



Parse.ly

GUIDE



The Content Marketer's Funnel

A Three-Stage Guide to Attracting, Engaging and Converting Customers

Content as a marketing function fulfills the constant need for “words on the page.”

Those “words on the page” have a big job: they must resonate with audiences, influence high engagement, create episodic experiences, and convert customers to benefit your business’s bottom line. To showcase the true value of your content, you need to pair a proven strategy with the right technology to deliver the right information at the right time to the right audiences.

According to an [eCommerce Foundation study](#), 88 percent of your customers are researching your company through your online content before they ever reach out. Buyers are introduced to your company and to what you do through content, and ultimately, it informs their purchase decisions.

Make sure you understand how to serve them at each stage of their journey.



88%

of your customers are researching your company through your online content before they ever reach out

Introducing *The Content Marketer's Funnel* - a comprehensive framework for content strategists, creators, and marketers. It has everything you need to start your content strategy, whether your team is small and just starting out, or you're part of a larger team looking to iterate on your process. This ebook breaks down the valuable work content strategists do, showcases insights to build the audience you want, empowers you to capitalize on the true value of your content, and enables you to readily share results across your organization.

This ebook examines the flow and the metrics to help prove the value of your content in our all-digital climate. By definition, a marketing funnel is a modern application of the power of persuasion. For *The Content Marketer's Funnel*, familiarity with your company combined with your ability to create and publish valuable information will be the recipe for success.

A lot of what we're discussing here can be made easier by using Parse.ly, which was created to overcome these challenges:



Understanding your audience

Directly measure audience engagement with content on your sites and apps to understand your audience



Informing your strategy

Leverage 30+ content metrics to craft your content strategy to drive your business forward



Focusing on value creation

Use content conversions and attribution to understand the true impact of your content, and to fine-tune your strategy

But whether you use Parse.ly or not, the recommendations below are easily applicable for any marketing program. With these pointers, you'll be equipped to create a content funnel that systematically turns your audience into revenue-generating customers.

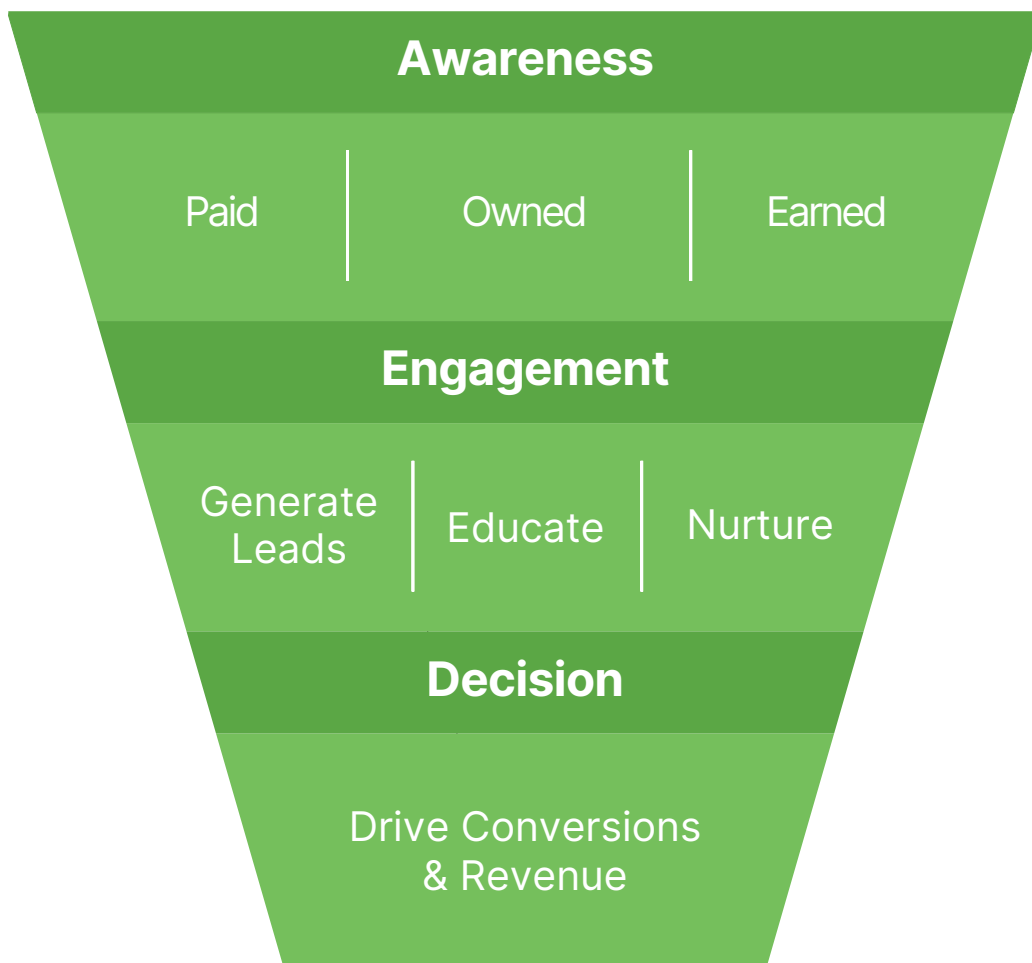
Let's dive in.



