

THE CONTENT STRATEGY



# FIELD JOURNAL



CONTENT  
MARKETING  
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## IDEAS FROM

*Robert Rose*







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### **How can you create remarkable content experiences and more scalable content processes?**

All through 2015, Robert Rose has been sharing exclusive insights in a weekly CMI newsletter. These conversations include current concepts that struck him as interesting; new ideas, big and small; near-term and long-range views of our industry; and more.

All are things you should start thinking about today, as your marketing team plans for content that will serve your organization as a strategic business asset tomorrow — and in the future.



# Sing With Me!

*“When you hear this sound a comin’ hear the drummers drumming — I want you to join together with the band. We don’t move in any ‘ticular direction and we don’t make no collections — I want you to join together with the band!”*

Okay, it’s The Who for all you youngsters out there. Over the past several weeks, we have received some passionate and wonderful questions about why the heck CMI purchased ICC and what our vision will be moving forward. Yeah — full mea culpa here — we should have done this a while back — but come on, join together with the band.

To put it simply, we’re passionate about two things: elevating the way content is used in enterprise organizations and building communities of individuals who are committed to learning and moving the industry forward. My post this week, [The Search for Intelligent Content in the Universe](#), goes into many more details, but we want to be very clear on how we will help you.

Our mission is simple: deliver value to you — the professionals who want to understand the best practices of how to create, manage, deliver, and scale the approach of intelligent content in your business. We’re here to be explorers. **We’re here to help develop successful content practitioners and to elevate content to the strategic, differentiating asset that it should be in the business.** *Come on, join together with the band.*

Please comment on the post, or reach out directly with questions. If you know others who are passionate about content, I simply ask you to forward this to them and invite them to join the conversation. I promise it will be an exciting adventure. Come on, join together with the band!

*Originally published December 6, 2014*





# Content Strategy vs. Intelligent Content: What's the Difference?

Wow, it's been a busy first week of the year for me — how about you?

This week a friend of mine happened to ask for my thoughts on how “content strategy” differs from “intelligent content.” I found myself explaining the distinction through a metaphor that turned out to be pretty useful, so I thought I'd share it here.

When I think about content strategy, I often separate the abstract idea of content from the practical mechanics of how it is applied and optimized as it flows through the business' veins. It's kind of like the difference between “economics” and “finance” (yes, I realize there are inherent weaknesses in this metaphor; but just go with me here for a minute...):

When I think of economics, it's generally characterized as a social science that studies the production, consumption, and distribution of goods and services. Its goal is to explain how economies work, and how their various agents interact in a large-scale scenario.

Finance, on the other hand, puts the concept of economics into a specific context, focusing on the study of prices, interest rates, money flows, and financial markets. When we think about “financial strategy,” it's often in terms of the flow of wealth, the time-value of money, rates of return, the cost of capital, optimal financial structures, or the quantification of risk.



## So in this metaphor:

Economics = Content Strategy

Finance = Intelligent Content

They are definitely interrelated, but each has a different primary focus.

Content strategy can (and I would argue should) be a social science that studies why and how to develop and use content as a strategic asset in the business; and, as I've written before, it's intimately [connected to content marketing](#), though it's a separate entity in and of itself.

The goal of content strategy is to explain how, strategically, content will interact with consumers and work as a strategic asset of the business. For example, when writing for multiple global audiences, the actual words that are chosen (the precision of language) can save (or cost) the company hundreds of thousands of dollars and can impact the value it will have as a strategic asset. It's critical that organizations understand personas because the business must balance customer needs with efficient use of the asset. The business must know how content as a business asset will be applied to the company at large and make decisions that will govern the use of those assets.

From there, they can start to think about how each specific decision will impact their organization most optimally. They have to actually publish, display, contextualize, personalize, and manage the continual flow of content through their business' veins. That's intelligent content strategy — it's just as important as content strategy, but with a different focus.

Anyway, I don't want to belabor this, as I might start to push the metaphor beyond its breaking point. But it seemed helpful for my friend to think of it in these terms — and I hope it will be for you too.

*Originally published January 10, 2015*





# How Well Do You Need to Know Technology?

A couple things happened this week that got me thinking about this question.

