

HOW TO DO BETTER CONTENT MARKETING

# Understanding Your Business & How Content Drives It



## “Why do we even do content marketing?”

Almost half the companies doing content marketing today [don't know if their content marketing is working](#) or generating real business results. Despite that, companies are [creating more content](#)—generally twice as much in 2021 as in 2020—and spending more money doing so.

There's no shortage of people—especially CEOs and CFOs—asking “Why?” Many businesses were forced by the pandemic into drastically increasing the scale of their digital marketing and didn't have the time, resources, or skill sets to fully determine what the purpose of their content was going to be in the first place.

Flying blind is no longer an option for successful content marketers. The best and brightest have a deep understanding of their business. They know the overall business goals, how the business attracts customers, what customers get out of being customers, the value of each customer, and so much more.

In short, they understand how the business operates from the inside out, and the critical metrics that measure success. They use this deep understanding to create amazing, impactful content.

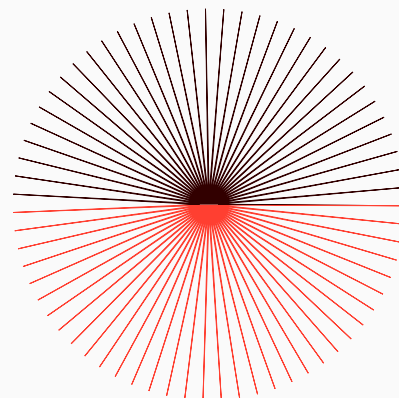
But this understanding isn't always easy or clear.

So let's take a step back and ask, “Why do we even do content marketing?” There's no one right answer. It depends on the nature of your business, what you sell, how you sell it, what it costs, and what journey your customers take to get to a purchase.

This guide is meant to give you a framework for analyzing your own business, using examples of common business models and how content marketing drives success for each. Use it to identify how your content strategy can tie to overall business strategy, and set the foundation for a successful content marketing program.

# 51%

Track metrics and understand how content is performing



# 49%

Don't understand how content is performing

# 32%

Track metrics but don't know how content is performing

# 9%

Not tracking metrics

# 8%

Don't know if metrics tracked

Source: [Content Matters Report 2022, Parse.ly](#)



## Beginning at the beginning: Who are we? What do we do?

No two businesses are the same, and the ways in which content marketing can be effective vary from business to business. Some have long sales cycles and need content to answer customer objections throughout three to six months of negotiations that may involve a dozen people. Others have individual customers who decide to buy in less than 60 seconds. Each has correspondingly different needs for their content.

There are common business types that share a similar path to successful content marketing. By determining which category is closest to your unique business, you inform what kind of content you should create, how much you should create, and how you should measure the success of your program.



Ask yourself these questions:

- **How complex is our product or service?** Geoffrey Moore argued you can characterize all business as either [complex systems or volume operations](#). Complex systems businesses sell offerings that require lots of explanation and customization to a relatively small number of customers. Volume operations companies sell simpler, off-the-shelf offerings to more customers.
- **How will our customers make a purchase?** Where will they buy: On our website? In a store? Through a partner? From a salesperson? How much consideration will they need to make the purchase—for example, buying a candy bar versus buying a home. How often will they buy: Once in their life? Several times? Daily?
- **What is our customers' purchasing lifecycle?** Will there be a subscription over time that might be canceled? Are we starting with a relatively low price or free product with the hope of upsell or expansion? At what point do we make a profit? How important is customer loyalty?
- **How diverse is our customer base?** Do all our customers look the same and have the same needs or will we need to sell to each a little differently? Consider this but don't stop with your first answer. If, for example, your customers span age, nationality, and gender, but you are selling them a fire extinguisher, they may not be terribly different when it comes to how they connect to your product.

In short, you are asking where the money comes from, how it gets there, at what point you are profitable, and what pain points there are along the way. The goal is to solve those pain points with content.



# Common business types and content marketing strategies

With this information, you can bucket your business into one (or more) of these categories:



## High-consideration

The final sale might happen offline, but research is performed ahead of time by consumers. Examples might include hiring an electrician, buying a new phone, or purchasing new tools for your team at work.



