CONTENT CREATION

Transcript
Audience Segmentation

Social Research

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LESSON 1: CONTENT PLANNING
So what is content marketing? Content marketing is defined as any pieces of content that we can use to convince and convert a potential audience into a fully-fledged customer. We’ve determined this based on a number of factors, by your content personas, by the channels that you’re using, and by what your intended business aims are. We’re going to look at varying forms of content marketing and how you can apply this to your business to achieve your goals. In terms of the benefits of content marketing, content marketing can help grow your brand or business awareness, can help recruit new brand advocates. It also helps in increasing your search engine optimization and also your traffic to your website enhancing understanding of exactly what it is that your business has to offer and then a unique sales perspective that your business has, and also helps you generate new business leads and recruit new business interests.

How to Plan

From the stats on this slide, you can see that the sheer amount of content that is generated every day is enormous. Brands have to compete not only with other competitor brands but with influencer content, and also digital publishers.

We’re going to look at varying forms of how you can create content that will help you stand out with the newsfeeds. Cutting through the noise is a real challenge for brands and businesses. Considering the previous slide when we talked about how much content is generated and consumed every day. We break a successful planning into five key stages. Listening, when we talk about listening, we’re talking about identifying what conversations are already occurring within the social media space, being able to figure out pinpoints for your intended audience, what they’re already engaging with in terms of content, and also, trying to determine any preconceptions about your brand or business that already exists and matching your content to alleviate those problems or also to leverage or capitalize on those elements that are happening by using social listening will help you achieve a great plan.

In terms of actual planning, understanding your goals, being able to align your business objectives with your content will help deliver the best return on investment for you. Implementation, this is the actual creation of your content. So we’re going to explore this a bit more in depth and talk about the different content formats that you can utilize to achieve your content marketing objectives. Measurement, it makes no sense to just see content edge into the online space when you consider the sheer volumes that are created every day. We’re going to take you through key steps on how you can measure your content, its effectiveness, and actually see if it’s delivering on the goals that you’ve setup to achieve. And then amendment, we talked about best learnings and we talked about implementing analytics from our measurement section to help us benefit and help actually focus our return on exactly what we’ve put out into the internet and to making amendments for more diverse, sleek, and optimized plan. We’re going to go through ways in which you can amend your plan based on your measurement section. It should be very evident that each of these sections in this path to cutting through the noise feeds into the next with the aim ultimately of reaching the consumer.

Content Types

With your content intent, it’s particularly important to determine what audience you’re speaking to. We can broadly group this into two sets. What we call B2C, which is Business to Consumer, or B2B, which is Business to Business. We’re going to consider a couple of determining factors when pushing content out to these two audiences and how you should tailor and adapt based on their
content need under conversation behaviors. Generally speaking, a business to consumer audience is a lot broader. When we recommend pushing at business to business content, being focused on a particular vertical, being quite specialist, and a little bit more niche than a business to consumer audience is generally recommended. When we talk about the individual purchaser in a business to consumer situation, largely, the purchaser is a single person. For example, somebody who buys a single ice cream goes to the shop and makes a purchase, where with a business to business relationship, if a shop is ordering an ice cream from the wholesaler, there might be multiple factors influencing their purchase decision, based on shelf space, based on retailer, and based on logistics, so being cognizant of the purchase behavior in that individual relationship is key.

The buying process for business to consumer audience is very much a single-step process. Generally speaking, these are individual purchases that are carried out and completed quite fast. Within a business to business realm, a multiple-step process can be in place. Talking to procurement teams, being able to pitch for business or being able to smash your credentials in order to win new business are sometimes key in this arena, so it’s a very different purchase behavior that you have to be cognizant of. In terms of the sales cycle, as a result of this more impulsive short leads sale with the business to consumer, the sales cycles are lot shorter.

With the business to business, essentially, services are retained and are kept on for a lot longer, so be aware of this when you’re generating your content and you can see the need for investment in a long term relationship with the business to business audience. Considering the sales drivers, a lot of business to consumers make their purchases based on recognition and reputation of brands of businesses. Business to business relationships are a lot more rationalized around the relationship and also detailed information based on whatever your business or brand is offering. And finally, sales factor. Consumer audiences often buy into more impulsive or emotionally targeted advertising or marketing. On the other side, business to business is a lot more rational, thought out, fact-based. Being able to create content that talks to each of these individual markets will be key to securing the right content marketing strategy for you.

There are myriad of different content types across the board. The entire world of content ranges in everything, from infographics to long-form videos, static graphics, and eBooks. Being able to determine exactly what content will help you achieve your goals is key. So make sure that you read up and that you’re familiar with the individual content types that we’re going to speak with you today. Taking the time to identify exactly what content works with your audience, what the content is that they’re consuming on a day-to-day basis, and what will help you achieve your goals will help deliver you the best content strategy possible.

When we talk about content, it’s incredibly important to recognize how this feeds the sales funnel. Literally speaking, we can break the sales funnel into three key sections, awareness, consideration, and eventual conversion. When we talk about awareness, the content here should be general content that can excite interest, but also identify a need of our target audience. Being broad with this content will help get more people into the funnel at that particular moment in time. Entertaining and educational content works really well on this section. In terms of consideration, we’re trying to build a larger relationship and a more ongoing moment of trust with our individual audience. Being able to create content that provides the utility to the individual really helps build up that trust and that credibility in this section. And then in terms of our conversion, ultimately, we need to be including calls-to-action. We need our intended audience to know exactly what it is that we would like them to do.

Using sales formats in this particular area of content creation makes lot of sense. Being able to offer discounts, trials, promotions, being able to add value to our users and help them on the path to
purchase. When we overlay the audience journey with our sales funnel under content formats, we can start to build a real clear picture of exactly how we’re going to get consumers to convert. When we talk about the awareness section, create content suggestions here would be stuff like eBooks, Whitepapers, blogs, podcasts, or even video content. Looking at social media advertising in this section, well, for a mass audience without too strong of a sales call-to-action would be key for generating mass brand awareness. In terms of consideration phase, again this is about building the relationship.

So, answering questions, building a community that you interact with an ongoing basis, and also replying to any emails that you get, being able to essentially build up a friendship or a relationship with individual consumers en masse. Offering trials, garnering testimonials from existing clients and being able to really build up that element of trust with new intended audience is key in this section. And finally, in the conversion section, being able to add additional value, looking to see where you can make further discounts and being quite clear and direct with your call-to-action in exactly what you want users to do to convert is up to that, the key. In terms of amplifying content, this has never been more important for social media marketers.

Essentially, what was before seen as a free launch by a lot of marketers has now become pay-to-play. Understandably, the content channels like Facebook, and Twitter, and Instagram have now got business cases to support themselves. They do this by leveraging reach in exchange for payment by brands. What we see here is that brands don’t just rely on organic reach for getting their content on to their intended audiences but are also well-versed or familiar with social media advertising and boosting content to news feeds.

We’ll consider the difference between organic and social content. I want to leverage and use both and also the individual formats available to you as a social media marketer. Getting your content seen by your intended audience based purely on a channel-by-channel basis has its own mitigating factors that you should consider for each individual channel. We’re going to have a look at some of the larger social media channels, and things that you should be quite aware of when you’re placing your content. Facebook as a channel has an incredibly low reach.

Facebook was the first channel to introduce what we call algorithmic content newsfeed. This means that essentially, brands can pay to be up higher in the newsfeed and also appear in more newsfeeds based on that algorithm that Facebook have introduced around not only advertising formats but also endorsements from your friends and from your contacts that you have on Facebook too. Facebook has become the largest earner of paid social advertising in the world. Through the paid formats, you can activate a number of ad types. There are fan recruitment tabs, page like ads, click to install ads for mobile applications, and even content boosting ads. This is to generate engagement on individual pieces of content.

When we look at Twitter, they have also followed up with an algorithmic newsfeed for their individual platform. There are nice paid formats on Twitter as well to help your content be seen by individual audiences. This includes what we call Twitter Cards. Twitter Cards are largely aligned much like Facebook ads to any clear objectives, whether this be click to install, content promotion, click to engage, or click to websites. Being able to align exactly what your ad type is with your intent and your business objective for each piece of content will help you receive the best return on investment. Instagram have also introduced an algorithmic newsfeed for organic content but have also introduced new ad formats as well. These individual formats are less than Facebook’s vast array of ad formats. However, their targeting and their intent is aligned with business objectives and it’s very powerful too.
Individual objectives for Instagram advertising could be click to app and install, click to websites, and also video view content. With YouTube, there is no such thing as an algorithmic newsfeed there. However, the platform doesn’t largely function on a newsfeed basis. YouTube doesn’t suffer from the same algorithmic newsfeed, mainly because there is no real newsfeed basis for YouTube. Essentially, the platform is more by video discovery. However, low organic reach is suffered by the brand, by brands who activate on the platform. Largely, for your content to be seen as a digital marketer, you need to be using Google Ads for video formats which come in a multiple array, which we’ll discuss later in this presentation. These are placed through the Google Ads platform. With Tumblr, they don’t currently have an algorithmic newsfeed, and there’s an array of paid formats which can be utilized by brands for getting content seen by larger audiences. This includes sponsored posts and sponsored videos.

And finally, Snapchat, not currently affected by algorithmic newsfeed. However, there are some really nice innovative platform features for brands to utilize on Snapchat. A great example of this would be Cadbury’s Creme Egg Easter Snapchat filter, which ran across the UK and Ireland for two days and achieved over 4.5 million views and usages of the filter on the platform. Other innovative advertising formats on the platform would also be sponsored stories.

When it comes to content, there is no one size fits all. We strongly recommend that in your research and planning phase that you establish what we call content personas. As you can see from these three examples, there is on one piece of content that would necessarily relate and resonates with each of these individual audiences. In terms of establishing exactly these content personas, there are number of key questions you should ask yourself about your intended audience. What life stage are they at? Are they married? Do they have kids? Are they still in college? What age are they? Where are they located? What makes them buy? Why do they buy? And what are their passion points, interests, or challenges on a day-to-day basis?

Creating content that resonates with each of these audiences should be a number-one objective for you. We recommend not trying to make too many content personas but ultimately identifying what the ideal consumer looks like for you and then generating halo content around that individual. Gaining shares and positive amplification of your content is great. A recent research polled on by Revue found that 70% of consumers are more likely to trust a peer-to-peer recommendation than an advertisement for a brand or a business. So when your content is shared by consumers amongst themselves, it was a great job of building of that peer-to-peer recommendation aspect.

We’re going to look at three reasons why people share content online and delve into the inside a little bit deeper. Number one would be incentives. Usually, some form of a tactic in terms of a discount, a promotion, or even a competition that you run through your social media channel can help your content get legs and be shared across a number of different platforms from a number of different consumers. Be very aware of the individual regulations by platform on staging your own social media competitions, however, as this can be quite regulated. Always make sure to cover yourself off with a standard terms and conditions, and if needed, a data privacy policy. Fame, being able to provide some form of social currency with an intended audience as peer group or social network themselves as a “I find this piece of content first.” Being able to tap into that aspect of vanity for users within their individual social networks will help you achieve great brand kudos.