This week, in a move that everybody who has been paying attention predicted, web content management software companies Ektron and EpiServer merged. Now, you can safely bet that a more evolved Epiktron technology (as my friend and analyst at DCG Marianne Kay calls this potential hybrid product) will not emerge from the primordial soup of Excel spreadsheets, PowerPoint slide chevrons, org charts, and backslaps from happy equity holders. As [Marianne observes eloquently](#), “The time spent integrating two existing platforms is the time lost to addressing demands and requirements of the past, not the future.”

That’s the key. Technology is moving too fast now to even think about merging the best features of those solutions into one.

Consider this. Scott Brinker just released his [landscape of marketing software](#) technologies. In just one year, the number of marketing-technology companies has gone from 947 to more than 1,800. It has doubled in a year. Now, he’ll tell you that’s as much due to deeper research as it is to the market — but yeah, doubled!

Then there’s [this article](#) from Digiday, and another one I ranted about on [this week’s PNR podcast](#), both of which talk about how forward-leaning publishing sites like Huffington Post



and BuzzFeed are “hacking their CMSs” because the technology can’t keep up with their needs for contextual display and native advertising. The Digiday article quotes Todd Sawicki, CEO of Zemanta, who says, “We’re sort of all dancing around, waiting for the tech to get better.” That’s right. Even at the blistering speed that enterprise technology is evolving, content strategists are still pulling for the technology to move even faster.

Finally, I searched through a couple job sites for “content strategists” and found on one site almost 5,000 jobs that contained “well-versed in technology” as part of the job description. Here’s another interesting data point: A search on LinkedIn for “content strategist” lists more than 1,000 open jobs, 600 of which are in “Marketing” and 187 of which are in “Information Technology.”

What does all of this mean? The only thing I know is that the content technology landscape is likely to get a whole lot more confusing before it gets clearer. As you move through your career as a content marketer or content-strategy practitioner, how well do you need to know technology? The answer is, as well as possible. If you don’t, you better darn well have somebody you trust who’s paying attention. As Ferris Bueller says, “Life moves pretty fast. If you don’t stop and look around for a while, you could miss it.”

So stop and look around. Don’t blink, or you might just miss the changes whooshing by.

*Originally published January 31, 2015*

*"Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look  
around for a while, you could miss it."  
- Ferris Bueller's Day Off*



# Are You Ready for the Next Level of Digital Content?

In a scene in *Batman Begins*, Bruce Wayne, searching for training to master his fears, gives a symbolic blue flower to Henri Ducard (no spoilers). Bruce has been told that delivering this flower to the top of the mountain will enable him to find what he's been looking for. Henri takes the flower and says, "To manipulate the fears in others, you must first master your own." Then he asks, "Are you ready to begin?" Breathless, Bruce says, "I can barely stand." With a powerful kick to the chest that knocks Bruce halfway across the room, Henri yells, "Death does not wait for you to be ready!"

How about you? Are you ready to begin?

Two weeks ago, Google Chairman Eric Schmidt was widely quoted as saying, ["The Internet will disappear."](#) There will be so many IP addresses... so many devices, sensors, things that you are wearing, things that you are interacting with that you won't even sense it."

Think we have a lot of interfaces to worry about now? What will it be like when we can deliver content intelligently and dynamically on your product packaging. What personal message will you deliver? That's the real question, isn't it?



Yeah, how's that website redesign and CMS implementation coming along? This week, Boris Kraft, the Chief Visionary Officer for open-source content management provider Magnolia, [wrote an article in CMSWire](#) about how the Internet of Things (IoT) may change the entire idea of digital customer experiences. He notes that the consequences of bad digital experiences range from “comically misguided (such as bad personalization) to the genuinely life-threatening (such as providing incorrect location data at a critical point).”

I find this fascinating. Contemplating the storytelling opportunities and the differentiating, valuable experiences we could deliver to customers using the IoT opens up a new world of creative possibility.

But Boris is right to point out the darker possibilities as well. Let there be no doubt about the importance of content — and the importance of quickly preparing our businesses to be really, really good at creating, managing, publishing, and intelligently displaying our content to deliver valuable communication to our customers. If we don't, our competition will.

As Henri says to Bruce with a swift kick to the gut, “Death is not considerate or fair. And make no mistake: here, you face death.”

Are you ready to begin?

