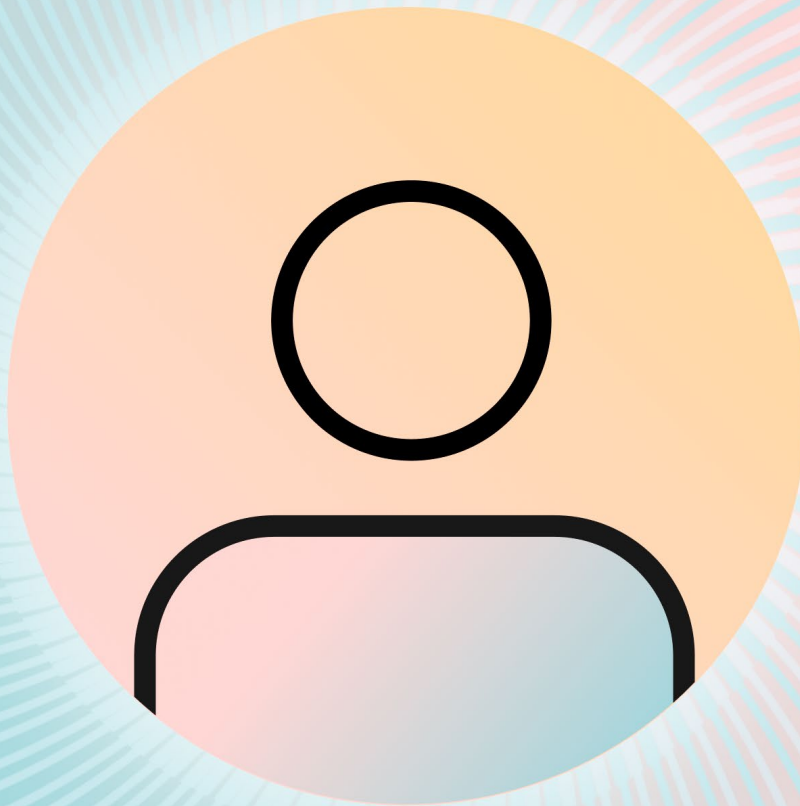


HOW TO DO BETTER CONTENT MARKETING

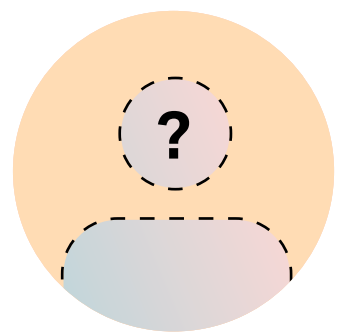
# Understanding Your Target Audience



As we outlined in Chapter 1 of our *How to Do Better Content Marketing* series, building the foundation of an effective content marketing program starts with analyzing your business and identifying how your content strategy ties into your overall business goals. It's about asking yourself, "Why do we even do content marketing?"

Once you have a solid understanding of [the specific ways in which content can drive your business](#), the next step is developing a deep understanding of the fundamental characteristics of your target audience, or the cohort of people who are most likely to buy what your company sells.

**This guide will show you how to go deeper than 15 minutes of Google research to identify, understand, and define your target audience.** Without following these steps, it's impossible to create good content—content that turns readers into customers.



Good content solves your target audience's problems—helping them be better at their jobs, save money, learn new skills, live better lives, or achieve goals that matter to them. Addressing these needs provides value, creates trust, and gives your potential buyers a reason to spend their money with you over your competitors. Good content does this in a way that accelerates your business, leading to improved deal velocity, bigger deal size, and higher lead generation.

To create good content, you need to determine who your audience is, down to the core—what they care about, how they use the internet, and what makes them tick. From there, you can define ideal customer personas (ICPs) that represent your target audience and the subgroups within it, and then create content that both solves their problems and serves your business.