A key question to ask when setting up your content strategy is: What are you looking to achieve? Content strategies can be used to support a number of purposes, like increasing brand awareness or growing your customer base. Starting from the top and heading down the funnel, we'll cover common content employed in each stage. The goal is to provide inspiration for your own content marketing funnel and arm you with metrics at each stage to ensure you're confidently measuring and tracking success.

Before starting, the critical first step is to dig in and understand who your ideal customers are. The emphasis here is on "ideal." Only then can you develop content that compels and converts those customers. It also helps you understand who you are targeting and why. Once defined, the path to measuring the impact of the content becomes much clearer.

Our goal is for content strategists to use The Content Marketer's Funnel to prove the value of content marketing to the business, stage by stage. The funnel has three main stages, broken down to fit within the parameters of your goals or key performance indicators (KPIs). Those stages help you ask the right questions and match metrics to those goals.



Awareness

The top stage of the marketing funnel is awareness. The awareness stage's goal is to provide introductions to your company, brand, and maybe your products/ services. The key with this stage is to cast a wider net for different audiences than your "core" and to answer questions about topics you have expertise with.

We classify content that falls in the awareness stage in three different ways: [paid, owned, and earned media](#).

Paid media is any paid advertising initiative executed by your company; owned media is any type of content that your company creates, owns, and maintains; and earned media is any content about your company that is organically shared by people outside of it.

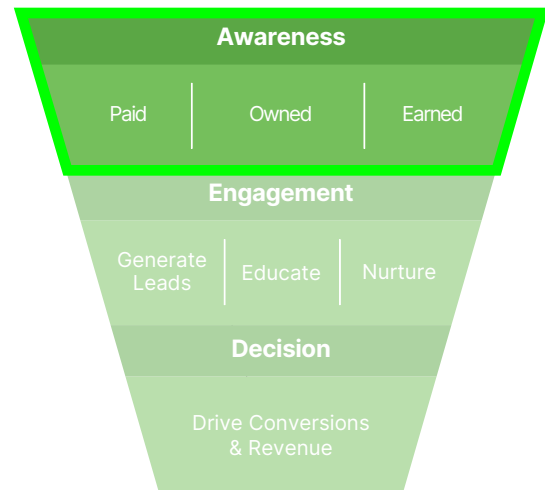
Let's go into detail on what those types of content look like in practice and how they fit into your overall strategy.

What content is in the Awareness stage?

As with all stages in the marketing funnel, content types will vary from company to company by industry, company size, and the audience's willingness to engage with the content. For a larger company, you may be able to invest more in top-of-funnel content through paid promotions on search engines or PR efforts. For a brand working within the IT space, you may need to publish more technical top-of-funnel assets to assert your credibility. And if you're primarily marketing to a young adult audience, like an e-commerce skateboarding business, you may want to tailor your content to social media and video platforms.

Here are ideas of what might fall in your company's awareness stage:

- Videos
- Website copy
- Paid promotion/PR
- Ads
- Sponsorships
- Events
- Partnerships
- Podcasts
- Social media posts



Understandably, it may be necessary for smaller companies to spend less or stay scrappy at the awareness stage. It's commonplace to see heavier investment at the middle- and bottom-of-funnel stages.

However, the awareness stage is often overlooked. Content teams tend to focus on the later funnel stages. To ensure the rest of the full-funnel marketing works as it should, gradually winning over and qualifying new buyers along the way, the funnel must be fed from the top. Make it a priority for a social media manager, events coordinator, or fellow content marketer to create content for the top-of-funnel in whatever lean way works for the bottom line—and keep SEO top-of-mind.

Examples in the Awareness stage

Any marketing funnel stage can look vastly different by company or business, industry, or goals for content. We'll share two different examples for each stage to showcase what these can look like for two very different companies, whether by budget, company size, or industry. The aim is to get you thinking about what the application of this stage could mean for your audience, content, and marketing goals.