*Originally published February 7, 2015*

*"To manipulate the fears in others, you must first master your own."  
- Batman Begins*





# Can You Be the Steven Spielberg of Content?

Allow me to geek out a bit.

I was surfing Reddit last week, and a thread caught my eye. It was a question about the classic movie *Jurassic Park*. The person asked why, after 20+ years, the CGI (computer-generated imagery) seemed so much more realistic than some of today's movies that feature state-of-the-art technology.

The overwhelmingly prevalent answer — which, after some research of my own (aka watching the movie for the 19th time), I agree with — is, well, two words: Steven Spielberg.

For the most part, Redditors contended, the better experience was due to Spielberg taking the time to care for every shot and using CGI sparingly. He used animatronic puppets on real sets, and he blended in computer-generated effects only when he needed them. This is what's missing in most of today's CGI-heavy movies. In other words, because technology is now easier to use, many of today's movies (I'm looking at you, *The Hobbit* trilogy) overuse computer-generated imagery. And audiences can sense that something is wrong. The suspension of disbelief is broken. This is what got me thinking.

Today, as marketers, we are offered an extraordinary array of special effects when it comes to using data to dynamically manage and display content. If I see one more demo of a



content management system that uses the weather to personalize content based on whether it's raining where the visitor is coming from, I might scream.

Anyway, in my Facebook feed this week, a colleague asked how much personalization an email can have before recipients get “weirded out” (his words). Yeah, this is the same “snap” that today’s moviegoers experience. Computer and robotics engineers have a name for this phenomenon: the Uncanny Valley. The “valley” is the dip in people’s comfort level when they encounter a nearly human image — a likeness that’s a little bit off. People feel repulsed rather than attracted to the almost-but-not-quite real.

With our marketing content, this “snap” into the Uncanny Valley is not good. It’s lazy directing, and it’s lazy content.

The answer is not to use less technology. Spielberg is one of the most technologically savvy directors ever. Marketers need to learn from his example and pay more attention to *how and when* we use technology. Great content, displayed intelligently, strikes the right balance between human care and technology — between art and science — resulting in more-resonant audience experiences.

That’s what makes a classic.

*Originally published February 14, 2015*





# Content Is What We Are

Why is content so important to business?

So, two stories.

Story one: This week I was advising an enterprise B2B client that, 18 months ago, launched a new, separate digital content platform that represented a sparkly new brand initiative. (Yes, it was expensive.) Why was it separate, you ask? Why was it not infused into the other content platforms they were already managing, you ask? These are great questions.

The answer is (and this is all too common), because the existing content management technology was so hard to use that it was easier to launch something separately. Now, 18 months later, they've got a content Frankenstein on their hands. It takes their staff twice the time to manage everything, and they can't connect the measurement of any of the new brand experience (which they've spent millions of dollars on) to the shopping experience in the classic platform. In short, they made a "strategic" decision that because they had a pencil stuck in their mouth, they should cease speaking, full stop, and start using hand signals to communicate.

Why not just remove the pencil?

Story two: I was doing an interview this week about my upcoming book, and the interviewer asked me the question of why content is so important to the business. I answered with the usual, well-worn answers:

- It helps people find us in a noisy marketplace.
- It helps educate our customers and, thus, differentiates our approach.
- It creates a valuable experience for the customer.
- It develops shared values that develop brand loyalty.



You can see the classic funnel-shaped thinking coming through each answer. I'd love to say that I stopped midsentence and came up with a better answer. Yes, I'd love to say that I did. I didn't.

But after the interview, I had some time to reflect.

Both of these stories point to why content is perhaps the most important business asset that we fail to manage as well as we could. What each story really defines is that we mostly rationalize the value of content against the priorities of individual functions of the business rather than its entirety. In other words, we look at content as a *feature of the business*, not as an ultimate *strategic value of the business*.

This is why content can seem so hard to justify.

So why is content so important to business? Here's the real answer: Content is what we are.

We often wander far and long for a business case for why content should be considered a precious asset to be managed and cared for as intelligently as possible. This is the answer. It is what we are.

Content defines every experience we create for our customers — including our product or service. Thus, it cannot be a neutral part of any one experience. Content either enhances the experience or degrades it.