In this guide, we'll walk through how to:

- Analyze your own customer data
- Take insight from content analytics
- Research your competitors
- Research industry trends and topics
- Perform social listening
- Perform keyword research
- Sharpen your focus with demographics and psychographics
- Create ideal customer personas

“By proactively answering questions that your prospects are thinking, you can save time in the sales process and help to qualify buyers earlier. But most crucially, by creating content that is honest, transparent, and demonstrates a mindset of teaching, you can build trust for your business that will result in more sales.”

They Ask, You Answer,  
Marcus Sheridan

## Just who is your real target audience?

Your target audience is the group of people who have a need for the outcomes your product facilitates, the ones most likely to spend money with you. Defining that audience starts by understanding what your company does and homing in on the reasons why people buy your product.

Focus less on the features and benefits of your product and more on the outcomes your customers achieve by using it. For example, if your product is a content delivery network, instead of dwelling on a nice-to-have edge caching feature or the basic benefit of faster website loading, cut to the chase. Highlight the outcome—the fact that having a faster website really means *more people will buy your products*.



To understand what content will resonate with buyers, dive deeper into those outcomes and why your target audience cares about them.

Which outcomes can your product facilitate? Which outcomes are most important to the people who buy your product? What questions does your audience have about your product? What objections might they have before purchasing? Where are people discovering and researching products like yours?

As you begin to answer these questions and learn about your target audience, keep a running list of the common attributes, pain points, and goals you find. You'll use these themes to define your ideal customer and inform what to write about later.

Throughout this process, remember that your goal in researching your target audience is creating content that solves their problems. Continually brainstorm how to address the goals, pain points, and outcomes that matter to them in a vernacular they know and understand. While you do this, also think of the strategies you'll use to turn content consumers into customers.

## Start with what you know: analyze your own customer data

Tap into what you already know about your current customers—who they are and why they chose to buy your product. Data recorded from sales and marketing activities is a gold mine of quantitative and qualitative feedback from current and prospective customers.

Systematically analyze this feedback. Use it to deepen your understanding of your target audience. Look for data from sources like:

- CRM software
- Sales call recordings
- Customer purchase history
- Email list member information
- Webinar Q&As
- Product and business reviews
- Customer surveys/interviews
- Anecdotal feedback

Frequently, the alternative a potential customer has (instead of selecting your product) is “changing nothing at all.” So, ask yourself the following questions, based on data sources, to learn what moves a customer from deciding to do nothing to deciding to use your product:

### **Why do people buy our product?**

- Which outcomes are most important to buyers?
- What other options did they have to solve their problem?
- What language resonates with hesitant buyers?
- What questions/concerns do people who are actually going to buy have?



## Who are our best customers?

- Who is almost always guaranteed to buy our product?
- Who requires our pain, sweat, and tears to get them to buy?
- Which customers use our product most often?
- What qualities do our highest value customers share?

## How do people find out about our company?

- Where do they discover our content?
- Which channels and content formats yield the highest ROI?
- Does our current contact database represent our target audience?

## Take insight from content analytics

More than ever, people research your company long before contacting you or making a purchase. And they do that research through the content you publish on your website, social media, and other marketing channels. Before they reach out or engage with your company in a formal way, they're actually having a conversation with you through the manner in which they consume your content.

Using content analytics allows you to [tap into that conversation](#) by analyzing performance and engagement data. This data is another gold mine of insights about what your target audience cares about.

Identify high-performing content to uncover the problems, questions, topics, and outcomes that matter most to your audience. View historical data around posts, topics, sections, and tags and sort by metrics that map to your marketing KPIs, like pageviews, engaged time, returning visitors, and [conversions](#). From the results, note themes you find. These patterns provide deep insight into your target audience.