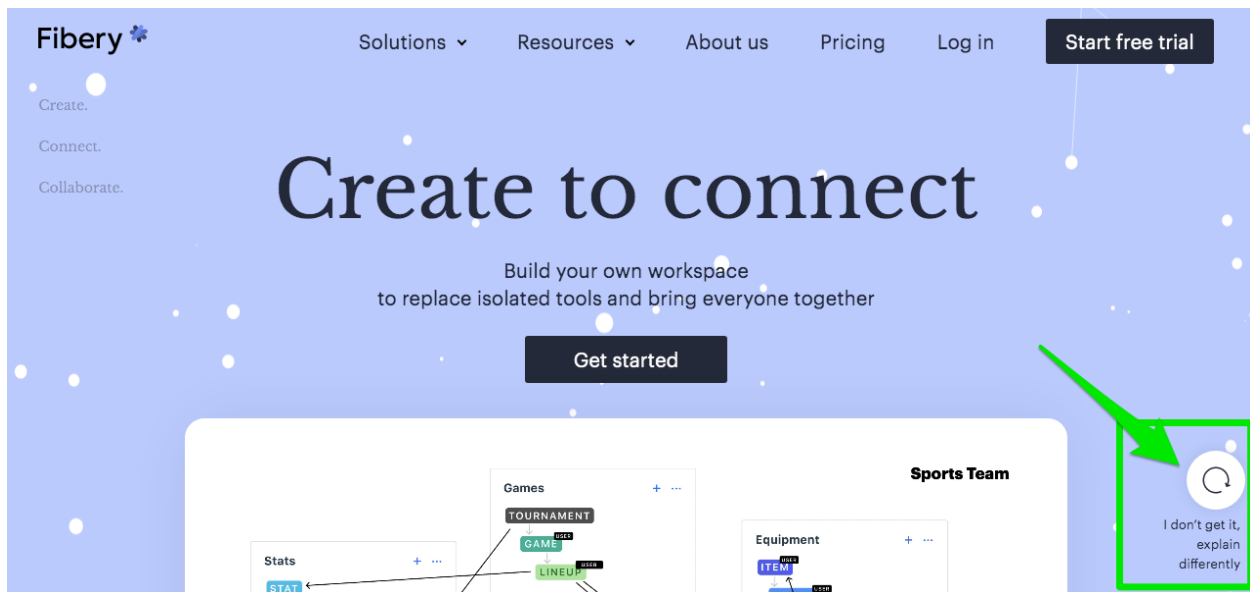
For a massive brand like Progressive, a catchy, relevant social media ad (like their take on Animal Crossing) is a prime example of a piece of top-of-funnel content. They've even made a new handle for their beloved spokeswoman, Flo, alongside their "main" company Twitter account for greater brand impressions:



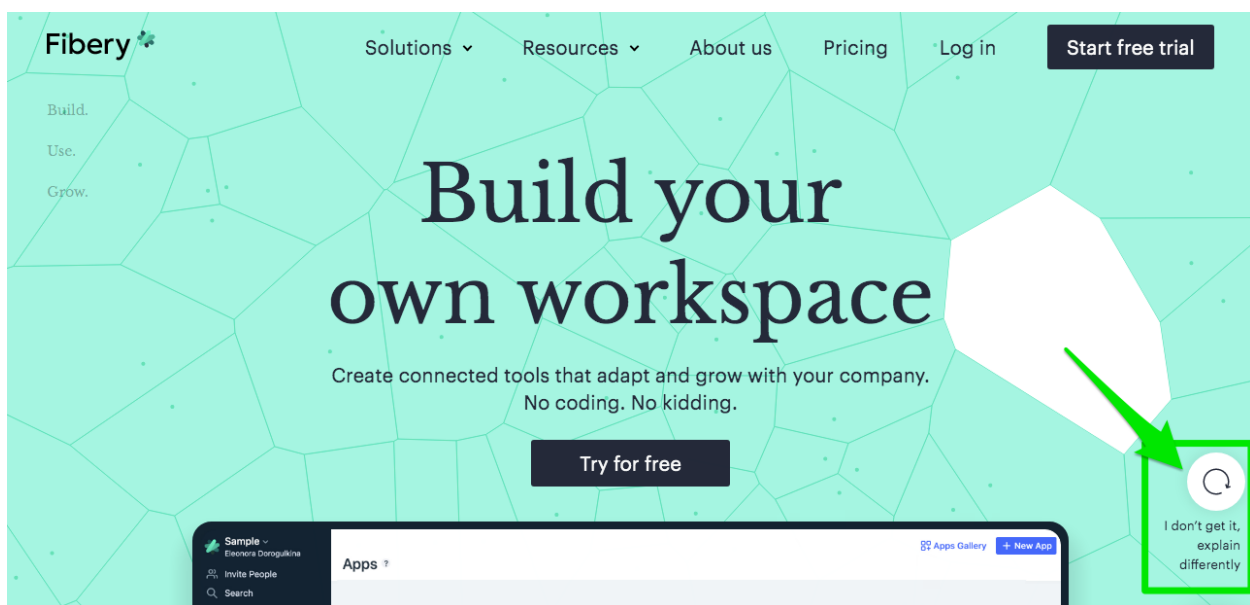
(Source: [Progressive Twitter](#))

For the work management platform [Fibery](#), which connects a product team's tech stack to their company's organizational goals, top-of-funnel content must educate readers about what the product does and why they need it.