There's a wonderful Will Durant quotation (often misattributed to Aristotle): "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit." Content created and managed well, repeatedly, defines a business. That's why it's so important.

Content is what we are.

*Originally published February 21, 2015*





# What Is Big Content?

I had a dream one night last week.

Alex Trebek takes the podium and opens the game.

“I’ll take Emergent Marketing Problems for \$800,” I say.

“The answer?” says Alex. “This big problem you think you have solved is about to become a huge issue for you this year.”

“What is analytics?” says the competitor on my right.

“No, sorry. That’s incorrect,” says Alex in his polite Canadian way.

The competitor on my left buzzes in. “What is content marketing?” he says.

Alex looks offstage. “Judges?” He looks back our way. “I’m sorry. We’re looking for something else.”

My turn. “What is Big Content?”

“That’s correct,” says Alex. The audience bursts into applause.

Out of nowhere, my third grade teacher appears holding a goat. But that’s a different story.

The term “Big Content” is getting bandied about — and yeah, I’m about to bandy it about some more. About a year ago, Michael Brenner, then still with SAP, wrote a roundup post on Big Content. He linked out to many definitions. One definition comes from Gartner Analyst Craig Roth, who opines that Big Content is about the quantity of unstructured content. Another definition comes from Idio’s Andrew Davies, who argues that “every large organisation has a Big Content challenge.” A Moz post then came out defining Big Content as the big quality of the content. And Matthew Gratt wrote a post on Convince and Convert supporting this idea of quality.

Most recently, even the president of the IAB, Randall Rothenberg (I call him the second-best-known RR — ha!), weighed in two weeks ago and seconded (or thirded depending on your point of view) the idea that Big Content is the Big Idea and that agencies and publishers had better pay attention.



Aaaaanyway, my point isn't to offer up some new Buzzword Bingo game. That's a discussion for different beverages. I think you can make just as good an argument for big idea or big pile or big problem. Rather, I want to bring up and support the notion that a large enterprise challenge is emerging.

Here are a few recent trends I've found in my work:

- This week at ContentTECH I hosted a presentation from ThisMoment, talking through the rights-management and new workflow challenges associated with user-generated content. This is an issue I hadn't thought about before. I was fascinated.
- I've had several discussions in the last month with enterprise marketing practitioners who are frustrated that the content in their enterprise web CMS is "unfindable" and "trapped." One even pointed me to a Google spreadsheet where they separately maintain every location of their thought-leadership content so that they can find it.
- CIOs and CMOs are becoming increasingly frustrated that enterprise content is too hard and slow, or that it's being created, stored, and displayed in ever-more "lightweight" systems, and there are real scalability issues.
- An enterprise marketing director, who is bleeding edge and acing it in terms of content marketing strategy and using the Big Data associated with it, is profoundly frustrated at the lack of scalable ways to tag and create an overarching tagging structure for marketing content.

In short, I believe that a crisis is fast approaching for many enterprise marketers who are scaling their content-production efforts. Big Content is not just a management issue. It is a content creation, curation, management, promotion, and measurement issue.

We all know that we need to produce content like a media company. But our existing people, practices, and technology are not there yet.

I think Big Content is tomorrow's Daily Double. Tune in next time for more on the goat.

*Originally published February 28, 2015*





# Action Reduces Fear

The Intelligent Content Conference was this week — an overwhelming success. We had great speakers, amazing attendees (I continually learn so much from this group), and beautiful weather in our host city of San Francisco.

Over and over, I heard about the challenge that many organizations face in transforming the way they treat content as a strategic asset. “Acting like a media company is super-neat-o,” goes the thinking — until, you know, we have to convince people to do it. Then comes the familiar word.

*Fear.*

It might be fear of change, fear of failure, or (yes, really) fear of success. The type of fear matters less than the ultimate outcome: inaction. One senior executive told me, “Every time I bring up the idea of centralizing content creation as a strategic function of the business, I get told that we shouldn’t upset the way we’re doing things.”

Quick story. Starbucks had a bad week this week. They launched their #RaceTogether campaign this week, which encouraged baristas to write the hashtag on cups and to have a conversation about race in the local stores. It was immediately met with a [backlash](#) on social media, and it was ridiculed by [John Oliver](#) on *Last Week Tonight* and on marketing blogs all over.