Also note:

- Non-data aspects of top performing content, like page layout and tone of voice. Does your audience prefer image-heavy content? Do they respond better to formal or casual writing?
- Seasonality of topics of interest. Do certain topics resonate more with your audience during fall or summer? Or during annual/quarterly events?
- Performance patterns in relation to distribution channels. Does your audience want to see certain topics on social media and different topics on your blog or in your email newsletter?
- Outlying circumstances that cause a certain topic or piece of content to perform notably well. For example, a retweet or a share from a well-known industry expert might boost engagement for a post that otherwise wasn't all that interesting to your audience initially.

Tag	Views: 30 Days	Posts	Page Views/Post	Context	Page Views
1 type: report		44k	3,515	45.5M visitors 3:07 avg. time	154,026,913
2 type: feature		2.6k	10,817	7.51M visitors 3:16 avg. time	28,004,233
3 apple		4.2k	2,659	4.77M visitors 2:15 avg. time	11,129,459
4 covid-19		575	15,607	4.02M visitors 2:51 avg. time	8,973,867
5 spacex		343	19,269	3.25M visitors 2:08 avg. time	6,609,292
6 entertainment		712	8,952	1.18M visitors 2:28 avg. time	6,373,924
7 public-health		466	11,674	2.34M visitors 2:57 avg. time	5,440,308
8 privacy		948	5,444	3.67M visitors 1:22 avg. time	5,161,047

Parse.ly dashboard

While you go through this process of analyzing your content data and identifying noteworthy themes, continually ask yourself if the highest performing content is actually directed at your target audience. For example, you might find some top performing content is actually attracting potential employees, not potential customers.



## Research your competitors. Who are they targeting? Why? And how?

There's no shame in taking inspiration from your competitors' audience targeting strategies. If you're selling similar products, you're likely going after buyers who are looking for similar outcomes.

Consider who your competitors' customers are, which marketing channels and content formats they focus on, and how they communicate those desired outcomes to their target audience.

Go back to the questions you asked yourself about your customer data sources. Think in terms of your competitors. What problems are your competitors trying to solve for their customers? Where are they targeting potential buyers? What problems can you solve for buyers that your competitors can't?

Answer as many as you can based on your competitors' blogs, resource pages, social media, and other public marketing channels they employ.