## Sales-driven

Often has lots of overlap with high-consideration, but also involves a human sales agent. Frequently includes variable pricing, negotiations, and contracts. Everything from software to cars and houses.



## Low-cost occasional

Minimal research is necessary. "I like this shirt—and it's only \$20!"



## Low-cost habitual

Where brand is king for consumers among many interchangeable products. Think Coca-Cola.



## Trial-driven, product-led, and marketplace

The "freemium" model, where becoming a user is easy and monetization happens at deeper adoption. Frequently the community is a major value factor.



## Free or ad-supported

Product or service is free, often supported by advertising, sponsorship, or other partnership. Examples vary from small regional newspapers to technology giants like Google and Facebook.

As you consider where to place yourself, realize you may not fall neatly into any one category. You may have multiple lines of business with different ways of selling for different types of customers.



Many business-to-business (B2B) companies fall under high-consideration, sales-driven, or product-led. Many business-to-customer (B2C) companies fall under low-cost occasional or low-cost habitual, but that's not always the case. Once upon a time the lines between B2B and B2C were much clearer, but increasingly some B2B businesses are having success with B2C tactics, and vice-versa.

If your business falls into multiple categories, consider which line of business or customer type has both high profit potential and existing pain points in the customer journey—these will be the biggest opportunities.





## High-consideration purchases

### What it looks like

The consideration buyers do before making a purchase directly correlates to the price and to the impact the product will have on their life or business. For example, while customers may research their buying decisions on Google for both email marketing software and new kitchen trash cans, their consideration and diligence will be quite different.

The vast majority of B2B products purchased online will fall into this category, but quite a number of high-value B2C purchases fit the same archetype. Think Mailchimp, Workday, or Salesforce in the B2B space, and Coinbase, CarMax, or Samsung for B2C.

### Where to focus

For these highly considered purchases, start thinking about your content and how it aligns to the buyer journey. Some buyers will begin thinking about a considered purchase long before they get anywhere close to buying. Some may even start reading related topics before they've even realized they have a need. You need to meet customers where they are.

Advisory content around general topics, for example, the difference between various types of product or services, trends, or hot topics, can move your company to top of mind. For these content pieces, traffic and engagement are the forward indicators.

It's unlikely that customers will immediately convert upon reading your content, but exposure and engagement will position you well for future success. [Multi-touch conversion attribution models](#) that tie back sales to content buyers engaged with in earlier stages of their journey can quantify the hard dollar value of your content.





As customers proceed along their journey, they will want to know less about trends or broad topics and more about product specifics. What does it do? Why is it better than the alternatives? How do they justify the purchase? Given the level of consideration and investment needed to buy your product, this content requires real depth. Ideally, it should lead to direct conversions.

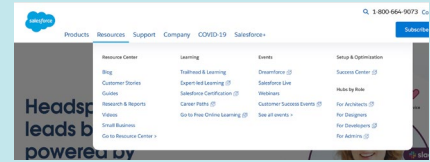
As your customer moves along their purchase journey, always remember: it's their journey, not yours.

They may read general content, look at a product, decide it's not right for them, go back to general content, choose a different product, delay their purchase, start again, look at a third product, go back to general content to validate their decision, then buy. Make sure your content doesn't fit only a single stage in their journey because it may be used in multiple places.

With both multi-touch and direct conversion tracking models, you should be able to tie your content marketing to an increase in new customers, lower customer acquisition costs, and faster sales.

Without effective content marketing in this model, users fall off their journey early or never discover your company in the first place. Your product loses out in head-to-head comparisons or you're forced to rely on word-of-mouth advocacy from people who understand why your product is better than alternatives.

## Find inspiration to get started



[Salesforce](#) was renowned for their large scale in-person events, where prospects and sales teams built strong relationships. Due to the pandemic, their entire 2,000-person marketing team shifted to digital and [replaced the in-person learning that happened at conferences with content.](#)

Salesforce creates content for all stages of their buyer journey and makes it easily accessible in their vast resource library. Their blog provides a variety of high-level advisory content, their guides and research educate potential buyers, and their case studies differentiate their offerings to help push buyers over the finish line.