People often share content that they believe their peer groups or their social circles will find useful, valuable, or insightful. This can also lead towards emotional connections between the brands and the businesses based on that aspect of trust and credibility which we touched on earlier.
Social Listening

Next up we’re going to talk about social listening. So, what is social listening? Social listening is the process of identifying overall conversation about a brand, a business or an individual on social media. This can help your content get through the clutter by being hyper-relevant to your individual audience’s conversation points. Also by identifying what competitors are doing in the market, and can also help you obtain information or insight based on any issues that any individuals might have with your brand or your business.

Social listening is a very powerful tool and should be implemented by all brands or businesses. When we talk about the importance of social listening, we can break it into five key bullets. Number one, will be being able to assess the sentiment towards your brand or business. When we talk about sentiment, we talk about either positive mentions or negative mentions. Being able to categorize these into individual segments and analyze percentage of positive versus negative will help you realize whether your brand is in a good position or a bad position and needs attention as your content marketing plan progresses. The second bullet point will be being able to assess the opinion of your business versus your competitors. Being able to look at overall brand mentions in a positive light of your particular brand or business versus any competitor’s in the arena, to see what they’re doing in social media can really help you tailor your message appropriately.

Number three would be that it also helps you identify business opportunities that you may not be aware of or cognizant of that are occurring in the marketplace right now. For example, if somebody’s talking about how much they love tea and that they would love tea to be a fundraising sponsor as part of an event, that’s really relevant with your target market, but maybe they haven’t mentioned your particular brand or business related to tea. Conducting social listening will help you identify the opportunity and complete that sponsorship if it’s relevant to your objectives, that you would’ve otherwise, missed out on. Number four is that will help you plan any social media campaigns to fit with your audience interests. For example, if you were a software company and you were targeting gamers who were very into football, being able to monitor and analyze which popular football teams were doing well or relevant to your particular audience, would help you determine what sponsorship properties maybe that you might pursue, or what content that you might seed out through your social media content strategy that would be hyper-relevant to your audience.

And lastly, being able to determine any crisis points. Often consumers can complain or can talk about your brand or business without directly tagging or mentioning you in individual posts or comments that go out online. Being able to use social media listening, being able to determine your key phrases around a crisis or something that maybe coming down the line for your brand or business, watching out for these and also measuring any traction that these particular crisis points develop. Being able to use social listening to do this will help you identify these crisis points well in advance and form a strategy in order to deal with them.

So, how can you use social listening to identify a real brand crisis? There are a number of ways. Number one will be setting up tracking for keywords or phrases around your particular crisis. Looking to see where these topics are coming up, where the conversation is happening and any extenuating circumstances that you weren’t aware of around this particular crisis to help you build a full picture. Using social listening to determine the volume, consistency, and sentiment around the brand mentions to do with your individual potential perceived crisis, will be key. And using social listening to do this will help you greatly. Identifying key contributors to whatever the negative sentiment is, being able to look at their full profile, their background. Maybe they’re a former disgruntled employee, maybe they work for a competitor. But always be aware that if using a tool like Twitter Lists to determine contributors to a particular brand crisis, that when somebody’s added to a Twitter List
they get a notification. So, labeling a list like “Troublemakers,” and then adding these individuals to it will identify you as tracking them as a troublemaker. Something to be aware of.

Also, look towards setting up a Google alert for any wider spread of the brand crisis outside of social media that may land in online news publications and also on other online sites. Making sure you have a full and consistent view of your entire potential perceived crisis from online to social is key for establishing a very clear picture.

So, how do we spot and how do we prepare for a social media crisis? There are three key things to look for. Number one is informational asymmetry. What we mean by informational asymmetry is when a business knows just as much as the consumer does. That the business is genuinely just not aware of what is happening and that this is a real new piece of information. For example, if you’re a business and you see a consumer tweet that, “Oh my God, I can’t believe XYZ business is on fire down the road.” This is maybe something that you’re not aware of and you need to act fast, obviously, to contact the emergency services. But also, to interact, to calm and to reassure your potential social audiences that the issue is being looked after, being looked into, and is under control. Secondary is that the message is representative of a consistent difference. Often users can be trolls or can be quite negative to brands or businesses online. This is not in any way to dissuade you from carrying out a content marketing project as part of your marketing mix. But just being aware that audiences can make flippant remarks on social media and these aren’t necessarily crises. However, if 50 individual consumers all tweet or Facebook post or Instagram a product issue or a business problem that they have with your individual brand, then you need to consider that this could potentially be a crisis and not just a once-off complaint.

And finally, scale. Looking to see just how far this particular message or this particular crisis has spread. Being able to determine if this is purely social or if it’s reached online news publications and being able to determine the reach and the influence of the particular contributors to any negative sentiment that you have seen on your individual brand pages or targeted towards your business to attempt to determine how far this is actually going to influence consumers and what fallout you need to prepare for.

For example, a customer walking into a bar and having service from a rude barman and posting a complaint on social media, is very different from somebody posting a Facebook status identifying that a gunman has wandered into a restaurant. One of these is obviously a lot more serious than the other and being able to determine the scale, the reach and the fallout from each of these particular social media moments, will be key for determining a successful crisis management program for your social media. So, how do you prepare and how do you manage a social media crisis? The number one thing that we could recommend for you in terms of managing and mitigating any risk of a social media crisis, is to prepare for all eventualities. Get all of the skeletons out of the cupboard and be prepared for worst-case scenarios and keep these documents quite confidential. Them falling into the hands of competitors could be incredibly detrimental for your social media marketing strategy. Draft a response document in line with exactly what it is you want to say as a brand or a business should any of these particular skeletons in the closet ever come to light. Make sure all of your key stakeholders are involved in the drafting of this response document. This can be anything from small product issues to large-scale issues around staffing or maybe previous embezzlement.

Being aware of every single aspect of how you could be vulnerable to an online audience will help you be prepared in the best way possible. Use social listening to identify any potential crises, but also to monitor any existing crises and report on them regularly. Be aware that conversations don’t just
happen within your channels and that you’re not always tagged in conversations. So, search proactively for brand mentions that are untagged through social channels. What we mean by untagged is essentially, where an audience member has decided not to use an @ symbol in front of your name on Twitter or post directly to your Facebook page or Instagram account. So, make sure that you’re aware these conversations are happening in a wider scale and to be on top of it from a brand perspective.

Be honest and open where possible about responding to consumers. Apologize for delay times if customers are feeling infuriated and ignored. And always try and offer a human absolution and a very realistic approach. Further engendering a human impact may be achieved by signing off your message with your name. When consumers see your name at the end of a response, they see a human behind the brand and not just a faceless corporation. And finally, try and take conversations into the private space. There’s nothing that looks worse than when a brand interacts in a back and forth exchange that looks like a petty and bitter squabble. Maybe move any conversations that you feel might be fruitless into a private phone call, into private messages or into an email. Essentially try and move any public spats into an enclosed, controlled and non-public space.

So, what makes a great content marketing campaign? We’re going to have a look at some key determining factors of the good and the bad.

Awareness. Having really good strong awareness with your intended audience and making sure that your content is reaching them on a consistent basis. A bad example of this for a brand or a business would be that your reach and your traffic to your site are quite low. Engagement. Making sure that your intended audience and that your consumers are engaging with your content on a regular basis. That your content is adding value to their lives, and that you’re also helping move them along the conversion funnel by using this content to engage them at the various stages of the buying process. A bad example of this for a campaign, will be that your engagement is either largely negative in its sentiment or that it’s just not engaging with your intended audience whatsoever. Be cognizant that content promotion is sometimes needed to achieve this engagement.

Understanding. In terms of your content marketing strategy, a great example of this would be that your audiences don’t just understand the content but they actually engage with it, add something to it back. That way, if there’s lively debate or discussion, you can identify that your audiences have benefitted from your content but are also keen to contribute to it as well. A bad example of this for a brand content marketing campaign, will be confusing content. Where users are asking questions that they just don’t understand the piece of content that’s been seeded.

Tone is another important element to consider in your content marketing campaign, whether it’s right for a business-to-consumer audience or a business-to-business audience, and whether it’s content that they can relate to. A bad content marketing campaign will hinge largely on slang or language that alienates your intended audience. Make sure that the tone of your content, the delivery in which it’s made and essentially the content that you’re pushing out to drive people along that conversion funnel is right for your audience.

Consistency is crucial. Making sure that your content doesn’t just sit in a silo for your social media, but also mirrors any other content promotion that you’ve got happening for your brand or your business whether that be in traditional forms such as leaflets, print advertising, television advertising. Making sure that you have a consistent brand or business message across all formats in keeping with your social media content makes sense for a consumer or for your intended audience. Always consider consistency across your brand voice whatever guise that takes. A bad example of this, would be to have a social style that is only consistent with your social platform and doesn’t recognize
the other elements of your marketing intentions. And finally, your business objectives. Making sure that the content that you’re mapping into your content strategy is linked back to, and is defined by, your business objectives. Whether they be generating new leads, generating new sales, being able to expose an audience to a new product development or to a new sales launch, ultimately at the end of the day the reason why we’re creating this content is to convince and convert audiences. So, making sure that your content is aligned to your business objectives will help you achieve a great content marketing campaign.
LESSON 2:
CONTENT FORMATS
Social Media Platforms

So, when we talk about content by platform, it's important to understand and to recognize that each platform has not only its benefits, but its pitfalls. Being able to strategize and plan for each individual platform for your social content will help you achieve not only the best return on investment, but also maximum engagement for your individual target audience. Always stay aware, and be up-to-date with any innovations and new features that are added to social platforms.

The social media space, as a business, is constantly evolving. Since we started these slide decks, I'm sure some new social media innovations have already happened. Be sure, as a social media marketeer, to keep up-to-date with the latest social media tech blogs, for example, Mashable or TechCrunch. So that you're able to be kept up-to-date with innovations and platform changes that are relevant to your business and to your industry. This table shows a variety of forms of content and what works best per channel. As you can see, Facebook and Twitter are largely the strongest in terms of the types of platform channel content that they provide and support. Also, arguably, they could be seen as the most innovative in terms of the new features they roll out on a consistent basis.

However, it's also important to note that platforms like LinkedIn and Snapchat do have their own benefits and very dedicated audiences, very much in contrast to a mass audience on the platforms for Facebook and Twitter. Being able to determine the content that you want to use and the individual channels will help you optimize your content in the best way possible.

Content by Audience

As discussed previously, a business-to-consumer audience and a business-to-business audience consume content in very different ways. When we talk about the content that they consume, we can break them down largely into content formats. As you can see from the business-to-business aspect, there's a heavier reliance on the likes of eBooks, whitepapers, and fact and educational data-driven content formats. Whereas on the business-to-consumer side, it hinges largely around entertainment, emotional and also mass awareness formats.

Be cognizant of exactly which market segment your brand or business are aiming to convert, and align your content formats accordingly. So, in terms of this content the first that we’re going to look at today, are articles and blogs.

So, what are articles and blogs and how can they help your business? Articles and blogs are essentially pieces of writing that are concise and are themed around a particular moment in time or a particular topic. The aim of these pieces of content are to convince audiences of your credibility, your knowledge and your in-depth understanding on a particular topic. This could be related to an industry innovation or could identify a challenge or a pain point for your particular intended audience. The overall goal of this piece of content is to convert these readers into potential business leads.