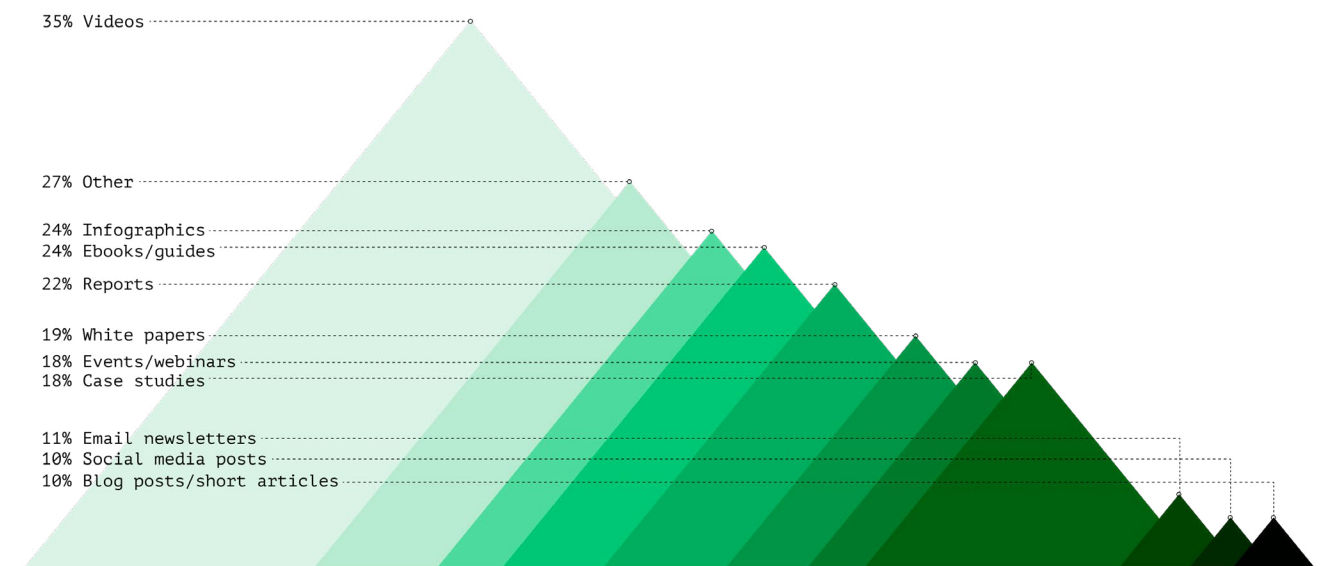




## Research industry trends and topics

Go beyond your own customer data and competitive intelligence by researching the broader trends in your industry. Subscribe to industry news sites, attend industry events, follow industry experts, reference [content marketing data studies](#), and study market research from [trusted sources](#).

We recently published our [Content Matters 2022 Report](#), a survey of more than 800 content marketers to uncover the latest content marketing trends. For example, we found that the number one content format that marketers want to create more of is video, and that so-called owned channels—e.g., company social, email, and website—are king in terms of content distribution priorities.



Source: [Content Matters 2022 Report](#)

Finally, don't forget to check discussion sites like [Quora](#) and [Reddit](#) for mentions of your product or similar products to see who is talking about them, what they're asking, and what problems and target outcomes they have.

## Actively perform social listening

Use [social listening](#) tools to find out what's being said and by whom about your brand and your competitors. Note mentions of keywords related to your products, the problems your target audience faces, and the outcomes they care about.

Look for pain points, questions, and suggestions related to your company and products, your competitors, and your industry as a whole. Who do these mentions come from? Current or previous customers? Customers of your competitors?

Who likes your product? Who doesn't? Why or why not? What information are they looking for?

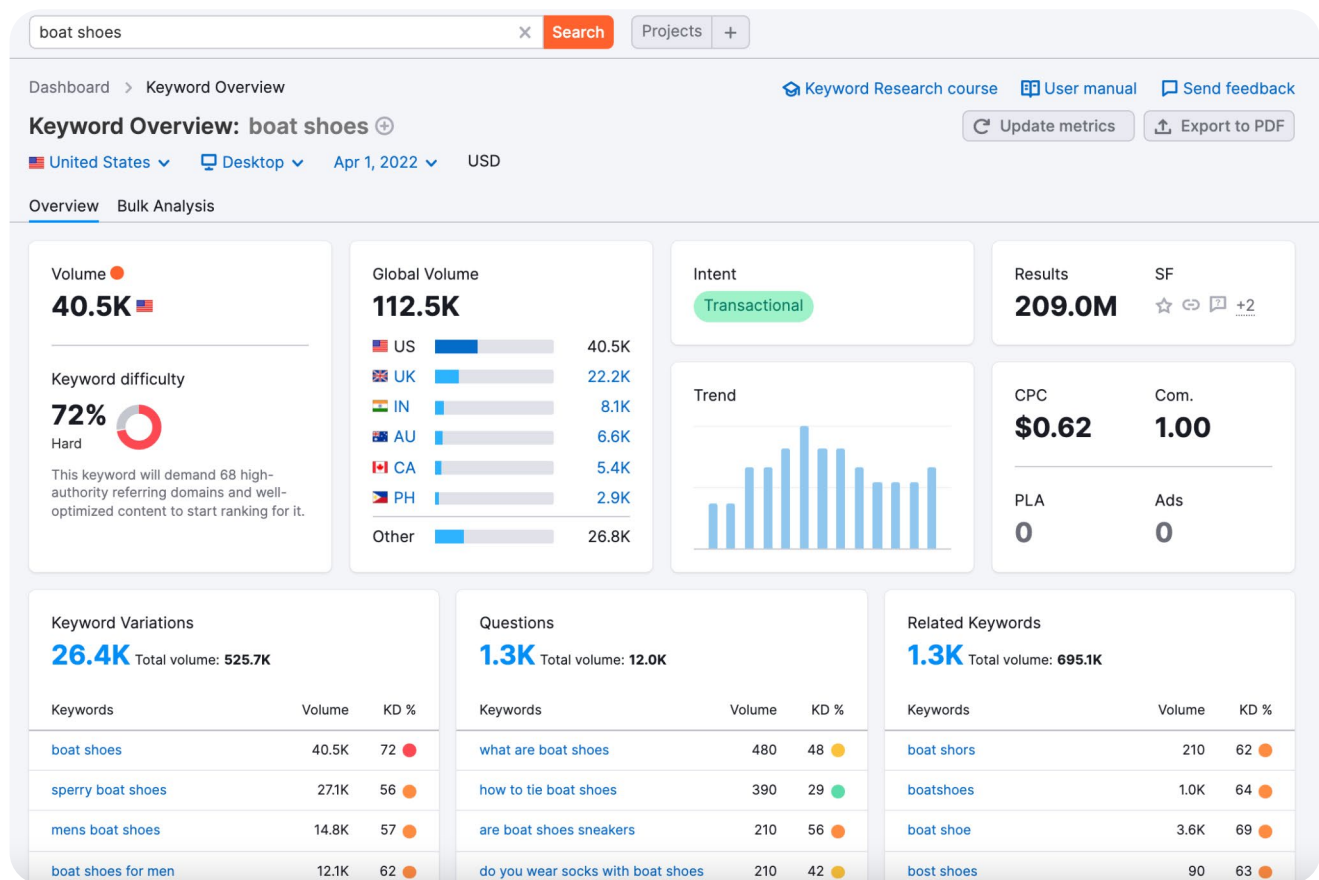
Take note of the platforms people use to talk about your brand and your competitors. Where are the discussions happening? Where can you join the conversation?