It doesn’t matter what you think of the Starbucks campaign. It doesn’t matter whether its strategy or execution was flawed. They tried something big.

So they failed. Will this “mistake” hurt their sales? Of course not.



As content marketing — including the development of differentiated, content-driven experiences — becomes a larger part of a business' strategy, brands will have to create content that has a distinct point of view. This means that some brands will attempt to take on tougher, more difficult issues. Sometimes their efforts will be met with derision.

But sometimes people will like what they do. Really like it.

For example, Dove has seen both kinds of response to their “real beauty” efforts. They’ve been [lauded](#), and they’ve been called [“creepy.”](#) They keep going. The only way they would ultimately lose is if they stopped. The only way Starbucks loses is if they stop.

And this is the key with becoming strategic with content for creating differentiated customer experiences. Every action we take reduces the risk of the next. It’s only through continued inaction that the risk of the first step increases.

It’s easy to come home after a conference and let all those great big ideas that accumulated in our notebooks sit. Unused.

Can we pick one? Take one action?

Even if we fail at it, that one action reduces the fear of the next. And one of those actions just might be the one that changes everything.

*Originally published March 28, 2015*



# Are We Reaching High Enough?

Two quick stories:

At the end of last year, I had the pleasure of following Seth Godin on stage at a marketing conference. So I got to watch him in action. At one point he asked people to raise their hands. Everybody did. “Now,” he said, “Raise them higher.” Of course, everyone does, and they giggle when they get it.

His point, and it’s a good one, is this: “Why didn’t you raise your hands as high as you could when I first asked?”

Okay, second story. Last week I was sitting with the C-suite and all the senior departmental VPs at a large company. The topic was content and how it is shifting the way companies are going to market. We discussed the following:

- Companies — Red Bull, Marriott, Condé Nast, and others — are building content studios that will put them squarely in competition with other media brands.
- Companies are hiring and partnering with journalists. Starbucks, for example, has partnered with a former *Washington Post* journalist to create large-scale media projects, such as documentaries and books to tackle social issues.
- Companies are recognizing the need for content-driven “customer experience” design as an in-house competency. For example, Capital One just acquired the experience-design agency, Adaptive Path, to focus on creating just such experiences.



That was when one executive folded up his notebook, took his glasses off, and pushed himself away from the table. He was annoyed. He said: “Look, our company has been in business for a hundred years. We still make money the same way. We are NOT going to upend our business strategy and build a movie studio or a newspaper.” For him there were only two options: all in, or not at all. There was no middle.

I see both scenarios a lot these days. As the business evolves, our approach to a successful content strategy will inherently force changes in our go-to-market strategy. It just will. And it will seem, in many of those cases, as if we’re forgetting — or are distracted from — the business we’re really in.

This isn’t true.

Expanding the remit of marketing into a group that creates valuable, content-driven experiences (rather than simply describing the product) using product-development methodologies for that content (rather than campaign-minded tactics) is the *evolution of marketing*. This new approach doesn’t have to distract companies from their core businesses. And it’s certainly not an all-or-nothing gambit.

But we do have to move. Deliberately. Iteratively. And, most of all, decisively.

At the same time, we’d better not be afraid to give it our all to make this evolution happen. The companies that will lose faith the fastest are those that make half-hearted attempts to tweak traditional marketing campaigns into “content campaigns.” The campaign mentality no longer applies.

So, this time, let’s raise our hands together. All the way up.

*Originally published April 11, 2015*





# Content Success Isn't a Destination

Many organizations want to know how to get good at content.

I've recently done a little work for one such organization, a high-tech consumer-focused company. I was one of a long line of advisors — including at least two analyst firms, a consulting firm, and a digital agency — to suggest that this company merge its technical-content and marketing-content teams.

- The analyst firms said that the company needed to create a change-management program that enabled many contributors to participate in the content process. Then it would be successful.
- The consulting firm said that the company needed to implement new web-content-management infrastructure. The content teams all needed to use the same technology. Then they would be successful.
- The digital agency said that the company needed a content hub. The merged content teams could then manage and measure their content from that hub. Then they would be successful.

Let me be clear. I don't think any of their advice is necessarily bad on its own. The issue is that this kind of advice gives the impression that after you do X, you'll be successful. Then you drop the mic and walk off the stage.