## Sales-driven purchases

### What it looks like

For many complex, high-cost products, there is a handoff between marketing and sales. Marketing generates leads, sales works to close them. Part of the reason for this is that when products or services are more complex, they may require tailoring, customization, or assembling multiple components. Typically, this necessitates a pricing negotiation for each client, different discount level, etc.

While this type of product is most common for enterprise B2B businesses, e.g., Marketo, Samsara, or Deloitte, there are numerous consumer products that act the same way, including life insurance, wealth management services, and, in many cases, automobiles.

In this model, business development and sales representatives play a major role in bringing in new leads and customers through targeted outreach.

### Where to focus

The metrics that matter here are the number of new leads being generated by marketing, and the close-rate percentage of sales. If either metric is unhealthy, none of it works—you need both.

According to research from the Corporate Executive Board, [57% of all research is conducted before a customer contacts sales](#). And according to SiriusDecisions, [67% of all research is done online](#), both before and after sales involvement. Content for sales-driven businesses needs to serve the entire customer journey.

High-level, educational content about trends, best practices, and things to ponder can be highly effective. Here, [engaged time](#) is an important metric.

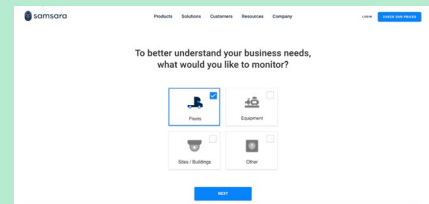


Further down the funnel, valuable content that helps convert readers to leads is key, with leads as the metric. This content includes competitor evaluations, technical evaluations, and business/ROI cases. Creating it means having a deep understanding of the customer, their pain points, and what options they have in front of them to solve those challenges.

Unlike the days when sales handled everything after a reader became a lead, now online content plays a role. There needs to be complimentary content online (and tailored for sales) that speaks a consistent message to move prospects through the sales funnel.

Without effective content marketing in this model, readers may never become leads and salespeople have to work significantly harder to close those who do. The number of leads generated is not the only metric to measure. Deal velocity and deal size are also key factors to track.

## Find inspiration to get started



[Samsara](#) is a great example of a company providing effective, sales-tailored content that assists their sales reps in moving prospects through the funnel, from leads to customers. The [pricing section](#) of their site offers a module to help prospects understand, calculate, and optimize pricing for their solution.





## Low-cost, occasional purchases

### What it looks like

These types of businesses have relatively simple products with typically low to moderate price points. Customers do only cursory research before purchasing and may go from consideration to purchase in as little as a few minutes, or even seconds.

Most of these businesses are B2C; however, small B2B purchases made with a credit card and reimbursed via an expense report may fit this model, too. These purchases include things like hotel rooms, toys, books, food deliveries, or event tickets.

### Where to focus

Here, content marketing needs to rely on small, quick pieces of content, and typically lots of them.

There are two key areas to focus on. The first is drawing eyeballs from in-market consumers. This includes ad content, placement on marketplaces, links from other sites, and organic search, especially. Thereafter, the focus is on immediate conversion. Content can be relatively surface level, visual or short text and geared towards driving a purchase.

One common challenge that hinders this sort of content marketing initiative is the sheer volume of content pieces needed and the number of channels where they need to be activated. While the content itself may not be complex, if your business is selling multiple products in multiple places, the required content amount multiplies. You need [solutions that can help keep up with this content proliferation](#).

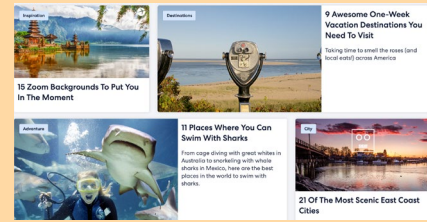
Measurement of content success boils down to traffic and conversion rate. If your content drives more eyeballs to your



offer and improves the conversion rate, then you've achieved success.