## Make keyword research a priority

Classic keyword research is another way to learn more about your target audience and the pain points, questions, and outcomes they're interested in. Reference [content analytics data](#) and use keyword research tools to run your own keyword searches to answer questions like the following:

- How much search volume is there for keywords related to our product?
- Where do our product's fundamental keywords rank on search engine results pages (SERPs)?
- Why are people searching for these keywords?
- Is the content surfaced transactional or information?
- Are there keyword niches we can target?
- What content brings traffic from search to our website?

Imagine you're selling boat shoes, for example. Look how much you can learn about what your audience wants to know about your product from one simple keyword search.



Use a tool like [SEMrush](#) to find overall keyword search volume, geographical distribution, search intent, questions containing your keyword, and related keywords with high search volume.

## Sharpen your focus with demographics and psychographics

With the information you've gathered from all this research, home in on the demographics and psychographics of your target audience. Define as many of the following qualities as possible:

- Age and gender
- Job title, responsibilities, and income
- Company size and industry
- Location and language
- Spending power and purchase intent
- Attitudes and opinions
- Hobbies and interests
- Tech stacks

At this point, you should have a strong understanding of who your target audience is—what problems they have, where they consume content on the internet, and what type of language they use to describe their challenges. But before you start creating content, make sure the audience you've identified is worth marketing to.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Are there enough potential buyers who fit the description?
- Will they actually benefit from our product?
- Can they afford our product?
- Is there a clear reason for them to buy from us instead of competitors?
- Do we have a way of reaching them with our marketing message?

- Do we have resources to develop strategies that turn content consumers into customers?

Once you're confident that marketing to your target audience is worth your effort, it's time to finalize and document your definition of that audience so that everyone on your team can work from the same playbook while creating content.

## Create ideal customer personas

Working with well-researched, well-defined [ideal customer personas](#) (ICPs) gives your marketing team a repeatable framework for creating effective content. These personas should paint an accurate and comprehensive representation of your potential customers, based on all your research.

