not already have customer journeys or personas based on solid research, you need them. If you need to create them, I highly recommend these books to help you:

- *Mapping Experiences: A Complete Guide to Creating Value through Journeys, Blueprints, and Diagrams*, by James Kalbach
- *Jobs to Be Done*, by Stephen Wunker, Jessica Wattman, and David Farber
- *Letting Go of the Words: Writing Web Content That Works*, by Janice (Ginny) Redish

Ideally, you will have a customer journey map for each main persona, or customer type. The map in **Figure 4.5** covers the journey for student athletes, an important type of customer for the Rack Athletic Performance Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

To ensure that your customer journey map is useful for content planning, follow these tips to update or enhance them:

- Go beyond customer tasks; add user questions and decisions.

  In the digital world, there is an obsession with customer behavior. Marketers want users to convert. Designers want users to successfully achieve their goals. So it's no surprise that a task (behavior) flow has become a foundation of customer journeys.

  I don't disagree that behavior is important. But I disagree that behavior is everything. Before, during, and after someone takes an action, they

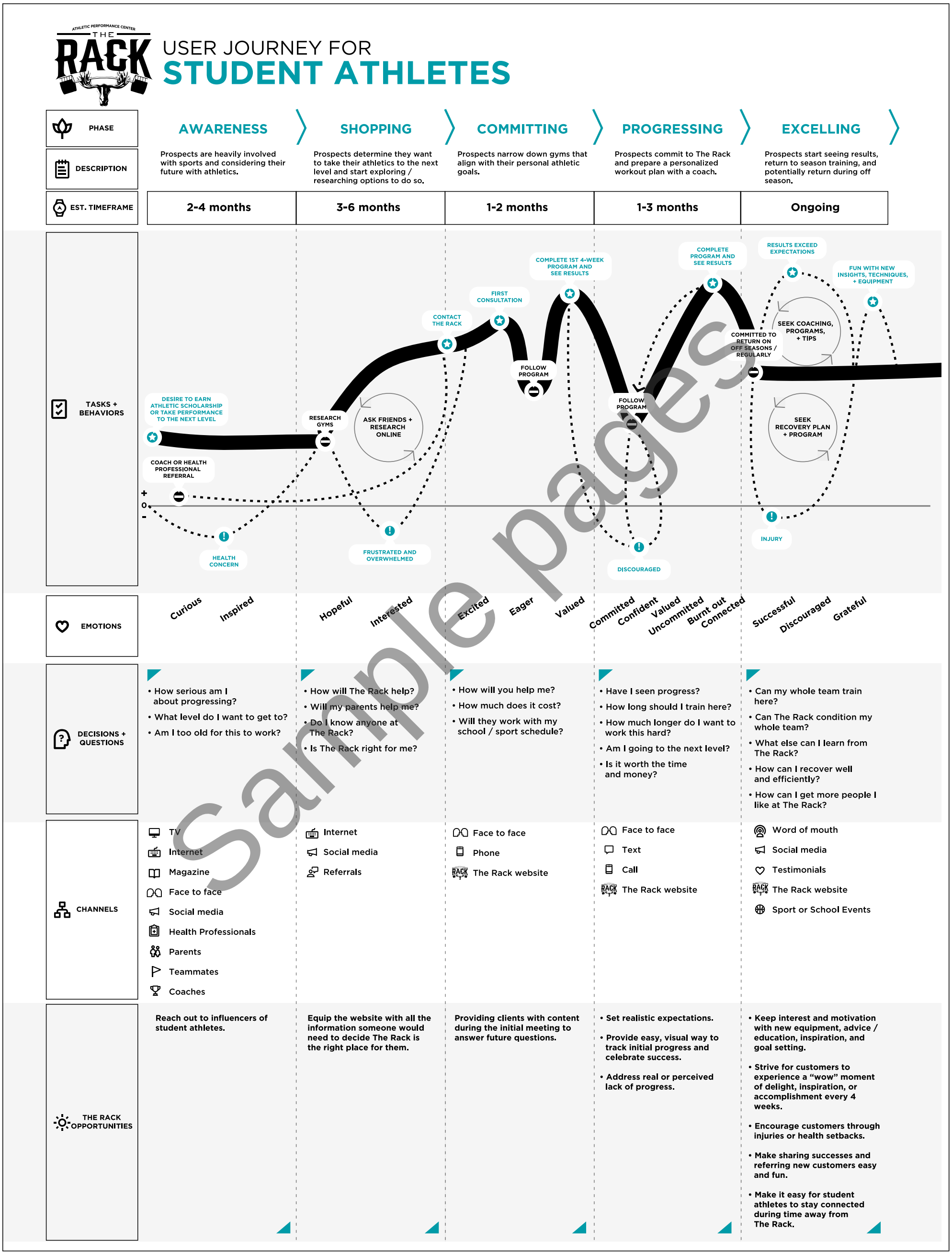


Figure 4.5: Example customer journey map

have thoughts and make decisions. That's an incredible opportunity for content to guide and influence users.

So how do you capture more than behavior in a user journey? Include key questions customers are trying to answer and key decisions they are trying to make. For example, the customer journey for student athletes I shared earlier includes questions such as "Will the Rack work with my schedule? How?" The questions your customers ask will likely be different, and capturing them will help ensure that the content addresses them.

- Build on emotional highs and lows with specific user emotions.

  Customers are people, so they experience emotions during their journey. Most commonly, customer journeys represent these as highs and lows, peaks and valleys. That's certainly important. But to be useful for content, user journeys need more specifics about emotion. This addition can be as simple as a brief list in each phase of the journey.

  How does this detail help content? By providing clues to appropriate topics, priority, and tone. Imagine you're preparing for a trip from the United States to China and searching online for the vaccinations you need. You find that Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests a long list of potential vaccinations. You instantly feel anxiety because you're not fond of shots or lengthy visits to the clinic. Now imagine the ways content from CDC could address this anxiety. For example, explore other formats besides a ponderous list and clarify that most travelers to the region need only one or two shots unless they are visiting a rural area or farm. I'm only scratching the surface, of course.