In the example below, you can see how Fibery adjusted the messaging on their homepage to better communicate the power and value of their tools. Remember, the content on your homepage is typically the first thing your target audience reads when researching your brand. Hone in on the messaging that resonates most with your audience to optimize top-of-funnel conversion by testing headlines, website copy and CTAs.



(Source: [Fibery Connect](#))



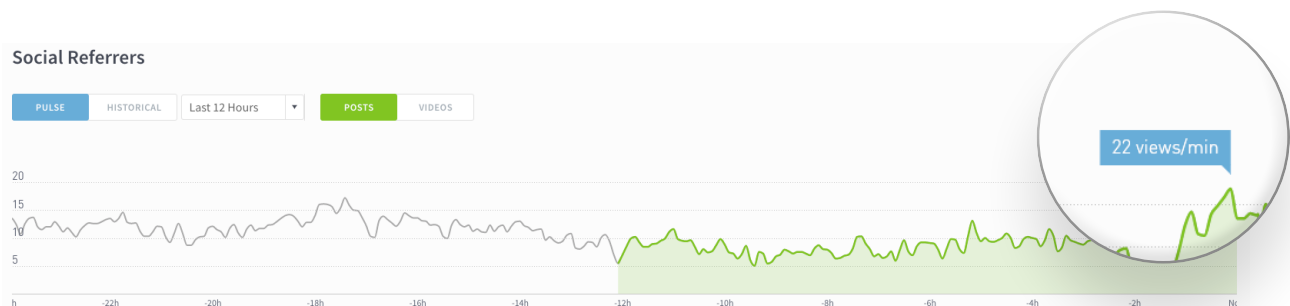
(Source: [Fibery Build](#))

What metrics are most important at the Awareness stage?

Content should be closely aligned with the [KPIs](#) of each stage of the funnel. In the awareness stage, these will be high-level metrics like traffic to your website, specific page views, social shares, or other tallies of top-of-funnel activities, like event attendees or leads gathered from sponsorships or collaborations.

For the Progressive ad example above, the metrics to track have traditionally been views, “impressions” in social media terms, and click-throughs to determine its effectiveness versus other ads. Ad platforms for social media provide a dashboard to follow these metrics, but tracking interest or true engagement on non-ad social requires a bit more digging or simply using more content-centric analytics solutions.

You want to be looking at deeper social metrics like social referrals, social interactions, and social referrals per interaction. Parse.ly has [direct integrations with nearly all social media platforms](#), so we’re able to surface these more meaningful metrics. We even show you the specific accounts who share or refer to your company’s posts.



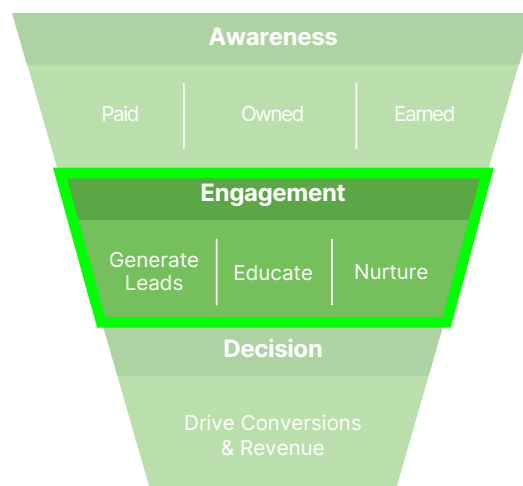
In Fibery’s case, in order to see which homepage messaging is creating the most top-level awareness for their brand, they can measure which version of the homepage is viewed more often (traffic), for how long ([engaged time](#)), and if the A/B testing calls to action are clicked.

Engagement

At this stage the goal is to foster further engagement, often in exchange for contact information to convert that reader to a true lead. It's about driving your audience from passively reading a piece of content, for example, to actively engaging—be it a click, download, or webinar registration.

In the age of digital marketing, as a rule of thumb, this action is frequently a click. What can motivate a prospect traveling down the funnel to raise their hand and say, “Hey, I’d love to get some more information”?