Compile and group the most relevant shared attributes of your target audience into one or more ICPs, including data like location, job title, industry, company size, team size, goals, and pain points. Your ICP definitions can live as a shared text document, a slide presentation, or a set of visual flash cards like the one from [CoSchedule](#) shown below.



NAME: *Chloe*  
AGE: 33  
GENDER: *Female*

- 📍 LOCATION: *Asheville, NC*
- 💼 JOB TITLE: *Marketing Manager*
- 🔧 INDUSTRY: *Outdoors retail*
- 👥 BUSINESS SIZE: *50-70 employees*
- 🏢 TEAM SIZE: *8-15*

### GOALS

- *Wants her boss to understand what marketing does, and how it drives business value*
- *Clearly defined team workflows that keep her team focused on results*

### PAIN POINTS

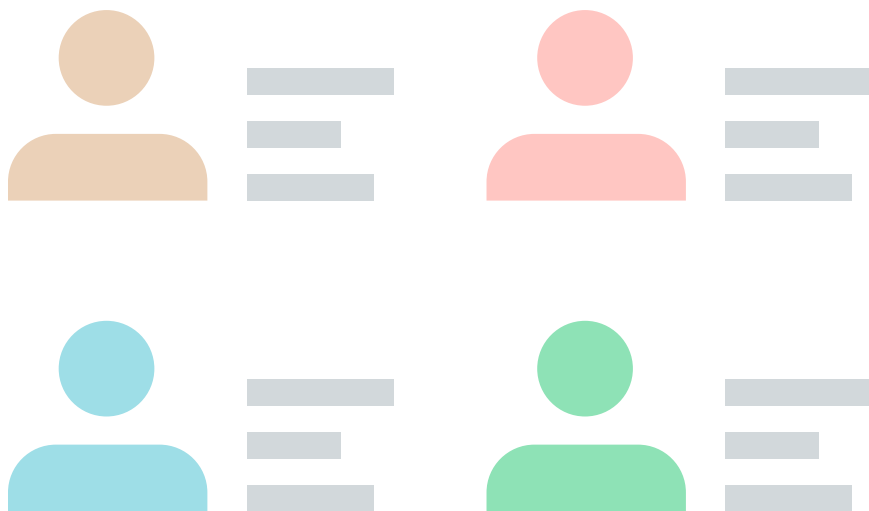
- *Team lacks a cohesive marketing process; Makeshift Marketing makes her and her team feel frazzled and unorganized*
- *Team spends too much time coordinating their work rather than completing it*

Source: [CoSchedule](#)

Refer to this persona to create a target audience statement that defines the goal of your content marketing. Use this as your team's mission statement as you plan out and execute your content creation strategy.

*{Insert your company} creates content to attract {insert target audience} so they can {insert desired outcome} better.*

Note: Defining ICPs and target audience statements is an ongoing process. Continually learn more about your customers and potential buyers, taking note of new audiences or segments that you uncover. Then tweak your personas and statements or create new ones accordingly. Once you begin to develop content targeted at your ICPs, prioritize your highest value personas.





## Next in our series: Planning the Plan

Now, with a deep understanding of your target audience, a solidified definition of your ICPs, and a clear target audience statement for your content marketing, you're ready to start developing, delegating, and executing a content creation plan.

In Chapter 3 of our *How to Do Better Content Marketing* series, we'll walk you through how to develop a content marketing calendar based on what you've learned about your target audience, create content quickly and efficiently, and tie your results back to business KPIs.



### **About WordPress VIP**

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WordPress VIP offers content management, enterprise commerce, and content analytics. Our platform provides best-in-class digital creation, combined with the insights to understand and optimize the impact of those digital experiences.

Our team has been delivering WordPress at scale for more than a decade, and will guide your team with architecture, integrations, plugins, agencies, and more.

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