  The emotions your customers experience will be different from this travel health example, but the opportunity to let emotions spark ideas for content in each phase of the journey is the same. You will not be able to make the most of that opportunity without identifying specific emotions in your user' journeys.

- Track multiple channels or touchpoints for the journey.

  In our fragmented digital world, our users and customers interact with us through more than the website. If your user journeys ignore this fact, they will have limited usefulness for content and might even cause confusion. The spinning studio Burn, as I described in Chapter 2, uses touchpoints ranging from the website to kiosks to digital signage to emails.

When you know the channels your users prefer or could use in each stage, you can identify more easily opportunities to

- Reuse content across channels.
- Optimize content for priority channels.
- Distribute content more effectively in each journey stage.

Let's consider an example. A media company focused on the US automobile industry decided it wanted to better support the customer journey for buying vehicles. The company identified the earliest stage as Dream and reviewed its own user research as well as current trends for how millennials in the United States become inspired about vehicles. The company realized that visually oriented social media channels such as Pinterest and Instagram were crucial to supporting the Dream stage. With that clear awareness, the media company could flesh out the content strategy and social media strategy for that stage.

Don't leave your customer journeys open to the risk of being pretty but impractical. Use these tips to make them useful for content planning.

Content Mapping

When you have a solid understanding of your customers' journeys and the existing content (or source material), you can map your existing content to those journeys. This process will help you see

- Where your existing content meets customer needs or could meet those needs with minor changes
- Gaps between customer needs and your existing content
- Overlaps or redundancies in your content, such as having too much content to address one customer need or touchpoint

You can do this mapping yourself, as an individual. Or you can turn it into a group activity with your team or stakeholders. When you make content mapping a group activity, you engage the group early in understanding the current state of your content. Instead of reporting to them, you involve them in the process of discovering the current state, which can be much more compelling than a report.