The key at this stage is educating the audience, proving the credibility or depth of your expertise, and, ultimately, solidifying those previously passive audience members as viable, interested leads who want to learn more about what you are selling.



What content is in the Engagement stage?

Think of the engagement stage as deeper conversations about industry-specific topics that aren't completely centered around your products or services. This could be a webinar, an in-depth ebook, a newsletter, or whatever compels people to trust your company, come to you for authority, and, ultimately, be willing to give you their contact info.

A larger company might host a weekly workshop or webinar with a panel of subject matter experts in their industry.

A specialized company like a marketing agency might create an ebook around marketing best practices.

A media publication might launch a weekly newsletter to notify their audience of recently published content.

Here are more ideas worthy of your company's engagement stage:

- Nurture campaigns
- Online courses
- White papers
- Data studies
- Case studies

The goal of the engagement stage is to capitalize on that initial awareness by delivering more educational information and opportunities to engage with your company. Ideally, your audience will give you their contact information in exchange, allowing you to engage them further.

Examples in the Engagement stage

For content marketers, Parse.ly publishes about every aspect of the digital content industry. For example, we released a timely data study about [what happened in the world of content during the disruptive year of 2020](#). We've also posted [evergreen content](#) that helps content marketers be better at their jobs, including a tactical ebook on [how to write a content marketing budget](#). With both pieces, we required a form-fill to make sure we collected audience contact info and effectively turned them into leads.



[Chorus.ai](#) is a sales conversation intelligence platform that helps customers drive team performance, build stronger relationships, and acquire unbiased market intelligence. To speak directly to their sales audience and capitalize on high-level awareness, they publish resources regularly on sales methodologies and how to effectively close sales, as well as comprehensive [competitive reports on conversation intelligence](#). These resources always require a click-through to read or download so that Chorus.ai collects user information and generates leads for its sales team.

A screenshot of the Chorus.ai website. The top navigation bar includes 'Product', 'Solutions', 'Customers', 'Resources', 'Blog', and 'About Us', along with 'GET A DEMO' and 'LOG IN' buttons. The main content area features an article titled 'C-Suite Participation in Sales' under the heading 'Relationship Intelligence'. The article text discusses C-Level Executives joining more sales calls since COVID-19. A sidebar on the left lists related content: 'THE STATE OF CONVERSATION INTELLIGENCE', 'Relationship Intelligence', 'C-Suite Participation in Sales', 'C-Suite Participation (by ACV)', 'C-Suite Behaviors in Sales Calls', and 'The C-Suite Factor in Your Deals'. A large graphic on the right shows a blue circle with '2.2x' inside, indicating that buying side C-level executives are 2.2x more likely to join sales calls than selling side C-level executives.

CHORUS

Product Solutions Customers Resources Blog About Us GET A DEMO LOG IN →

Relationship Intelligence

C-Suite Participation in Sales

C-Level Executives have been joining more sales calls, especially since COVID-19. Higher scrutiny and tighter budgets means that most deals need to cross a CXOs desk before it crosses the line into closed-won territory. Our sales call data can help you anticipate C-Suite involvement, and prepare your team for how to talk to C-Level Executives when they join.

2.2x

AROUND 2.2X MORE LIKELY TO HAVE A BUYING SIDE C-LEVEL EXECUTIVE JOIN SALES CALLS VS A SELLING SIDE C-LEVEL

THE STATE OF CONVERSATION INTELLIGENCE

Relationship Intelligence

- C-Suite Participation in Sales
- C-Suite Participation (by ACV)
- C-Suite Behaviors in Sales Calls
- The C-Suite Factor in Your Deals

C-Suite Deal Involvement (attended ≥ 1 meeting)

As a Sales Leader, your top priority is supporting your team to get deals across the line. Make sure that when you show up on calls that you're supporting rather than taking over. This provides an opportunity to coach and to validate your team's efforts. The buying side's C-Suite is joining at an unprecedented rate - 108% higher than they were in January. This is a stark difference from the end of