Blogs and articles can also be used to help improve what we call your search engine ranking, or SEO. Search engine optimization essentially means that the pieces of content that you put up onto your site contain a number of keywords. These keywords relate back to user behaviors when users search for individual topic or themes. Being aligned to the topics or themes that your audience is searching for and making content around those particular topics and themes, will help improve your search engine results when your intended audience search for those items.

That sounds kind of complicated, so here's an example. If I'm a hardware shop owner, then articles and blogs that I would put up on my site may be around DIY tips. They might be about new industry
innovations in hardware production facilities and they might be around what’s happening in our store this week. So, when our intended audience searches for industry innovations or for DIY tips, they may naturally find my site as a result of the content that I’ve pushed out through my articles and blogs. This aspect helps generate inbound traffic into your website and will hopefully end up in conversions for your brand or your business.

**Blogging**

Characteristics of high-quality blog content include the following. Consistent style and voice in terms of the content. Not mixing between we, us, me, I, in terms of your prepositions. Always write from a consistent voice. Identify what that voice is, and try and determine it, maybe even by outlining what it is in the paragraph. We write in a certain way and we always refer to ourselves as a we because we’re a very inter-knit team. Being able to define this and have all key stakeholders or anybody else who’s involved in your content marketing around blogs and make sure that they’re aligned with these determining factors. A high-quality blog post will be written for a particular demographic and touch on a particular challenge, pain point or interest.

Consider your content personas, especially when writing blog content pieces. User attention spans are up to about 15 seconds. So, you really need to capture somebody’s imagination in the first two paragraphs. Being able to obtain somebody’s attention to read the full blog post article will help you achieve the best possible return on actually taking the time to write these individual articles. SEO optimizing tool Yoast, recommends that blog posts should be a minimum of about 300 words. In truth, there is no ideal length for blog posts. Individual audiences will have differing attention spans that’s particular to them. Make sure to test, analyze, measure and then implement any learnings you have from your individual blog posts by looking at your Google Analytics on the back-end of your website or by tracking any CMS-installed analytics panels.

And finally, make sure to optimize for your keywords, which means including whatever the theme or topic is consistently within your blog post and update it regularly. There’s no point in having a blog on your website gather dust for months on end when you could be utilizing this as a very powerful tool for generating new leads for your brand or for your business. When we talk about optimizing your blog, here’s a simple checklist. Number one, be focusing on a keyword or a theme making sure to repeat this a number of times through the blog post or article, will help gain you valuable SEO. Including that keyword in the opening paragraph, will outline exactly from a user perspective what it is they should be expecting to read about.

From a technical aspect, using h2 tags on your blog post and including your keywords in these, will make the automated process of search engine ranking profiling, reflect well on your individual site. Make sure to include your keywords and any ALT tags for images, and finally, make sure your search snippet is defined to feature exactly what this particular piece of content is about, but also features your relevant keyword. When considering the benefits and limitations of blog posts and articles, there are a number of key considerations. SEO is a very obvious benefit for blogging for your brand or business.

However, there is a considerable amount of time and resource investment needed in terms of achieving a really good search engine ranking as a result of blogging. This is not something that just happens overnight. Forming a link strategy where you can earn links back to your site by utilizing devices like guest blogging, will help add additional traffic to your site. It is very important though, as a limitation, to define that any paid placements of blog posts or linking back to your site will usually use what Google calls a “non-follow link.” This means the link will exist on another site, but ultimately
will not benefit search engine ranking. Message control is achieved very well by utilizing your own blog post.

Essentially you control everything that goes out from your individual blog. But make sure to involve internal stakeholders so the blog is representative of your entire business, but is also checked for legality, for typos and for consistency across all marketing materials. Controlling that message is harder to do with guest blog posts. So, for example, if you invited a similar or synergy-based business to blog on your individual website, being able to censor them in advance or determining some house rules would be key.

Blogs also offer a great platform to include all forms of very innovative and creative content from creative writing to videos to polls. You'll be able to use your blog as a really blank canvas for getting your brand message out there. One watch out, would be to make sure that all content that is put out through your blog, you have appropriate rights and permissions to use. And reach. As mentioned before, definitely consider gaining extra reach and leveraging influencers to get your content out on their channels as part of your blog strategy.

However, with all paid placements, there should be a clear declaration of whether the content is sponsored or not. Make sure to be transparent and if in doubt, always declare. In addition to great SEO, including blogging in your content strategy will help bring traffic and users to your website, which ultimately can convert into leads. Companies that blog generate, on average, 67% more leads per month than those that don’t. That’s a very impressive statistic. 37% of marketers say blogs are actually the most useful and valuable tool of content marketing. This diagram shows exactly one particular way in which a blogging strategy can help drive sales. Make sure that your blogging strategy is aligned to a business objective and consider it as part of your wider content marketing strategy.

**Influencer Marketing**

Influencers on social media are now getting more traction than even some of the longer-established traditional media outlets. Take for example, Zoella, a famous YouTuber from the UK who now has 10.2 million YouTube subscribers. The BBC, a long-standing stalwart of the media industry pales in comparison with three million YouTube subscribers. Consider influencer marketing through individual influencer channels as part of your content strategy. You may recall earlier in this presentation we talked about the influence that a peer-to-peer recommendation has on individuals. Being able to seed content through an individual influencer’s channel actually adds that peer-to-peer element of brand marketing that is not seen as an advertisement.

However, there are certain watch-outs to consider. The three areas to ensure compliancy and transparency with your marketing campaign are the following. Disclosure. Disclose early and disclose often. Any paid or sponsored influencer program that’s done through your brand or business is your responsibility for the influencer to disclose the nature of the relationship that they have with your business. Whether it’s, “I was gratefully paid in return for my contribution to this blog,” or “X business gave me product in order to review it.” Making sure that your influencer that you’re utilizing for your particular moment or campaign discloses exactly the nature of your relationship will lead to full transparency.

Honesty. Making sure that the message that’s being delivered through your influencer channels or through any influencer marketing is honest. Now, you can control this to a certain degree but ultimately, you don’t want to mislead users in any way or seed out an incorrect message through influencer channels that could be perceived to damage an audience’s perception of your brand or
business through misleading them. And finally, monitor the influencers that you utilize to seed your content through. Make sure that they’re complying with any regulations that you’ve set out. Also, make sure to include these in any contractual negotiations that you have with these influencers.

Influencer channel marketing is becoming one of the most popular and the strongest way a brand can communicate with a very relevant audience and make sure their brand is given that really strong peer-to-peer connection. Also consider that just because somebody has 10 million Twitter followers or 20 million YouTube subscribers, that doesn’t necessarily mean that they have the right intended audience for your brand or product. Conducting social listening around the individual influencers will help you identify exactly the audiences that are speaking about them, engaging with them, and viewing or watching their content.

Always remember that relevancy is more important than reach. Reaching 1,000 people who are purely irrelevant is less impactful than reaching 500 people who are really relevant to your brand or business. Ultimately, it’s about filling that sales funnel with as many relevant consumers and targets as possible with the aim of converting them at the end. So, make sure that your message is delivered to the right, relevant audience and also use your content consumer personas to help achieve this.

Here’s a case study of influencer marketing gone wrong. It should serve as a cautionary tale to any brand or business interested in conducting influencer marketing. And also show the power by which these influencers wield. Mondelez, the parent company of Oreo, conducted a YouTube influencer campaign called, The Lick Race. They challenged some very top-ranking influencers on YouTube to see how fast they could lick an Oreo to completion. The reach was over four million UK YouTube users. However, these influencers did not declare that they had been paid by Oreo to feature this brand activation as part of original content, or seemingly so, on their channels. This was found to receive complaints by the UK Watchdog, the Advertising Standards Authority who instructed Mondelez to remove all of their YouTube videos in their current form from influencer channels and to declare the nature of their relationship with these individual influencers. Ultimately, the brand was left embarrassed in a situation they could’ve easily avoided.

How could they have avoided this situation? By holding contractual obligation with the influencers to declare the nature of their relationship, for their business channels, when sharing the content, to declare that the content was paid for, and also to annotate any particular video content that had gone out with a disclaimer and a notice to individual YouTube users that this particular content was sponsored.

Video

That leads us to video content. The number one format of content consumed on the internet today. Over 55% of respondents to the Global Digital Landscape Survey said that video content was the number one form of content that they accessed every single day. It’s no wonder there’s been such an explosion of video content in the online space considering brands and businesses are now clamoring to create as much content as possible to keep up with the innovations that are being introduced by the big social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram and YouTube. As such, these platforms are now competing with each other for video dominance. We’re going to look at some characteristics benefits and challenges of video content creation in the content marketing space. In terms of characteristics, audience attention spans have shortened greatly.

Being able to create very short, snackable content as we term it on the go, makes for an audience that is very happy because you’re meeting their consumer behavior need. Making sure that the video content that you’re seeding out through your individual channels is also relevant to your consumer personas. Having strong call to actions whether it’s a link back to a website, to download an app, or
to avail of something in store. Your call to actions don’t necessarily always have to be digitally focused but there should be some direction by which you want your users or your target audience to take.

And finally, creating high-quality video content. In terms of the amount of content that is produced on a day-to-day basis, making sure that your content is premium, top-notch, and reflects your business in the best possible light will help resonate your brand with target audiences. In terms of benefits, you’re capitalizing on an audience need by which the name of the game is video content because it’s their number one consumed form of content. Video content also benefits from additional organic reach which is ultimately cheaper for you to seed in the long run. And also, video content helps to capture the attention and the imagination of audiences in a way that static or text-based content doesn’t necessarily always achieve.

And finally, in terms of challenges for businesses, video content is not cheap to produce. Being able to do this dynamically is a real undertaking considering that video content often requires planning, preproduction and then actual production and post-production editing. It can be an expensive undertaking for businesses. Also, one thing in terms of a challenge to consider is that most video content that’s seeded out in the social web, suffers from, and is subject to, a feature we call, silent autoplay.

What does silent autoplay mean? Well, essentially, it’s video content that plays within social media news feeds with no sound. This is largely due to mobile. On mobile, there needs to be a click into the individual video for you to actually hear the sound. As a result, the consumer behavior is to swipe through story after story without landing on a particular video that interests them. All the time these videos may start playing in the news feed as they scroll by them, but they’re not necessarily hearing them. Making sure to optimize your content for silent autoplay is key in seeding any social media video content through your channels. As discussed, video consumption habits have changed quite considerably. In 2015, Microsoft reported that we now have an attention span of eight seconds. That said, some marketing communications will require longer forms of video. These videos, however, should be one minute and 30 seconds at the very most. When we talk about shortform video content which is slightly different to our longer form cousin, the video content around this can be broken up to three distinct varieties.

Shortform narrative, where the video is essentially no more than 30 seconds, but is a continuous story that should have a beginning, middle and end. Shortform looping is a style of content where the narrative is less important and is secondary to the looping nature or feature of the piece of content. Think of these as similar to a flashing neon sign outside your favorite takeaway. Being able to see this piece of content as more of a visual interest piece than telling a narrative is key for best utilizing it. An example of a shortform looping piece of video content might be a GIF file. GIFs essentially, capture the shortform video file and loop it consistently.