If you decide to make content mapping a group activity, I suggest take the following steps:

1. Print a list of the content. If you have a lot of content, you can group it into categories (such as troubleshooting articles), or conduct a series of group activities until you have included all of the content.
2. Set up a whiteboard or easel pad with the major stages of the customer journey.
3. Provide group participants with a copy of the content list, sticky notes, and markers.
4. Have participants work together to write an item from the list on a sticky note, and then place it on the whiteboard or easel pad. If you have many participants, you can have them work in groups of three or four. (See **Figure 4.6**.)
5. After participants finish mapping the content, lead a discussion about the gaps, overlaps, and the content that does not seem to fit at all.

Figure 4.6: A group collaborates to map content to a customer journey.

Assessing Content Effectiveness

An analysis area that I've developed with the Content Science team is content effectiveness, or how effectively your customers perceive the content. I am enthusiastic about how this analysis sheds more light on why and how content performs as it does with your customers. We developed this assessment out of our studies of content credibility and trust, where we focused heavily on how people perceive content.

Why do I care so much about customers' perceptions of content? Because, to paraphrase the adage, your customers' perceptions are your reality. Your customers' perceptions, colored by their beliefs, emotions, education, and more, drive their behavior. You cannot change their behavior, such as persuading them to use your self-service content, without managing or influencing their perceptions. Your biggest opportunity to do so is content.

In our research, we identified six elements of content effectiveness (**Table 4.2**), and these elements have held up over the course of collecting data from more than 150,000 people.

Table 4.2 The Six Elements of Content Effectiveness

CATEGORY	QUESTION
Discoverability/Findability	Does the content seem easy to find?
Polish	Does the content format and style seem to be high quality?
Accuracy	Does the content seem correct and up to date?
Usefulness	Does the content seem useful or helpful?
Relevance/Meaning	Does the content seem relevant and meaningful?
Influence/Persuasion	Does the content aid in completing a goal or making a decision?

The Content Science team developed a tool called ContentWRX to help automate this assessment, from collecting data to creating a content effectiveness score. You can also conduct this assessment by assembling and reviewing the following types of data:

- **Voice of customer data:** Mentions of content in survey or poll responses; comments on your content; email and chat inquiries; phone call inquiries

- **Social listening:** Mentions of content in social media and online forums
- **Microanalytics:** Understanding where people linger, click, save, copy, and more to help explain their reactions to content (**Figure 4.7**)

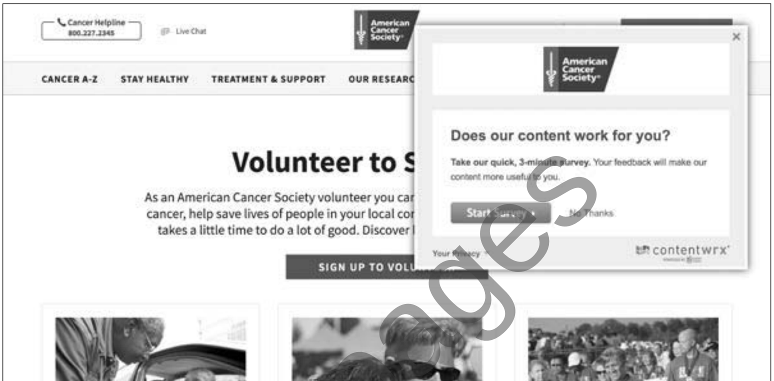


Figure 4.7: National Cancer Institute assesses the effectiveness of content on cancer.gov.

Understanding your customers' needs and perspective will complement your content analysis. You also will benefit from considering the context surrounding your content and customers.

CONTEXT

As a retired US Army general and the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Martin Dempsey is no stranger to developing and executing strategy. He once observed, "Strategy is, at some level, the ability to predict what's going to happen, but it's also about understanding the context in which it is being formulated." I could not agree more. Let's turn to four contextual factors that will be important to consider in your content strategy.