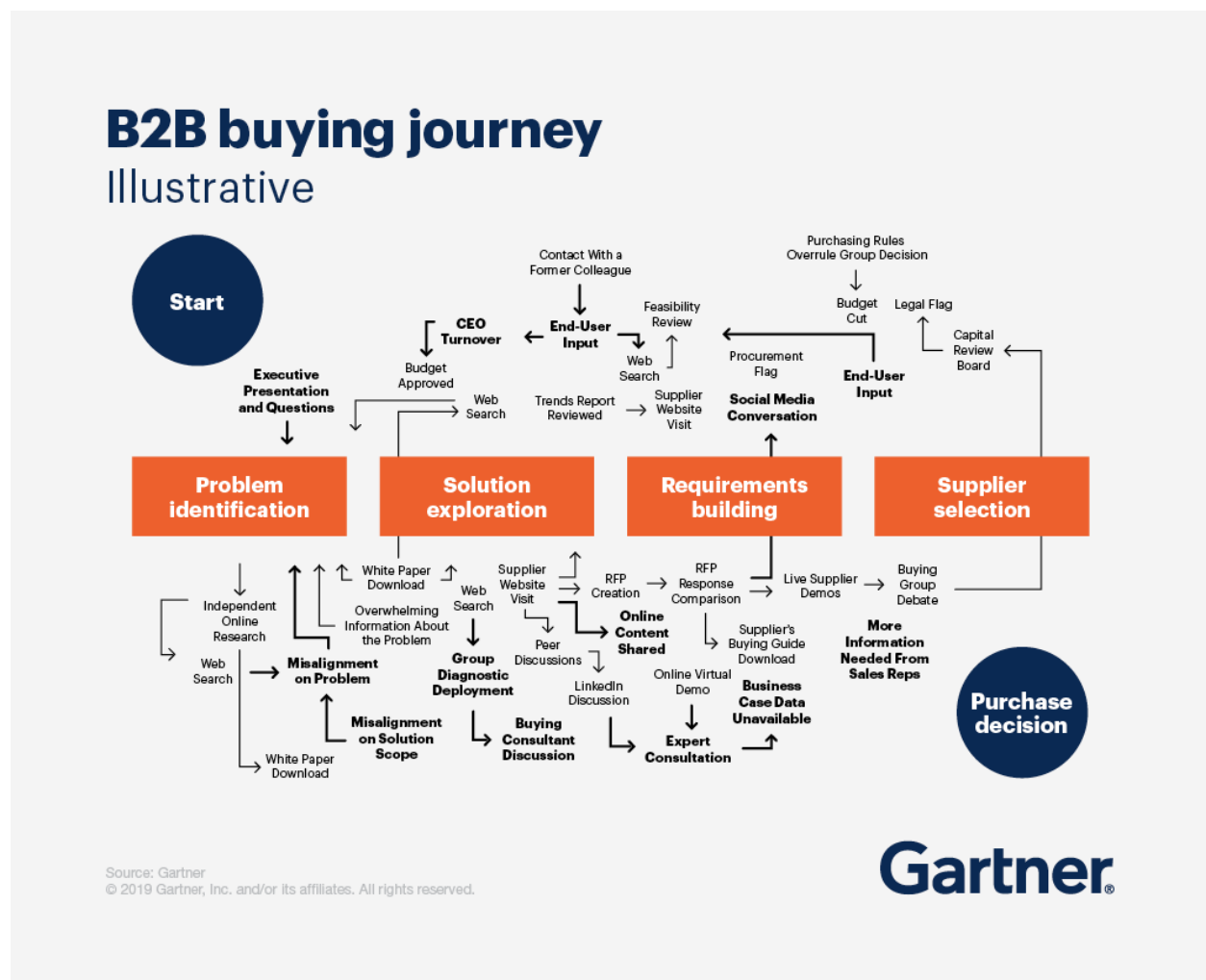
(Source: [Chorus.ai State of Conversation Intelligence](#))

What metrics are important at the Engagement stage?

Monitoring how effectively your engagement stage content is fostering trust for your business derives from [engaged-time](#). This helps you understand which content is holding the attention of your audience and is providing real value.

Engaged-time is useful for understanding how valuable your content is to your audience at more granular points along their journey through your funnel. This metric is especially helpful for companies with longer sales cycles, either because they have more expensive products/services or the sales process involves many decision makers.

Below is what this sort of complex B2B buying journey can look like:



(Source: [Gartner](#))

Beyond the surface-level engagement metrics of timestamps, time-on-page, or [bounce rate](#), Parse.ly's engaged-time metric and [heartbeat pixel](#) determine true engagement interaction levels, areas where other analytics platforms fall short.

Engagement is a key step to qualifying the right leads, so whatever engagement you're fostering here should also map directly to a decision-ready stage. As with other stages, this will vary from company to company: it could be content downloads to show interest in a closer-to-decision topic, or email or newsletter sign-ups to continue getting product updates or content roundups from your archive. Tracking [content conversions](#) will provide valuable insight into what's working.

Downloading a piece of content, for example, indicates a potential need for your product or service, so the number of downloads represents engagement. If a particular email drip sequence ends with a click-to-download option, you can also measure email opens or click-rates along the way.