And finally, shortform stop motion. Users can upload video by tapping on the screen to hit record, take their finger off the screen to press stop. This start/stop fashion is really conducive to special effects, magic tricks and being able to move very, very quickly from one situation or scenario to another. Largely, the stop motion forms of social video content are captured on mobile as well, so the quality isn’t always up to great premium standards. As discussed, our attention span when it comes to content of all forms, has changed. It’s gotten a lot shorter.

We break video content up into two key formats. Longform and shortform is discussed. These two content types serve very different functions for the social media audience needs. Always consider how the social media audience is viewing. Long viewing, longform, means largely a user is on laptop,
a desktop, or a tablet computer. Shortform content is a lot more conducive to on-the-go snackable content that is largely consumed through a mobile device or through a tablet. With these in mind, data restrictions around the longform video obviously, will be of a higher degree. In terms of your shortform content, that data requirements are a lot lower. So, this would be more fitted towards your mobile on-the-go consumer. Retention rates are a lot higher for shortform video because there’s less requirement from a user to watch all the way through to the end. And common themes for shortform might be around humor or educational pieces. Whereas longform content is a lot more utilized in educational but also, emotive and compelling pieces where the audiences feel required to watch all the way through to the end. Ultimately, what we find with longform versus shortform video is that the reach for longform video is a lot lower than for shortform.

One key consideration about this would be maybe considering taking a piece of longform content and serializing it into a number of different segments that you can then utilize and seed out at different moments in time. Thereby converting a piece of what may be potentially longform content into shortform content in snackable chunks. These will help extend your reach and also longevity for your piece of longform video content. In terms of best practice around longform video, there are a few key rules. Make sure to keep your content one to one and a half minutes. I know it’s called longform video content, but really, we want to keep it as short as possible without boring audiences. Make sure that you are aware of the autoplay in silent mode. And always optimize that whether your video has people talking in it or something that’s delivered in the first couple of seconds through an audio cue that you’re aware that subtitles are needed and really to move that audio cue into later in the piece when audiences might click through to actually hear the content. As always, include a call to action.

And finally, make sure that you have permission and usage rights for everything that features in that video. In terms of declarations of consent for many passersby or extras or actors in your videos, to any imagery, logos or signage that may feature in your video. Best practice is to make sure that you have permission and signoff for all of those featured within your video. How does this differ in shortform video? Well, largely in length. Making sure that your videos are kept really to about 30 seconds at the very max. We find square dimensions work particularly well with shortform video based on your individual platform. For example, Facebook and Instagram do really well with shortform video that is square dimensions. But do consider landscape for the likes of YouTube or for Twitter. Be very aware of any text overlay that feature in your video content in terms of promotion. This is particularly important for Facebook. Reach for your content can be limited based on the amount of text overlays that you have not only in image content, but video content. Defining your thumbnail as a frame within your video content that contains a large element of text overlay could hamper your reach and affect your social media advertising of that particular video. And also, considering that the videos are so short make sure that you’re not trying to overcrowd it with complex, cluttered themes.

Keep to one consistent strong idea at the very most. Each individual platform comes with its own challenges when it comes to video content. Facebook’s challenge is that there’s a high precipitation of video content on the news feed which makes it hard for brands to cut through the noise. Predominately, video content here is also viewed through silent autoplay, which means subtitles should always be considered. On Twitter, half-life within the news feed is so fleeting that video content should really be promoted where possible to achieve maximum reach. And also, consider the need for subtitles around the silent autoplay feature as well. Instagram video content has a 60-second limit on anything being uploaded to the platform. So, if you create a piece of content that’s one minute and 30 seconds long, be aware that you will have to trim 30 seconds out of this content before seeding it on Instagram. While YouTube doesn’t necessarily have a news feed, getting discovery of your content here can be more challenging.
Looking towards a content promotion strategy around some paid advertising with the platform is key on driving your brand message. A real challenge with Snapchat’s native video feature is that the content is recorded live, and on the go. This prevents any high-end production in terms of really nice video content, so make sure your adept at what we call mobile capture. And lastly, on Tumblr, content here consumed is very short. We’re talking two to three seconds. Really Tumblr is adept at short video content in the likes of GIFs and kind of funny memes that move. Make sure that you’re aware in terms of the video content behaviors based on your individual platforms and the challenges that you may face when seeding video content out onto these individual platforms.

We mentioned briefly that the individual social media platforms are now competing for video dominance with each other. Well, what does this really look like? Month on month we’re seeing Facebook and YouTube compete with each other by mere margins of thousands of views. What this means is that the two sites are really gearing up for a battle royale where they compete directly with each other for the largest share of video consumption on the internet. Being aware that each of the social media platforms are now competing with each other for video dominance should be at the forefront of your marketing strategy. Looking towards utilizing the native video features per platform will help you receive the best return on investment and also the best reach and views per platform. For example, if you had a nice of video content, best practice would be to seed it out through the native Facebook player rather than to upload it onto YouTube and seed out the link on Facebook. The two platforms are in competition with each other so, natively, Facebook will penalize you for using a YouTube link. Consider the brand and business objectives of the individual social media platforms and try and play to their strengths. Great innovations from the individual platforms are quite frequent in terms of video content. You can see on this slide a great example of 360 video that was used as a video of the day for GoPro. Three sixty video enables users to click and drag and see a full 360 perspective of the entire video capture process. It’s a really nice feature and it’s paving the way in terms of video consumption and innovation moving video almost into virtual reality. In the center, you can see an example of Twitter’s innovative video card, that autoplays video within the news feed, another example of native video streaming.

And then, on the right, YouTube’s own native advertising format, Pre-rolls. Pre-rolls are when YouTube shows you a piece of highly targeted leader content that plays before the piece of content that you want to see. This can be highly targeted towards your particular moment in time and what you’re consuming. For example, if you’re watching funny cat videos, then a brand of cat food that advertised as a YouTube pre-roll in advance of the cat video would make a lot of sense. It’s identified that you were interested in animals and specifically that you have an interest in cats. YouTube pre-roll advertising can be used really effectively using Google’s Ads for video platform to achieve the target. It also capitalizes on existing user behaviors and their history profile with using YouTube.

From the attached chart, you can see how Facebook’s algorithm has now prioritized organic reach around video content. It’s above everything else. Facebook have done this intentionally to compete with YouTube for that share of video consuming audience and try and keep people within the singular Facebook experience. When publishing your video content, it’s important to optimize per social media channel. You receive the best reach by publishing to one of the big five social media channels. These include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Linkedin or Instagram. The only channel without a native upload function within these five is LinkedIn. However, YouTube embeds do automatically play in this channel. Many of the other social sites that allow for native video upload, also allow for a very handy call to action button. This emphasizes what we’ve said previously about including call to actions. These can be embedded or overlaid on the video content. Again, the exception to this will be LinkedIn, who would rely solely on YouTube for those call to action embeds.
There are also specialized video advertising formats for each platform. One particularly useful feature, for example, is on Facebook where you can build a target custom audience based on people who’ve viewed a video for later advertising re-targeting. For example, if you put out a really lovely piece of emotive content, you can re-target everybody who’s viewed that piece of content with a follow-up more hardline sales message to drive them into the next stage of the conversion funnel. Sound should also be used more to enhance content than to rely on it. Again, being very cognizant here of the autoplay in silent feature that a lot of brand videos are experiencing due to a consumer behavior.

Here’s an example of how Twitter has innovated its platform and now offers distinct video services as part of its stable. A great example of this would be for the big rebrand a special two-minute narrative was put together to explain the processes, the understandings, and the undertakings of the rebrand. This was shared out through targeted key audiences on Twitter, with a promoted spend.

Another neat feature of Twitter video innovations is a platform called SnappyTV. This works as a cloud-based digital video recorder and seeds out live TV snippets and is exclusively by invitation only from Twitter, often utilized by TV broadcasters. For example, while live-Tweeting at a Manchester United match the broadcaster used their SnappyTV subscription to seed out the moment when the serious tackle went down or when that brilliant goal was scored. And lastly, Periscope has innovated how we consume video content by offering users around the world to seed live video directly from their mobile phones. This ties in with an auto-generated URL that is seeded out through a user’s Twitter account and offers brands, businesses, and individuals a great doorway into their day-to-day lives and also real, on-the-go, raw unedited video content.

Some of Facebook’s innovative features would be native video. As discussed, native video achieves the best organic reach and the best return on views on the platform. In fact, no other social media channel presently, can really challenge Facebook on its native video return with key audiences. Three-sixty video has been a really successful innovation for Facebook. A great example of this was when teasing out the new Star Wars film, an otherworld alien planet was shown in a full 360-degree view where users could explore every inch of this new and strange dimension using this very innovative feature and feel like they were right there in that moment. And lastly, getting in on the innovative space of live-streaming video content, Facebook has launched its platform for live video streaming called Facebook Live. This, similar to Periscope, allows audiences to tap into live, unedited, raw content that shows behind-the-scenes. This has achieved great kudos from audiences and is really best utilized for live or unique events. With video now autoplaying in newsfeeds, it’s important to consider how we accurately measure true views and success for pieces of video content.

We consider a number of determining factors and metrics when measuring the success of video content. Audience retention will show you how long an audience actually stuck around to watch your content before clicking off elsewhere. The longer you retain an audience, the more of your message that they see. Consider this when including calls to action and not just having them at the end because your audience may not actually get that far in the piece of video content. Average duration of video view will show you on average, how much of your video content was consumed up until what point by your intended audience, and is also another important consideration when including your call to action. Total video views is ranked, ultimately, in different ways by different social media platforms. Facebook and Twitter both regard a video view as three seconds or more. Whereas YouTube doesn’t regard a video view until somebody watches 30 seconds.

So, being really conscious of these varying factors on how individual platforms report video views is key on getting a clear analysis of just how successful your video content is. Another really important factor to consider is repeat views versus uniques. The amount of times somebody went back to
watch your video in a repeated fashion, rather than just seeing it for the first time. That frequency of reach, the higher it is, the more engaged with your content your particular intended audience are. They haven’t got bored of it, and they’ve gone back to see it again.

A great example of the case study of video content, was a social media phenomenon entitled, “The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge.” It was unique and viral nomination mechanic that saw audiences sharing pieces of video content natively on a lot of social media platforms for the first time. All with the aim of recruiting people to donate to a charity. Audiences were challenged to pour a freezing cold bucket of ice cold water over their heads in order to generate awareness and donations for a Lou Gehrig’s Disease charity. This gained huge reach on social media including videos from Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, and large global celebrities. Overall, 300,000 pieces of unique video content were created for this particular challenge as it very much went viral in the social media space. The charity received a 500% increase in donations and ultimately benefitted from this user-generated content a variant of native video content seeded through the individual’s social media platforms.

We touched briefly on live video, but now to explore that topic in more detail. Live video can provide its own benefits, but also challenges. Being able to prepare live video in advance is tough and challenging. Ultimately, it will come down to planning and preparation to control the environment and any external factors. To gain the best reach and audience interaction with your live social channel views, make sure to pre-promote when your social video is going live. Making sure audiences know when to tune into your Periscope or to your Facebook Live, will make sure that they don’t miss these crucial moments before they fleet and disappear.