Without effective content marketing in this model, users never discover your products and you miss out on their fly-by purchases.

## Find inspiration to get started



For a travel company, content like guides, best-of blog series (e.g., best places to travel during the summer), and local reviews for affordable restaurants are effective. This content may live on your own digital properties or those of a partner, retailer, or marketplace. Often, content is created by the business for placement in a media publication.

[Expedia's travel blog](#) is a great example of effective content marketing for this type of business model.





## Low-cost, habitual purchases

### **What it looks like**

Some of the world's biggest, most recognizable brands sell relatively low-consideration, low-cost products that consumers buy everyday, such as Coca-Cola or Whole Foods. Even more than low-cost, occasional purchase businesses, these types of companies are almost exclusively B2C.

While some have real product differentiation, many live and die by creating customer preference for what is essentially a simple, commodity product. Consumers often purchase commodity products like sugar or flour exclusively from the same preferred brand every time they shop.

### **Where to focus**

Here, brand is king. While metrics like eyeballs and direct conversions are often useful to understand content's impact, the long-term success of these companies is highly dependent on customer preference and brand loyalty.

The type of content that works best for this type of business tends to be more focused on how the product makes you feel and less on the attributes of the product itself. These brands want their customers to have an emotional response to their content. Creativity and the depth of the experience matter greatly.

Product placement or creating content for social networks like TikTok is a great way to get this type of message across to a large audience. Some brands also use their digital presence to create immersive experiences, games, or other innovative capabilities. Content and engineering or development often work hand-in-hand to build these.



The goal here is usually not a direct conversion.

[Engagement time](#) is what matters. Content needs to keep the brand top of mind for the consumer so that they are more likely to buy repeatedly without thinking. Social interactions can also be a source of measurement as, like engagement metrics, they indicate the loyalty or affinity a customer has for the brand.

Without effective content marketing in this model, your brand becomes irrelevant to your audience, leaving potential customers no motive to buy your product over a competitor's.

## Find inspiration to get started



Think back to Coca Cola's ["Share a Coke" campaign](#), where they sold bottles with common names printed on the labels. This strategy was hugely successful because it made consumers feel a real, personal connection with their brand.





## Trial-driven, product-led and marketplace purchases

### What it looks like

Not everything is a single purchase or even a series of discreet purchases. While trial-driven models, marketplaces, and product-led growth may sound quite dissimilar, from the perspective of a content marketer they are not.

In each case, there is an initial event where a customer adopts the product or service, either for free or at a lower cost, and a business expectation that further adoption, usage, or transactions will come. While many founders have pitched investors that “the product will sell itself,” in most cases even a product-led growth model requires effective content marketing to succeed.

Companies like [Backstage](#), Dropbox, and Slack all fall into this category when it comes to planning a content marketing strategy.

### Where to focus

Like the sales-driven model, the critical element of these types of businesses is a moment where the customer is “captured.” In the sales-driven model, that was the point where they became a lead. In this model, it’s where they become a user.

Like high-consideration and sales-driven businesses, there is a strong need for general, top-of-the-funnel educational content with a focus on eyeballs and engagement. In many cases, however, because the product or service is, at least initially, less complex, this content may be more lightweight or cursory.

A second set of content focused on customer sign-up or other key moments is then needed. Again, the customer may follow a non-linear journey through their consideration, so multi-touch attribution is important in understanding the many paths to conversion.





Where these types of businesses differ from others is once the customer signs up, the job of content marketing is not done. Not by a long shot. The goal is to get them from freemium to premium.

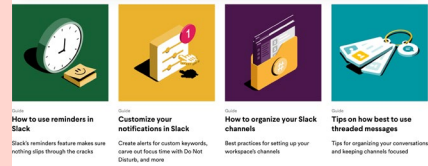
It's no longer about enticing the customer to engage with content or simply convert. Rather, customer success means explaining the product, service, or marketplace and enticing the user to: 1) use it more (and successfully), 2) adopt new parts of it, and 3) ultimately make it something they can't live without.