The questions you should be asking at the engagement stage are: *'Did your audience act in a way that indicates they're ready and willing to learn more about your products or services?'* and *'Are they ready to be sold based on what you know from their more meaningful, deeper interactions with your brand or content?'*

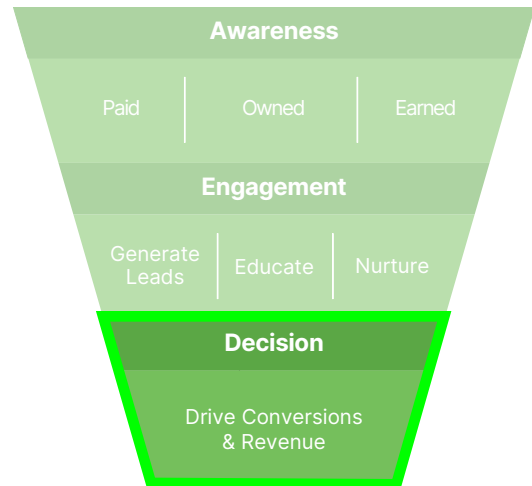
For any company, remember that the key to this mid-funnel stage is loading up the top with a broad audience. Qualification processes are necessary as your audience progresses down the funnel. But the more awareness you start with at the top the better. It's crucial to make a strong first impression.



Decision

The decision-marketing stage of the funnel is just what it sounds like: getting your audience to make a decision that makes you money. The actions at this stage are directly tied to revenue—swiping a credit card or signing a contract, or the final steps that indicate buying readiness—signing up for a “hard sell” product demo with a salesperson, or signing up for a limited free trial by inputting payment information.

The commonality of these actions is that they represent other ways of saying, “I want to buy what you’re selling!” or “I’ve decided to give your company a chance to solve my problem.” You can think of this as what many marketers term *opportunity creation*.



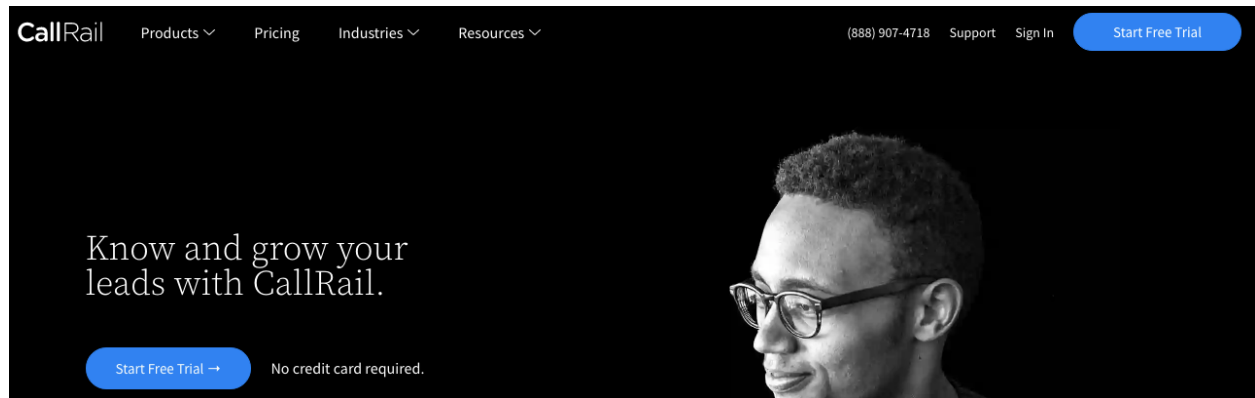
What content is in the Decision stage?

The following are some ideas of what could fall in your decision stage, but they are certainly not limited to this list:

- Add to cart
- Case studies
- Product or service reviews/testimonials
- Subscription signups
- Onboarding, knowledge guides, how-to videos, user forums/communities

Examples in the Decision stage

[CallRail](#), a marketing platform that connects businesses to communicate with leads and customers and track all their activities (calls, texts, form submissions), has a free 14-day trial of their marketing software. This is usually the final step in their buyer's journey before purchase.



(Source: [CallRail](#))

Social media influencer and fitness/nutrition expert [Steph Gaudreau](#) runs a program periodically for women to level up their energy and strength. Depending on enrollment, she maintains a CTA for signing up or for inputting email to be placed on the waitlist. Again, a last step in her buyer's journey.

Core 4 Program

Get Stronger, Reclaim Your Energy & Own Your Power in this 6-week program.