Ephemeral and unscripted content creation is largely rising amongst consumer audiences. Snapchat is now the fastest growing social media platform in the world. The element of ephemeral that we have mentioned is largely around disappearing content. It’s the key USP or unique selling point for a platform like Snapchat. Essentially, it means that the content lives for a user defined period of time and then just disappears. This is different to the likes of Facebook, or YouTube, or Twitter where your content lives on as an endless stream of your previous musings, or posts, or content marketing campaigns.

Snapchat is really popular with millennial audience and is really being driven by personalities. Great examples of brand in Snapchat campaigns are actually undertaken by people working within the organizations themselves rather than focusing on any high quality brand visuals or above the line style executions. Great examples of brands to look out on Snapchat and follow and maybe even try and emulate would be the likes of Starbucks or Taco Bell or McDonald’s in the States. They’ve got great incisions, great connections with their target consumer audiences because they’re putting people behind their Snapchat accounts that really resonate with their target audiences.

Some really interesting statistics on Snapchat include that there’s a slightly female skew of 51%. The age demographic is very young. Really, it’s from 16 to 19-year-old. What we’re seeing is a huge increase in usage from 13% in 2013 up to 41%. That number is continuing to increase day by day. And really, the platform is so conducive to personalities that we’re now starting to see influencers making names for themselves and creating large followings through the platform solely with no other social media platform to support it. So Snapchat influencers. Here’s a great example of a case study from Dove who utilized Snapchat, again, driving that personality basis to connect with their audiences in a really meaningful, credible, and trust-earning way. They created a campaign called the Dove Self-esteem Snaps. They drove their content around this concept of self-esteem week. They used real time conversations between their audiences and a child psychology and a teacher.
Being able to access the insight and human element of the brand through these professionals allowed audiences to connect with Dove in a very meaningful way that built trust and good credibility. The activation drove 7,500 new followers to Dove’s Snapchat account and 130,000 views on content where millennial women interacted with these Dove brand ambassadors.

Why did this work? Well, it leveraged the strongest element of Snapchat of all, personalities. It wasn’t overly complicated, wasn’t heavily branded, and really focused more about emotional connection with the brand. It was very genuine and it reacted in real time. Marketers can learn a lot from Dove in this particular brand example of using Snapchat, and ultimately, understand the user behaviors and the target audience consumption needs.

**eBooks and Whitepapers**

Next up, we’re gonna look at white papers and e-books and how they can contribute to your content marketing strategy. First, let’s define the two formats and how they can be best utilized for you to deliver key brand messages and move users along the content conversion funnel. When it comes to white papers, these are long thought-out pieces of content that are based on fact, information and always include a logical link back to your business. For example, identifying an industry pain point or something where there’s a nice bit of innovation that you feel as though the industry could benefit from your learning through your research are best utilized through white papers. These are a bit more highbrow and content that necessarily leverages user data. There’s a lot more research and a lot more time gone into providing white papers than necessarily goes into e-book creation.

E-books are essentially a shorter more snackable version of this kind of content that users can interact with based on wherever they are along the content conversion path. Examples of great e-book content might be how-to guides or templates for individual industry documentation. Generally, e-books are a little bit more evergreen in terms of their content proposition. And what we mean by evergreen is content that necessarily doesn’t date too soon and is relevant for a longer period of time. Key characteristics of an e-book would be identifying a challenge or a pain-point for your audience and providing a solution.

Being able to experiment with format is a great benefit for e-books. There’s no rigid form by which you have to determine your e-book and this allows for more interaction, more engagement with audiences and actually more space to be a bit more creative. As always, this is delivering on a business objective for you. So make sure to include your branding and a link back to your website. Also, a strong call to action so that your audiences know exactly what function you want them to perform after consuming the content.

White papers are more focused towards profiling yourself, establishing authority and credibility, and thought leadership. With this, there’re obvious considerations in terms of the formatting of this particular piece of content. Strong, clear visuals, publishing in a PDF format, and linking strongly back to your business with calls to action and website branding or corporate guidelines would be advised. Also, consider your tone when writing white papers. Make sure they’re in-fitting with your industry and make sure they’re relevant to your particular audience.

One final consideration would be gating content. This is both for e-books and white papers. What do we mean by gating? Well, gating is looking for users to exchange some form of data with us in return for receiving a piece of useful content, be it your e-book or your white paper. This can help add benefit to your channel marketing by acquiring user intent, user data, and user insights, helping you tailor your content marketing more effectively. However, it can seriously affect the reach of your
potential content as users aren’t open or perceptive to giving away this data in exchange for an e-book or a white paper.

Some benefits and limitations of e-books and white papers to consider are, ultimately, they’re cheap resources to create. However, they do require an additional amount of time, research, and investment in making sure that your brand or your brand positioning is included and brought through on these pieces of content. As discussed before, being able to gate your content will help you do more user research analysis on your intended audiences or could limit the reach of your content, and ultimately, these formats will help you build credibility, trust, and utility with your audiences. However, it is challenging to build brand personality or emotional connection through these formats which is why they’re best utilized for a B2B audience as they connect more with fact-based and informational-based formats such as e-books and white papers. Some trends in the scope of e-books and white papers would be Amazon’s dominance of e-book distribution. This can make it really hard for an independent e-book publisher to push through and get cut through in terms of content distribution. Also, the consideration or engaging your content based on what your industry is more open to and willing to share in exchange for white papers and for e-books.

How can you utilize e-books and white papers to best serve your content marketing strategy? You can take learnings from e-books and white papers and build them into your own content marketing strategy whether it’d be the latest template for a blog post, top 10 tips on how to utilize Facebook’s new advertising feature, or an in-depth piece of research around the best formats by which to seed your video content to get the best return on views, being able to look around your individual industry as a social marketeer and utilize these into your business to help learnings and help you optimize your content marketing strategy is key.

These white papers and e-books can also help you form the basis for further research. Maybe, you’ve noticed something that happens on your particular social media channels or within your business sphere and you identify that a white paper merely scratches the surface. You could use this as the basis to form a fuller more in-depth well thought out white paper that helps build you into a positional brand credibility and thought leadership.

And the final consideration is the awareness of consumer trends within your industry. E-books and white papers often touch on data and insight points that can help you adapt, implement, and spot opportunities in your vertical. Keep up to date with white papers and e-books in your business vertical and within the social media business vertical to make sure that you’re implementing best case practice into your individual marketing campaigns.

Infographics

Infographics are a great creative way to show large volumes of maybe data that might seem otherwise dull. Being able to use infographics is a very creative way in which marketers are getting slightly more business-heavy stories into nice pieces of data visualization. We’ve seen an increase of usage of infographics, particularly in a business-to-business space, of 51% up to 62% in the space of a year.

Infographics are now also regularly published on online news sites as pieces of content as well. So this is something to consider outside of not just your social media marketing context. Innovations in the platform are coming in the form of moving content. Infographics is also key to this too.

We’re seeing a great sway towards moving infographics and video-based infographic content. Some key considerations when you’re putting together any infographic content for your brand or business
are the following. Make sure that your data points are reliable, truthful and up to date. Make sure that you're able to use this data to tell a story effectively. Random pieces of numbers or statistics that don't weave together in a narrative really just confuse audiences.

Make sure that you're not overloading your audiences with too many information points. Make sure you are as concise as possible. Always include premium visuals and be considerate of easy-to-read fonts. Here's a great example of a corporate social responsibility, or CSR, infographic created by Coca-Cola.

You can see this particular version of an infographic features very strongly the Coca-Cola branding icon of the bottle but also the brand colors. Immediately, you know, this piece of content, without reading any of the text, is from Coca-Cola. Make sure to include strong corporate branding in your infographics to get that same brand recognition, as generally, the creative of infographics may not align with other marketing opportunities and content that you have happening elsewhere.

Infographics come with benefits and also challenges. The benefits of infographics are that they can convey really difficult or slightly dull complex data sets into an exciting and entertaining narrative. They help build thought leadership and they're visually interesting to audiences. Challenges around infographics that marketers encounter will be getting appropriate data sets, being able to weave that narrative as we discussed, and also finding the right graphics to illustrate your particular data points.

**Images**

In other forms of image content that form part of your social content strategy, it's important to define a number of key high quality image content factors. Make sure that photography or design is of the highest possible resolution, that you're using a regular industry format such as a JPEG, PNGs, or GIFs. Make sure that you have all of the rights and permissions necessary to publish this particular piece of imagery content for your brand or business. Consider branding the individual piece of imagery so that people can connect that piece of content out of context if they see it in a place that is not your social media channel, that they can ultimately link back to you as the creator or the originator of that content.

Also, make sure that your imagery complements the message that you're pushing out. Having a picture of a cute dog or a cute cat but talking about sales that you might have on parasols may make absolutely no sense to associate the two together. So make sure there's a logical connection between the imagery and the individual post copy that goes along with it.

Some of the benefits with image-based content are that images help bring slightly dull text content to life, they can make your content stand out in the newsfeed and they can also add an element of personality or emotional connection with your brand or business. Challenges with image-based content are the time and resource needed to invest in high quality image-based content. Also, usage of stock imagery should be considered to also be within your competitor's remit too. So avoid embarrassing situations where yourself and the competitor are both caught using the exact same piece of stock imagery, and making sure that your image-based content is optimized to fit on the right social media platform at the right time.

Adding text to images on Facebook can be very useful to add further context for posts. However, there are a number of restrictions in place that apply to doing this. Images are eligible for pay promotion on Facebook with text content. However, a number of key considerations must be made. Facebook group content into three main categories, content with low text, medium text, and high text. Reach is restricted based on how much text is included on an image post. There are exceptions...
to this. That would include any imagery that you have or products that happens to have text on it rather than any post production text that has been overlaid onto a picture. Examples might be album or book covers, movie posters, or indeed infographics. The one point remains true though. Where possible, try and limit the amount of text that you include on images for your individual posts. These restrictions will affect any Facebook pay promotion of these individual posts.

We discussed adding your brand on to imagery that you seed out on social media so that users can understand and relate back to your business when they see the image out of context. Here are some great examples of high quality images that have been branded by individual brands for their social media. Note the additional text layers that have been added in post-production in addition to the branding. These text layers add an additional emotive cue for our audiences and also link back to the brand benefits. If you saw these posts in isolation with no post copy whatsoever, the message would remain clear and the connection to the brand strong.

To stand out in newsfeed, status social media content is evolving. More and more brands are now starting to innovate their static imagery-based content into looping GIFs. Here’s a great example from L’Oréal where they show a lady’s hair flowing in the wind which would generate a style of interaction that they would not necessarily get if it was a static image. This is also known as cinematographs. Largely, these work better as pieces of content where there’s no long narrative and that the looping doesn’t become an irritation to users. As you can see, this particular example, adds the brand benefit of the individual hair spray products that’s being mentioned in the post. It’s also worth noting that play metrics on short looping GIFs aren’t available in the same way that short pieces of video content will show you view metrics.