Content Maturity

This area focuses on what happens "behind the scenes" with your content. After encountering company after company with unrealistic expectations of their content capacity, the Content Science team and I developed a set of content maturity models. I'm sharing our simplest and most widely applicable model in **Figure 4.8**.

Content Maturity Checklist ™

Where are you now? Where do you want to be?

CONTENT MATURITY LEVEL	INDICATORS	
1 Piloting	☐ ☐	1. Have you successfully launched a small content effort? 2. Are you seeing results, such as a boost in sales or sales leads, from your small content effort?
2 Scaling	☐ ☐ ☐	1. Are you developing a broader vision for content at your organization? 2. Have you won more budget to invest in content efforts? 3. Are you applying lessons learned from your piloting phase to other brands, channels, products, teams, or areas of the customer experience?
3 Sustaining	☐ ☐ ☐	1. Are you investigating how marketing and content automation can make your approach more efficient? 2. Are you establishing content guidelines and tools to make your content approach easy and efficient to repeat? 3. Are you developing a plan to evaluate your content approach in terms of big goals and small indicators that you're progressing toward those goals?
4 Thriving	☐ ☐ ☐	1. Is your approach to sustaining running smoothly, so you're free to experiment with new content approaches, formats, and techniques? 2. Do your teams have the right processes and technology in place to support agility? Can they respond to problems, such as customer concerns, and opportunities, such as tweeting a clever response during the Super Bowl, quickly? 3. Is your evaluation showing progress toward your goals or achievement of your goals? Are you seeing boosts to your reputation, earned media, sales or sales leads, and customer satisfaction?

My Current Level: _____ My Target Next Level: _____

Figure 4.8: A sample content maturity model

If you find that your company is at a low level of maturity, take heart in the fact you're not alone. In the Content Operations and Leadership Study, 70.9% of participants reported being at the lower scaling level. It's not too late to catch up or get ahead.

Assessing content maturity is another opportunity to involve your team or stakeholders. You can conduct a survey or a workshop activity that asks your stakeholders about their impressions of the current approach to content operations (**Figure 4.9**).

Figure 4.9: A group collaborates to assess content maturity.

Brand and Reputation

This area focuses on the broader perceptions that customers and potential customers have about your company and its reputation. When you have a realistic understanding of those perceptions, you can develop a content strategy that sustains or changes the perceptions. GE, for example, has credited the significant improvement in perceptions of its reputation in 2015 to its content efforts.[6]

Your marketing leadership might already have a system in place to track these perceptions. If not, then you can conduct a survey or poll as well as mine your voice of customer and social listening data.

Technology Trends and Business Dynamics

As the words “technology trends and business dynamics” imply, what you consider here will change as technology and business trends evolve. For the near future, you will want to consider how advances in technology, such as machine learning and artificial intelligence, can realistically help you. Content or business ambitions that might have seemed out of reach in the past, such as personalization and automation, are much more feasible now.

Content Landscape

The content landscape is other sources of content that your customers use or are exposed to in the course of their journeys. These content sources might be your business competitors, or they might not be. For example, the online retailer mentioned previously created thought leadership about niche health conditions and topics such as plantar fasciitis and heel pain. The retailer’s competition for this content was not other retailers but other sources of health content, such as WebMD, Cleveland Clinic, Sharecare, and Mayo Clinic. Identify the potential content sources that your customers are likely to encounter in their journeys.

You’ll learn more about understanding and using insights about the content landscape in the next chapter, “Play to Win.”

PROMISING TOOLS

In this chapter, I have mentioned a few tools that can help you analyze your content, customers, and context. A number of other tools can help you conduct analysis and establish a system of ongoing intelligence. You can find a complete list of these tools in Section V. Additionally, we maintain a list of these tools at content-science.com.

With a thorough analysis of your current state complete, you are ready to put together a strategy and a set of plans to change your current state into your desired future state. Let’s start making your company’s content vision a reality.