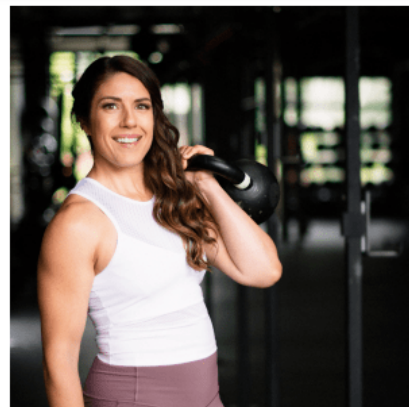
You'll go from overwhelmed and confused about your health to clear, consistent, and confident.

My signature 4-pillar approach will help you get stronger, embrace your body, and own your power. Gone are the days of strict diets and slogging away on an elliptical for hours a day.

The Core 4 Program has helped thousands of women from all over the world feel stronger, appreciate their body for what it can do (instead of only how it looks)...and step into their badassness.

GET NOTIFIED WHEN DOORS OPEN >>

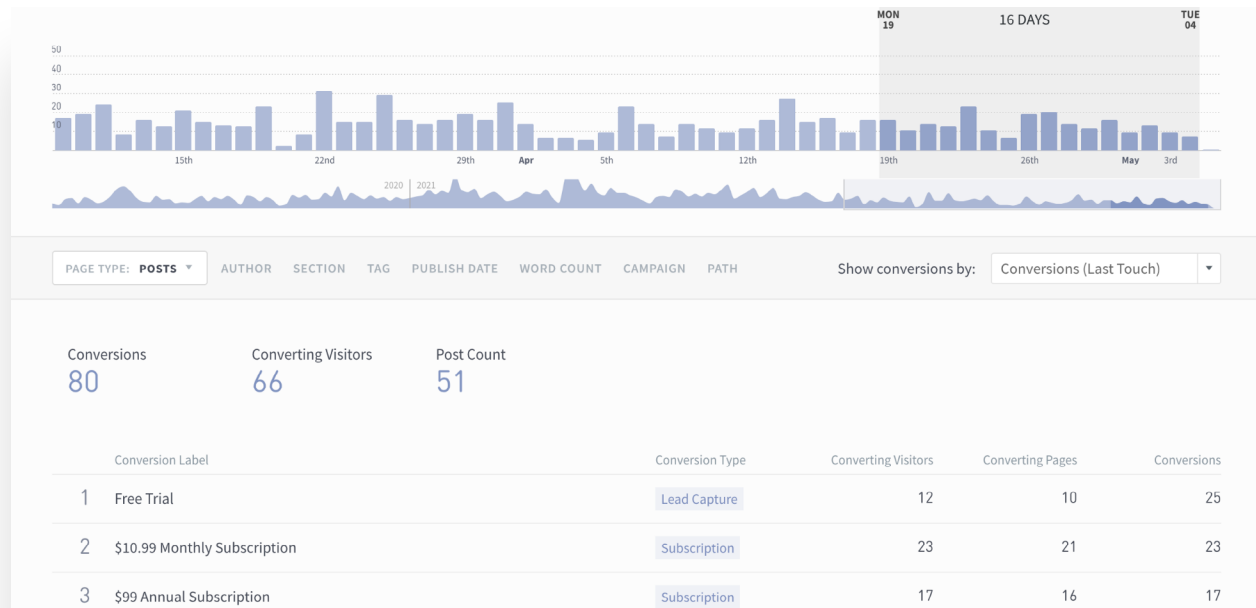
[Join the Core 4 Program waitlist](#)



(Source: [stephgaudreau.com](#))

What metrics are most important at the Decision stage?

Again, at the decision stage, it boils down to money—the KPI that executives care about. It's the bottom line, closed won revenue, or the summation of revenue-driving actions from your audience. Parse.ly's [content conversions](#) tracking feature allows you to tie content performance directly to revenue.



Monitoring your bottom-of-funnel performance is undoubtedly important to drive business, but it's only one piece of the puzzle. People at your company who don't work in content can become hyper-focused and myopic on the bottom of the funnel, sometimes to the detriment of the business, so remember to use this ebook to help you prove the value of your content all along the way.

Remember, bottom-of-funnel content loses its punch when it's not balanced with educational, higher-funnel materials. Simply saying "buy, buy, buy" on your website will have your leads saying "bye, bye, bye."

Conclusion

Optimize your company's marketing funnel with Parse.ly insights

To know the effectiveness of your content marketing funnel, track relevant KPIs and metrics at each stage. As with any marketing initiative, content strategy requires advanced thought and planning to achieve the best results. By following the steps we've outlined in The Content Marketer's Funnel, you'll be on your way to a documented, scalable strategy that targets the right audience and achieves those bottom-line results.

Unlike other analytics platforms, Parse.ly is agile enough to cater to each business's measure of content success. Interested in seeing how Parse.ly can augment your data-driven content marketing? [Get a demo](#) from our expert team of data nerds.