**Podcasts**

Podcasts are another key content consideration for your content marketing strategy. So what are podcasts? Podcasts are short audio blogs that allow users to listen to many shows on the go from their desktop or mobile device where they can hear topics discussed and considered from one or more contributors. Podcasts have a number of advantages and limitations. Some advantages of podcasts are that they’re a very controlled piece of content. They can be edited in post-production and made into really premium pieces of content that deliver your business or brand objectives. Podcast charts and seeding platforms offer great insights on mechanics and metrics for you to be able to track the uptake, audience retention and download of your piece of content.

Limitations with the format are that it is purely aural, so any visual cues or visual puns or anything that an audience needs to be able to see will not be able to be communicated through this format. Another limitation of this particular form of content, are that it can be intensive to edit down into a concise piece of content from a long stream of rambling consciousness. Trying to limit the number of contributors would help this greatly.

Let’s consider some characteristics of high-quality podcast content. The podcast should focus on a particular topic or theme and be consistent throughout. Try and keep your podcast really to a maximum of 15 minutes. Audiences will find it difficult to engage with content that is longer than this. Make your content fun and topical and be sure to record on a high-quality audio content that means using a specified piece of software for recording your content and not just relying on the provision of a smartphone microphone for example. To gain the best traction and reach your podcast content make sure to promote your podcast regularly with other social media content and also articles and blogs that lead to your podcast. Here’s an example of some social plugins utilized by some podcast publishers.
The example on the left from Empire of the Sun shows a remix they did with a popular DJ, David Guetta. They’ve utilized the SoundCloud podcast card on Twitter which auto-plays within the Twitter news feed. This is a great example of innovation and cross-promoting your podcast channel through other social media formats. On the example on the right, NPR has shared their podcast through Facebook’s native podcast format. This ties in with podcast streamed from iTunes and also allows consumers to interact with the content natively within the News Feed.

**User Generated Content (UGC)**

Next, we’ll look at user generated content or UGC. This can form a very strong pillar and tactic in your social content plan, remembering how strong peer recommendations can be as a form of advertising. A few examples of user generated content that you could leverage for your business include testimonials, running polls with your perspective content audience, reviews on your business, co-authoring thought leadership pieces or even conducting interviews with your potential or converted audience. However, user generated content does come with some watch-outs. Always make sure to follow these five key things. Make sure you have obtained permission in utilizing any user generated content in your social content marketing. Always be sure to credit appropriately the individual whose created this content for you in the way that they have asked. This could be done through tagging their brand or business page themselves or could be a text overlay on any piece of imagery or video content that you’ve obtained through their channels. Understand that when utilizing any user generated content that you need to maintain control of that message. For example, if somebody is doing something illegal or dangerous, don’t utilize it as a user generated content because if you do you will be responsible for publicizing that particular activity, which follows into understanding the legal boundaries.

Use common sense and implement legal advice from your internal legal teams before utilizing any user generated content and as mentioned before always declare any paid for or sponsored user generated content partnerships. If in doubt always declare. You can do this by including a hashtag sponsored or a hashtag Ad on promoted content tweets or by including a text overlay or a comment with your individual post to say this post was paid for by our business or this post was created and sponsored by our business.

**Social Influencer Networks**

We’ve covered social influencers previously but here are some added benefits on how you can leverage them in terms of creation content free. By tapping in to influencer channels and influencer content creation you can make sure that your message and your content is hyper relevant for your audience based on the audience that is subscribed to this influencer to begin with. By utilizing their channels and their association you’ll achieve great reach and access to their social audiences online. That strong peer to peer element of recommendation is also added when conducting influencer channel marketing and finally you’ll benefit from their creative input and their ideas. Nobody knows an influencer’s audience like the influencer themselves. Make sure to include them in the creation process and the reason why you are actually associating yourself with them.

When accessing influencer channels it’s important to be aware of the advantages and the limitations. As mentioned advantages include connecting and leveraging with a hyper-relevant audience with your message. Creating content that meets the demands of that particular influencer’s audience and achieving that nice element of building credibility through that nice peer to peer recommendation format. Limitations, limitations include considering their relevancy versus their reach. As discussed, it’s better to reach 1000 highly relevant ideally potential customers than to reach 10,000 consumers who have little or no interest in your brand or proposition. Always make sure that your message isn’t
misleading and is completely truthful and also as mentioned before, declare all sponsored placements.

**Content Creation Tools**

Next, we’ll conduct an overview of some useful content creation tools. To begin with we’ll have a look at some blog creation tools. Here’s a selection of blogging platforms and tools that you can utilize for your business, some of them have paid premiums subscription features and some of them are more free to use. Looking at the background of each of these individual platforms and assessing if they’re more of a business to consumer or a business to business audience would be key for establishing your blogging content strategy. For example, Medium is a great format for connecting business to business in terms of the creative industry whereas Tumblr would be a great tool for reaching millennial audiences with a business to consumer message. Make sure to do the research and find out which blogging platform is right for you.

WordPress is a very popular blogging platform content management system or CMS. The platform allows for great freedom in terms of post creation, gives great insights into backend analytics and traffic sources, allows for really creative plugins that can help innovate and energize your individual platform. It also allows a great feature by which you can police and administrate your individual page to prevent any spam or any trolls from getting involved or creating any crisis moments for your brand’s blog. With video content, there are a number of free and paid for video editing platforms. Some of these are native apps that feature video editing built in and some of them are third party apps. Some great long form video editing tools include Adobe Premiere Pro, After Effects and Final Cut. Shortform video tools include Photoshop and other native video editing tools include YouTube native editor, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, who all have various elements and degrees of being able to edit video content built into them.

Here’s a look at YouTube Native video editor. As you can see there’s a number of really handy tools, the ability to add music and sound effects, scene transitions, subtitles, make basic edits in terms of chopping and changing the length and also adding additional scenes. YouTube also has a very handy audio library of free royalty music for any video projects that you want to work on. When it comes to creating e-books and white papers there’s a number of free and paid for tools that you can utilize also. Microsoft Word and Adobe InDesign will be two paid for platforms that you can utilize to create your e-book or white paper and other free platforms that you’ll be able to utilize are Creatavist and HubSpot have a great selection of really entertaining ebook formats for free.

For creating infographics there are a number again of free and paid for tools some of these are native applications and others are cloud-based web applications. Free tools include Infogram and Piktochart and paid for include Visually and Adobe Illustrator. Some of these platforms have great templates to help you get your infographic designed up in the least amount of time and resource necessary. For image creation, there is a vast number of both paid and free for tools. For SMEs, Canva is brilliant for creating beautiful presentations and tools like GIMP and PicMonkey allow advanced image editing without having to pay high fees. Photoshop by Adobe would be the industry standard in terms of image editing. This is utilized by a lot of image professionals but is a paid for product. Here’s a screenshot of online image editing platform Canva. As you can see you can use a collection of high-quality formats and design assets from templates in the stock lobby provided. You can then customize and personalize these into exactly what it is that you need to design. It’s a very simple interface and works great for creating not just social media content but for presentation decks and even for infographics.
Podcast creation and seeding platforms come in a multiple variety of formats; iTunes would probably be the largest in terms of seeding across the web. Other platforms like PodOmatic and Podbean can help you create great podcast content that travels well online. Probably the best integrated with social sharing would be SoundCloud. SoundCloud have specially worked with social media platforms to build specific formats to help aid the sharing of their content in native news feeds streams. Other tools to consider as part of your content creation arsenal are social advertising mock-up generators. Essentially what these tools allow you to do is create a number of social media examples, being able to draft up content without having to go to the necessary bare blank design and being able to use templates to visualize exactly what it is that you’re hoping to achieve can help introduce efficiencies for you in your content strategy planning.

AdParlor and lemmetweetthatforyou.com both offer very dynamic platforms by which users can fill in pre-populated templates to get the data analyzed and visualized exactly as they need it to be. Here’s a screenshot from AdParlor; in this particular example you can see that they are demoing a Facebook advertisement. This tool is great for mocking up social media posts, various social media advertising formats and even social media channel design, for example, trying to map out what a new cover photo on your Facebook page or your Twitter account might look like if you change the font or change the color position.
LESSON 3:
CONTENT SCHEDULING
Content Calendars

So, what is a content calendar? Well, a content calendar is an essential piece of kit for any content marketer. Making sure that you align your content to a business objective, a day of the week, the channel in which you’re publishing, and your content personas. This act as a road map to make sure that your content is focused, that everybody knows exactly what your content is set out to achieve, and that you’re able to measure and effectively plan using one of these template documents. Largely, they take the form of an Excel spreadsheet or similar spreadsheet software.

What are the steps in creating your own content calendar? The overarching consideration would be whether you need to plan your content by the week, the month, or by business quarter. Being able to effectively plan by week, month, or quarter will help you achieve a road map to a destination for that particular time period. Broken down into simple steps, create a spreadsheet that contains the following headings: Platform, time of day, intended audience. An overview of the content itself, the copy to go with the content, any creative in terms of images or video, and what call to action is included with that content. Make sure to populate your content calendar with as much detail as possible. Here is an example of a content calendar that’s been created for a single week. Best practice is to embed any creative, for example, images or stills from videos into these spreadsheets. As you can see, days, dates, and sample copy are included in this particular example.

With this next example, another helpful feature is to keep a rolling spreadsheet and create a new template for each week or month. This will help keep content in the same place for easy reference. You can see with this example, at the very bottom, week one, week two, week three, on the rolling weeks of the month have been included for easy reference back to previous content. Also, consider inserting results as you continue through your content calendar process. This will help you analyze, amend, and optimize content going forward but also show you a history of how previous content has performed in one easy-to-use place. When considering the seeding of your social media content, it’s important to put some thought towards what strategy will work best for you in terms of an Always On approach or a Pulsed approach. We’re going to look at the key characteristics of each.

An Always On approach is very heavy on customer service. Because content is going out consistently, you may have to engage with your audience consistently as well. The budgets required here are obviously higher because the content is ongoing. There is more investment needed in teams and in resource to manage an Always On content approach. Be aware that evenings and weekends may not be as free as before. With an Always On content approach, audiences are more inclined to engage with you around the clock. Always On content is consistent throughout the year. So remember, key times like Christmas holidays or school holidays still need to be catered for. Any business closures also need to be factored in. Always On content by its very definition is non-seasonal. It runs through the 12 months of the year. So essentially, you need to factor this in. A Pulsed approach to content seeding would definitely yield lower inquiry levels [and] is lower on budget and resource allocation. Ultimately, it’s better leverage for daytime activity, but still allows for key campaign moments to have high volumes of activity.

And very much what we see with the Pulsed approach is that seasonality works best. That said, a combination of the both of these approaches could work quite well. Big Pulsed moments for your ongoing campaigns that happen at key times of the year, with an Always On approach to customer service might be exactly what your brand or business needs and a lot of brands and business actually carry out. So why are content calendars so important? Well, content calendars help a number of key stakeholders input into the messaging that comes through your social media content. Key areas to consider or stakeholders would be your customer service teams, your advertising
teams, your legal teams, maybe your finance teams, and your web deployment team. Making sure that compliance is achieved through your social content will prevent future headaches. Make sure that anybody who is public-facing in terms of a spokesperson, or media, or press officer also has input into this social media content calendars, so that the messages from your business or your brand are completely aligned. Allow for defined content themes that make your content easy to associate with your brand and also logical to your business. And finally, these content calendars should help you reach the right audience at the right time by using the right channels.