The content marketer is not alone, however, on the journey. More than any other model, this type of business requires tight collaboration between product teams and content marketing to ensure a friction-free experience for the user, even as new product capabilities are designed or redesigned.

While good product design can make some capabilities obvious and lure users, other new capabilities require more explanation. The content marketer's job is to guide the user through their journey, through a set of steps to product stickiness, upsells, or other desired actions. They must understand all these key actions and how they're impacted by their content.

Without effective content marketing in this model, free users won't understand how to get maximum value out of paid features and will never end up becoming high-spend customers.

## Find inspiration to get started



### [Slack's resource library](#) is

full of educational product-related content that promotes higher usage and ultimate stickiness. They provide answers and tips for virtually any question or challenge their users might come upon, and point those users towards the corresponding upsell opportunities and desired actions.





## Free or ad supported

### **What it looks like**

Many businesses offer their service for free, and are supported by advertising, sponsorship, or other partnership. In ad-supported cases, the reader isn't the customer. The business essentially sells their reader base to advertisers—so the readers are the product.

Media companies are a prime example (some also use paywalls or other purchase drivers). A word of caution: the very definition of "media company" often changes.

Ad-supported games, social networks, and others also fit this mold. In this model, the more eyeballs that are acquired and the more usage or engagement they generate, the more ads are served, and the more money the business makes.

### **Where to focus**

In many ways, this is the simplest and purest form of content marketing—here the content is the product. Traffic and engagement metrics are key to success.

In these businesses, content marketers are crucial as there is a constant drumbeat to produce more and more content and to make it increasingly engaging to easily distracted consumers. It's a challenge requiring meticulous attention to drive the most traffic and engagement.

The next step is increasing your overall readership—getting your content in front of audiences who have never seen it before. Retaining your current audience, of course, is important, but real growth comes from new, unique visitors.

Here an effective distribution strategy is crucial. Great content is worthless if no one can find it. Which topics bring the most

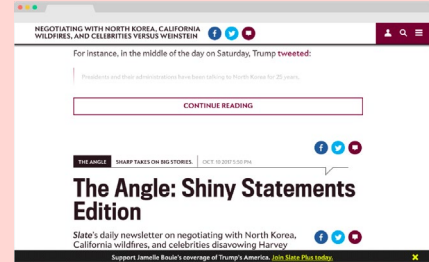


engagement on social media? What stories do people find through search? What do people want in their newsletter? Being able to answer questions like these will help you confidently tweak and optimize your distribution efforts.

A second differentiating factor for this type of business is the time horizon. While most businesses, and particularly those with long sales cycles and complex products, can evaluate the performance of their content on a monthly or quarterly basis, these types of businesses may need to pivot their content hourly or by the minute. This real-time nature of content requires new tools, people, and processes.

Without effective content in this model, you fail to grow your reader base, lose the attention of your current audience, and miss out on revenue from advertising and sponsorships.

## Find inspiration to get started



Digital magazine [Slate](#) optimizes for audience growth and engagement through personalized content recommendations and thoughtful product design, which they brought together in an [infinite scroll reading experience](#). When a reader reaches the bottom of one Slate story, another relevant story appears, dictated by Parse.ly's [recommended content API](#).

This feature helped them achieve an increase in engaged time per visitor of 8.5% and an increase in total page views of 17%.



## Where to go from here

By no means is this the definitive list of types of businesses and how they should focus their content marketing efforts. There are many shades of gray between our models. Over time, market forces and trends reshape the nature of each market.

The growth of the internet and mobile phones and societal changes driven by new generations of consumers—as well as the COVID-19 pandemic—shifted businesses between models almost overnight. Some experienced explosive growth, some were driven out of business.