Key considerations when putting together your content calendar would be your business priorities. Making sure that any new brand developments, sales, promotions, or innovations are adequately covered in your content calendar. Also looking towards other forms of marketing if your business has a sponsorship deal that's pending, if they're doing some form of sampling. Making sure that you are aligned with your social content to tie into this, so there's a consistent message coming from your brand or business. Theming your content around time of year and seasonality in terms of sales will also add benefit to your brand. Here are some great examples from Lidl and from Coca-Cola on how they integrate time of year and seasonality into their social media content. Also note how Lidl have incorporated a new product launch in with their Christmas activation. They're also supporting Valentine's Day with a key product driver too. So you can see how this builds in the element of a business objective with seasonality and timing for their content. Sporting events and international days which can be sourced through daysoftheyear.com also work well as timely content for brands on social media. When creating your content calendar, there are a number of internal stakeholders that you may have to consider.

Here is an example of an internal stakeholder structure. This may not be exactly how your organization is laid out but it will give you a great idea of some considerations of internal people who may want to input into this content calendar. Selling in the benefits of content marketing to each department might be a challenge. However, including them in the content calendar creation process would help you win them over and help represent a full and holistic version of your content that represents the entire organization. Make sure that representatives are limited to one per key area to avoid elongation and approvals and content amendments.

**Scheduling Components**

Spending time putting together a content strategy and creating this content is useless unless you can get seen by your intended audience. Here is a few tips to increase your social media reach, and make sure your content is seen by your target customers. Make sure to create a strategy around your content that should be at the core of everything you do. Know where and when your customers are online, what their audience behaviors are, and what they're consuming day-to-day. Engage with your audience online, answer all queries, ask them questions, be a point of contact that they can approach. Use your traditional channels to promote your social media accounts. If you're advertising in a newspaper, why not include the link to your Twitter account on the actual printout? Make sure that you have consistency across all marketing materials aligned with your social media platforms. Social-charge your website by including any social media sharing buttons and educate yourself on all paid social formats so you know how they can be leveraged to gain you additional reach. Utilizing the native scheduling features on the individual social media platforms will help you introduce a new efficiency into how you see a content.

There are however, a number of limitations too, so make sure to watch out for the fact that these scheduling features are not dynamic. They can't respond to something that maybe when you once scheduled now seems drastically inappropriate. So make sure to keep an eye on your content that you have scheduled in through the native schedulers to make sure that they're still relevant and still
timely without offending anybody. Another consideration around the limitations of native scheduling are the end dates. Scheduling in a piece of promoted content that runs from Monday to Wednesday and says, “Happy Monday,” by the time Wednesday rolls around, it looks very embarrassing to your social audiences. So again, these native scheduling tools can be great and introduce efficiencies but just use a bit of human common sense and oversight to make sure that the content is still relevant and that the message is still on point. When scheduling your content by platform, it’s important to consider the frequency by which you have social permission almost from your audiences to publish. Posting more than twice on Facebook per day as a brand can not only be fruitless for achieving any sort of reach with your audience but can also be potentially seen as a bit spammy. Really, the highest frequency should be one to two at the very most in terms of Facebook posts.

Twitter audiences are a lot more susceptible to ongoing content pushes from brands and businesses. This is largely due to the very versatile and very fast nature of Twitter’s news feed. With Instagram, one to two posts is fine per day as well. And with blogs, really, we recommend at least two blog posts per week.

**Paid and Fixed Social Buying**

Social advertising in its most simple form falls under two categories. The first is auction based (paid social), where your ad competes in an auction against other ads, bidding for visibility with your target audience. Usually, these ads are placed via a self-service platform where you can determine your ad copy, creative, and budgets per day. In this self-service platform, you can also determine how much you’re willing to bid based on your objective. The other form of social media advertising is around fixed media.

When we say fixed media, we are talking about advertising space that is charged a fixed price. These are largely negotiated with sales reps of the individual platforms. For example, a promoted hashtag or a promoted trend on Twitter would be done directly with a Twitter sales representative and is done first, and is sold for a fixed price. For example, a promoted hashtag or trend on Twitter is a deal that is done directly with a sales representative from Twitter themselves and is sold at a fixed price. This particular format is not available to social media advertisers through the individual sales platform.

When it comes to utilizing both paid and fixed social buying, here’s a couple of tips. Always make sure your paid social amplification falls in view with a strong objective. Whether this is video views, mobile app installations, increased reach, increased engagement, fan recruitment, or website clicks. Make sure that you’ve aligned each of your objectives very clearly to an advertising objective. Target well and you’ll avoid any wastage in your advertising spend by delivering the right message to the right people and optimizing for the best conversion. Be aware of how fixed inventory offerings differ from each platform, and how they work slightly differently to your auction based format. And lastly, make sure to double and triple check any paid promotional content for any typos or any incorrect data.

Once the paid promotion goes live, your content will receive reach and engagement far beyond your brand channels. Avoid embarrassment by making sure that the content is 100% correct and accurate. Objectives for social advertising, for the most part, focus on the following objectives. Impressions which are great for generating brand awareness where the aim is to get seen as much as possible. These are usually measured in cost per mille or cost per thousand, as 1,000 views of a piece of content. Engagements are where the objective is to have social audiences engage with your piece of content. Ads will be shown to the most likely to convert users for these particular ad objectives. Views, this objective for video content, again targeting users by their behavior and
propensity to view video content and engage with it. This is also a format which you can target based on interest. Another objective is downloads. Usually, where a social ad is placed to drive app downloads from either the Apple iOS store or Google Play Stores, this is a clever tactic, as users can be targeted by device, relevant purchase history from mobile phone applications, and location based on languages. Another format is fan recruitment. This is where a business is keen to build a community of followers, and again, ads are displayed to users most likely to convert based on their interest set and user behaviors.

Formats in social media advertising that are key to understand are news feed ads. These are content formats pushed into your news feed and viewable by all, but specifically more driven towards the intended audience most likely to convert. Dark ads are ads which are only visible through promoted spend and can only be seen by the intended audience. These are not visible to all members of the public. Limitations on social media advertising are relevancy. Making sure that your content promotion is relevant for the intended audience and also for the intended duration.

Retention from social media advertising can be challenging. Sure, if you put a piece of content out and you place some social media advertising behind it, you’ll get results on that piece of content. But in actuality, how many of the people who engaged with that piece of content are going to follow your brand consistently? Retention is a real challenge for social media marketers. Being able to engage with the audiences based off of the initial engagement with this piece of social advertising will help you receive a better retention and also further your social content strategy. And similar to retention, short term traffic. Social media advertising provides a really strong boost and a nice bump in your social analytics in a short term basis. But again, investing and focusing on a long term strategy with consistent social media advertising moments across the year makes more sense to drive traffic holistically.
LESSON 4: CONTENT STRATEGY
Content Strategy Formation

Your social media content should tell a story about you. As Simon Sinek once put it, people don’t buy what you sell, they buy why you sell. Being able to tell a convincing narrative, will help you convert audiences into your business objective and become brand advocates.

Roughly speaking, content can be teamed into three overall categories. The first is functional. This is less emotive and more fact-based and driven. This is also a strong driver of B2B content and is directly related to your business or brand objective. Essentially, it’s the hard sell. Emotional, this is the realm of tapping into the human experience, whether it be funny, whether it be uplifting, or maybe it’s a moment of real honesty or poignant reflection. Showing your brand as a personality, allows consumers to relate to your business. And then essential. This is the absolute bare minimum your consumers need to know about you in order to form an opinion. This might be your product range, your prices, may be the locations of your venues or your vendors. Making sure that this content is in here, will effectively help achieve great calls to action for your brand or business.

A good social media strategy should be a mix of all of these content pillars. Forming a complete content strategy will help you create meaningful content that’s seeded to the right audience, to the right channels. We’re going to look at a number of steps in the content strategy planning process. The first would be to define your objectives. What these may be from a brand and a business perspective. It may be that the main objective for your social content is to achieve brand awareness or you could be looking towards getting sales and full conversions. Being able to align these objectives that we’ll discuss shortly with your content, will mean that you’re delivering on a brand promise.

KPI measurement. KPI stands for Key Performance Indicators. Being able to measure the effectiveness of your content as you go on and establish benchmarks and targets that you want to achieve with your content. Audience segmentation, identifying key content personas and being able to create content based on their audience needs. Content type selection, determining which content formats best serve your purposes and are required by your target audience. Platform selection, making sure the platforms that you choose to push out your social media content on make sense and are aligned to your audience behaviors and business objectives. Social listening, as we discussed before, for highlighting opportunities, identifying brand crisis, and also establishing a real picture of the sentiment towards your brand or business. Competitor analysis, to identify opportunities and crossover between you and your competitors.

Conducting content audits to make sure that your content is performing as well as it should be and making sure there are no missed opportunities for optimizing or improving your content. We’ll have a look at resourcing, the ongoing discussion between whether it’s better to have your social sit in-house or with an agency. And lastly, we’ll look at scheduling. Content creation should always facilitate a wider business objective. Here’s a couple of business objectives that we’ve outlined as sample objectives that may fit your business in terms of their social media content strategy. Increasing the exposure of your brand or brand awareness can be achieved through your social content. Also increasing traffic can help drive conversions and, ultimately, gain new customers. Increasing engagement helps build a brand trust and a brand relationship between you and your intended audience. Garnering marketplace insight. Using your social media content to act as a measuring bar by which what kind of content your audiences want to consume, but also by identifying the sentiment around your business or your industry. Developing loyal brand advocates or fans, being able to foster great relationships with maybe even key influencers that make them determined to influence other people through almost their word of mouth and their individual social channels.
Generating leads, ultimately, that will help improve your sales. When defining your content type, it’s important to also understand what the job to be doing is by content type.

In this particular diagram, we look at the difference between content that not only entertains, but educates, convinces and inspires. You can see as we move from the entertaining into the inspirational space, we go from awareness to purchase and as we move from entertaining into education, we go from an emotional response to a rational response. As discussed previously, our business to business and our business to consumer audiences are very different in their purchase behaviors and the types of content that they consume. Make sure that whatever your intended audience is, that your content format and type, including your content messaging and tone, aligns with the needs and requirements of the content these audiences consume.

**Platform Selection**

Utilizing consumer insights, their behaviors, and their path to purchase will help you choose the right platforms for your social media content. Just because a platform exists, doesn’t necessarily mean that you have to use it. It’s better to do fewer social media platforms extremely well and generate great leads, then try to do every single social media platform under the sun. Make sure not to spread yourself too thin with resource and focus on what works best for you as a brand. Again, there’s no one size fits all for any brand or business.

So when planning your channel strategy, what are the key things to consider? Well, first and foremost, what are the channels that your audience are using? Making sure that your message is going where your audiences are, is key to getting great visibility. Does the platform suit the specific type of content that you’re seeding out? Maybe you want to publish white papers. Generally, we wouldn’t recommend publishing these through Twitter. So making sure that your content is aligned to your particular platform choice as well. And to recap, allocation of resource for manning these channels, whether they be in-house or third party, making sure that you have enough resource in terms of budgets, time, and manpower to allocate the attention required to man these channels in a very convincing and conversion gaining consumer facing channel.

**Audience Segmentation**

Segmenting your audience by various factors across their purchase behaviors, age, demographic, location, language, and even device usage can help you create personalized content that adds a hyper-relevance to your message. This can ensure relevant and timely delivery of that content to particular users and can also help increase return on investment for you. Ultimately, using audience segmentation will reduce risk in understanding your audiences better. It would also increase customer retention as consumers will feel that you, as a business or a brand, really understand what they’re about. Here’s a great example of audience segmentation in process. You can see from this breakdown of age profiles for social media platforms, that a youth-focused brand, for example, maybe a concert ticket promoter, might utilize Facebook as the best place to place their message as that’s where the large 18 to 29-year-old age group is currently located. And that’s where they will receive the most relevancy, the best reach, and, ultimately, the best conversions.

Make sure to get to grips with the insight panels that are natively available for free within Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. These will help you track conversations, appropriateness of content, your audience growth, and any sentiment that exists on the platforms that you need to highlight. Being able to track your content through the native insights panel will also help you generate ideas around the kind of content that performs well and optimize this by creating more of it. Being able to leverage the reach, engagements, and time spent viewing individual pieces of content, will help you optimize
your social content strategy. So do utilize these free tools. LinkedIn also provides a great insights analytics tool in their backend. This is maybe not as advanced as the Facebook and Twitter insights panels, but should definitely be utilized for measuring the appropriateness of your content and any content successes.

**Social Research**

Before setting up any social channels for your brand or business, we strongly recommend that you conduct a period of social listening. This will help you in a number of ways. It will help you identify key usages of the individual channels, and if your audience are currently there, for you to tap into. It would also help you benefit from competitor analysis on that particular channel. Being able to identify what is going on in your particular industry in terms of negative and positive sentiment and also the kind of content relevant to your industry that’s being consumed there. And lastly, you’ll be able to identify the sentiment and the pre-existing conversation about your brand or business, if there is any. Being able to plan in advance and being able to strategize around what is currently being discussed while you’re not even on the platform, will add great benefits for you and help you optimize your social content strategy.

Social media offers a great space for discourse and being able to address concerns and complaints. Having a proactive and honest approach should help you handle anything that comes your way. Different to crisis, FAQs might be an ongoing customer questions through your channels, but also having a standard response document prepared will help build in an efficiency and agility and keep social teams aligned instead of ‘back and forthing’ on responses. Make sure these responses, though, are personalized and not just copied and pasted, as this may add an element of robotic nature and dehumanize your brand or business on social. Always try to address concerns within 24 hours. Make sure to sign off your name to add that human touch again and also add an element of contingency for customers. For example, I was speaking to Dave on Twitter about the product I was having an issue with the other day. They were able to pick up and they were able to rework their complete relationship with you and retrace their steps. This will add brand benefit for you and help build the credibility and trust.

One key consideration is to never delete or remove negative or critical comments in social media. This can often snowball into a further complaint of customers feeling as though they’re censored or that their concerns aren’t being taken seriously. Make sure, as previously mentioned, to try and move maybe public spots or issues into the private space, but don’t censor or remove negative comments for the sake of it. We touched on developing a standard response document and here are some benefits in terms of developing those documents. A standard response document will help you maintain consistent messaging across your social platforms and across whatever members of your social team, either in-house or externally, are managing your social platforms. These will add an efficiency to your social media communications. They’ll also negate any crisis from spiraling by being able to manage effectively and also consistently. Ultimately, this will help you deal with issues in a timely and professional manner. A standard response document is a very fluid creature, though. You will find during the duration of your social content strategy and activities, you will add to it, amend it, and it will develop and continue to grow.

**Competitor Analysis**

Conducting regular competitor analysis will help your content strategy in a number of ways. You may spot gaps in messaging that your competitor hasn’t picked up on. You may be able to identify new pieces of content that your audience requires, being able to jump on this and leverage this to your benefit. Watch how your audience interacts with the social content of your competitors to inspire you
and the kind of content you need to be creating, and also, avoid any embarrassment of similar messaging or crossover by analyzing what kind of messaging, their tone, and by giving yourself a unique position in the market.

Here's a screenshot of free tool, TweetDeck. TweetDeck can be used really effectively for competitive analysis in terms of monitoring brand mentions of your competitors, hashtag mentions, and even their account activity. You can overlay this with activity from your own account and also sentiment and mentions from your products or your brands. Another great free tool for measuring the impact of competitor campaigns is TweetReach. Without access to the Twitter analytics dashboard, TweetReach acts as a third party analysis, where you can track the success or failings of competitor hashtag campaigns on Twitter. This is a great tool for being able to get the insights that your competitor already has through their Twitter analytics dashboard. So what should you be looking at in terms of competitor analysis? Have a look at their content development schedule. The days in which they post and the themes in which they post around. Identify customer feedback on their posts. Is it positive or negative? How are they addressing it? And how are they moving conversations from the online space to the offline space? Watch the numbers and their social following growth. Are there key campaign moments where they recruit social fans in a rapid manner? And also, have a look at their new format adoptions and innovations to inspire you and spot gaps in where you could optimize and where you can improve upon what they are seeding out through their content strategy.

It's also very important to be aware that competitors will be tracking your social content too. Making provisions for this by not exposing too much of your strategy, by not giving away what's coming up in order for them to respond with reactive campaign, and being able to keep any new product information or innovations top secret until you’re ready to publicly announce them. Here’s a great example of social benchmarking tools, SocialBakers. This will allow you to compare and contrast your social media following based on country, vertical, or industry. This is a great tool for showing which brands are in campaign mode at the moment, where you can see they’re gaining huge social media followings in short spaces of time, and which brands are slightly dropping off the charts. This is a great tool for being able to compare yourself next to your competitors.

Facebook also have a very similar tool where you can monitor your brand pages against competitor brand pages. This is a native function called Pages to Watch, which is built into the backend of Facebook analytics.

**Content Audit**

Auditing your content regularly will help you assess whether you’re meeting your KPIs and your business objectives. This can be anything from measuring traffic to your website to social engagement or sentiment. It’s also very important for you to reconsider what free social tools, what content creation tools you’re using on an ongoing basis, and make a very rounded estimate and an honest evaluation of how your content is performing.

After a social content audit, it’s important to incorporate learnings and also best practices and optimization recommendations going forward. In terms of content audit tools that you can appropriate, as discussed, SocialBakers will help measure you in comparison to your competitors at a particular moment in time. Facebook’s Pages to Watch will also carry out the same function. TweetReach, as discussed, will help you track competitor hashtags or Twitter accounts. And finally, Iconosquare is a great tool for measuring Instagram account performance. This will give you facts and figures for reach and engagement on Instagram posts, something that is currently not available in terms of a native insight dashboard for the platform.
Allocation of resource internally or through an agency is a very important consideration for many businesses. Both have their benefits and drawbacks, but it's important to have a fully rounded view of how each could increase your success in content marketing. In-house teams are often closer to the business, their objectives, and aims. They breathe and eat the company ethos. So knowing all of the potential skeletons in the closet also adds benefit to them in terms of any crisis management. However, budgets here are considerably lower, internal insight may not be as wide a scope, and functions can be quite siloed. Where resourcing through an agency helps benefits businesses, is experience across multiple verticals which can be applied to your particular brand or business. Teams are generally more diverse and have a lot more industry insight and wider creative input. You’ll find in agencies, there are more specialized individuals in terms of even the individual platforms.

However, the consideration around agency resourcing is that it can be a much more expensive undertaking than recruiting in-house.

Scheduling Content

When scheduling in your content, make sure to keep these four concepts in mind to remain relevant and increase your chances of achieving your content goals. Timing, is this message relevant right now? For example, an ice cream post sent out on a Monday morning is not in keeping with consumer behavior. Audiences are unlikely to engage with this content. Frequency, have you already posted today on Facebook? Or are you running the risk of spamming audiences? Always think of high-quality content versus high quantity. Reach, is this channel really the best for reaching your audience? Are they using it actively? And are they engaging on it? If not, how could you change to reach them better? And occasion, is what you’re saying right now relevant? For example, posting about Christmas tree sales in July makes no sense. Also, again, be cognizant that fixed days have a duration. For example, posting a happy St. Patrick’s Day post that goes out over a four-day period when St. Patrick’s Day only occurs on one day, may be confusing and irritating to consumers. Make sure your content promotion is for a fixed period of time and that your dates make sense.

Creating content for moments that you can predict or plan around is called topical content. This concept is about inserting your brand into a contextually relevant moment. For example, pancake Tuesday or romantic restaurants or Valentine’s day. These three topics fit together really well because they’re food related and romance related. Reactive content, however, is a more agile form of content which is created around real-time conversations.

For example, a social media phenomenon like “The dress” goes viral overnight. This kind of topic allows you to create something that is timely and hyper-relevant to what it is that your audience is discussing at that moment in time. Here’s a great case study from Oreo who hinge their entire content strategy on social media around topical content. The daily twist was a form of content strategy that saw Oreo create over 100 different topical moments through social media using their iconic black and white cookies. The content resulted in hyper-relevant moments within the news feed that resulted in over 433 million Facebook views, which is astronomical. There was a 280% increase in shares of their content because their audiences engaged with it more and Oreo became a living, breathing moment in popular culture that lived far beyond their packaging.

In terms of reactive content, a great case study around this would be “The dress.” Brands clamored to create reactive content around the dress, which people were saying was blue and black or was white and gold and people really were arguing and couldn’t come to a decision over what color the dress was when it hit social media news feeds. And ultimately, the real winners in this were brands. A great example of social content in the reactive space around the dress was this campaign from the
Salvation Army. You can see here they’ve used a very clever play on words to highlight victims of domestic abuse against women. Being able to tie in a brand moment which people saw as quite whimsical and flipped to something that was very meaningful and quite emotive, helped drive donations and awareness of the Salvation Army’s campaign against domestic abuse.

**Implementing Agility**

So how does a brand or business be successful in the reactive space? Well, it’s very tricky. It requires great buy in from all stakeholders and some basic ground rules. We’ll go through a few of those now. Agreeing a framework of what’s acceptable and what works within the confines of your regulations in your industry and also consulting with your legal team is key. Developing a consistent creative style, making sure that there is a template by which you can populate quite fast with agility and not necessarily having to create something from scratch every single time a reactive moment occurs. Agreeing a subject area to act within and react to. Just because something happens doesn’t necessarily mean that you should create reactive content around everything. Making sure that you’re relevant and tying back to your brand or business objectives in those particular reactive moments is still very important. Agree turnaround time with your creative team.

Spotting a reactive piece of content and not being able to work quick enough to get the creative live, whether it be a piece of short video or a graphic that is seeded out, is incredibly frustrating. So making sure that your content is agile and that your creative teams are aware of this strategy and get their buy-in will help you form that agility. And lastly, manage your content first, organically. If you spot a good reaction, then amplify it with additional paid support, making sure that your content gets out to a wider audience. Reactive content can be a little bit hit miss, being completely honest, but when you spot something that sparks off and that can ignite into a much wider piece of success for you, always jump on it.