However, understanding your business can help shape your content marketing strategy. Aim to define the following:

1. Which business model or business models best match(es) the environment in which your business operates?
2. Based on your business, which KPIs generate business success. Is it engagement? Leads? Direct sales? Brand loyalty? Something else? Try to keep your initial KPIs to no more than two or three.
3. What are the steps in the customer journey that map to those KPIs?
4. What content will best move your customer through that journey?
5. What people, processes, and technologies do you need to build that content at the volume required to meet your goals?
6. How will you measure against KPIs? Do you have the right tools to provide insights to tie your content marketing strategy to business success?
7. How will you prove the value of your content marketing? For example, ask yourself: "If my CEO invited me into their office



tomorrow, could I tie our content marketing to what they really care about?" If you've confidently defined everything above, your answer should be an unequivocal "yes."

The good news is content marketing continues to grow and drive growth for companies that practice it well. And every year, companies are investing more in the discipline. In fact, 50% of the content marketers surveyed in our [Content Matters 2022 Report](#) said their budget grew last year, and 42% expect it to grow in the coming year.

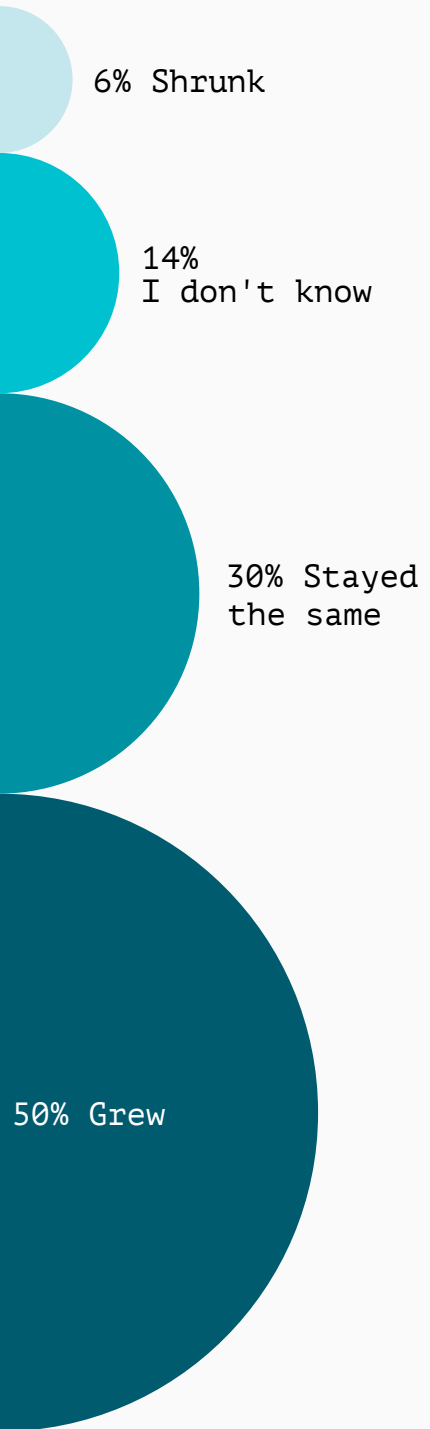
The bad news? Many companies can't tie their content marketing teams and budgets to business results. By understanding the unique nature of your business, building the KPIs, formulating a content strategy to impact them, and then measuring and refining, you unlock the limitless potential of content marketing.

### Next in our series

You've just read Chapter 1 in our *How To Do Better Content Marketing* series. Now that you understand your business model, what KPIs matter for your business, and where content marketing fits in, it's time to address the challenge of determining *what to write*.

In the rest of this series, we'll explore how to understand an audience, how to create content they're interested in, and how to use insights and data in that process—all to positively impact those KPIs. Stay tuned!

### Change in content budget over the past year



Source:  
[Content Matters Report 2022](#),  
[Parse.ly](#)





### **About Parse.ly**

Parse.ly is the analytics platform built for content creators.

Parse.ly gives creators, marketers and developers the tools to understand content performance, prove content value, and deliver tailored content experiences that drive meaningful results.

With Parse.ly, your writers and marketers don't have to turn to the analyst team for answers—they can be data-driven themselves.

[Learn more about Parse.ly](#)