This couldn't be more wrong.



Think about the top 20 content initiatives that are always named in presentations around the world. You know the ones I'm talking about. I will tell you first-hand — having visited with a good number of the people responsible for those initiatives — they worry, just like you. They have to continually build business cases, just like you. They have big bugs in their site and software, just like you. When their company gets bought, they worry about their job security, just like you. They struggle with silos and politics, just like you.

Success with content isn't here (*points finger at ground*). It's always out in front of you. It's always evolving.

Whatever project you're launching — a content marketing blog, a customer help system, a CMS, a taxonomy — is a step. There is no last step.

Even if your company's example popped up on the first slide in some influencer's presentation about the awesomest content strategies in the world, you would wink at the person next to you and say, "If people only knew."

In fact, that's what keeps us going. As J.J. Watt said, "Success isn't owned; it's leased. And you pay rent every day."

The rent is due.

*Originally published April 18, 2015*

*"Success isn't owned; it's leased. And you pay rent every day."  
- J.J. Watt*





# Content Is a Show That Never Closes

I was visiting with a mid-sized company this week. I was brought in to help them sort out their content marketing strategy. In the discovery part of our conversation, they showed me some of their recent content work:

- A microsite that an agency set up for them last year. “It hasn’t had any attention for a couple of quarters,” they told me.
- A customer training blog. “John went rogue and put it up on WordPress earlier this year. We think it’s cool, but we haven’t done much with it.”
- An awesome video that Mary created a few months ago. “We put it up on YouTube. It didn’t get many views. We think it could be a whole series.”

I had a similar experience recently with a large company. The only difference was that they hadn’t published the content yet. Each team — from demand gen, to social, to brand, to content, to PR — had three or four content pieces scheduled. Each piece sounded wonderful on its own merits. Unfortunately, each piece would be developed by a different agency. The pieces had no connection to each other; each would support a siloed goal.

That’s right — this company was *planning* for uncoordinated, disjointed content experiences.

As marketers, when we create campaigns, by definition we build something to launch. The launch is the goal. The rocket is built with just enough fuel to get it into orbit, run its course, then fade into the ether to be replaced with another rocket. That’s campaign-thinking — and there’s nothing wrong with it in the right context.



But here's what we don't ask when we create a campaign: "What happens next?"

Transferring campaign thinking to content development, we can see why the half-life of most deliverables — white papers, webinars, infographics, YouTube videos — is so short. We launch them as assets in a campaign. When ensuing campaigns push older assets below the fold (literally or metaphorically), we forget about them — and so does our audience.

Content development should be different. Content deliverables have more value when created as long-term strategic assets — products. Each product fits into a product line that has a coordinated life cycle. Whether we are developing one asset (a white paper, video, etc.) or an entire "story space," as I described in last week's letter, we should develop a connected, consistent narrative that hangs together and builds a coherent content-driven experience.

We must ask "What's next?" in the planning stages. Let's look back at those three items I listed in the beginning. To create them as true (long-term) assets, the company needed to address — during their planning — questions like this:

If this microsite is successful, who will keep it going? What will its goal be?

Who's going to consistently develop the customer training blog once it launches?

If we turn this video into a series, what do episodes two, three, four, and so on look like, and how does each episode connect to a larger narrative?

In other words, how will all these content-driven experiences connect in a holistic, sustainable way? Want your content program to succeed? Think beyond how the show opens. Think about how it keeps audiences leaning forward all the way through — and keeps them coming back for more.

Content is a show that never closes.

*Originally published May 2, 2015*





# Your Pet Cats Must Go

To be clear, no cats will be harmed in the writing of this post. It's just that we have to move on from pet cats — projects or platforms that no longer work for us.

Earlier this year, I wrote an article for CMI that asks [whether content is a sustainable competitive advantage](#). In that article, I refer to someone who influences my thinking, Rita Gunther McGrath. In her book *The End of Competitive Advantage*, McGrath discusses, among other things, the idea that, today, competitive advantage is transient. She encourages businesses to think about moving in and out of “arenas” in order to remain competitive. In short, she argues that it is our ability to adapt and change — not necessarily what we adapt and change into — that gives us a competitive advantage.

I'm thinking about this again this week after talking with some people at a large enterprise about their content platform strategy. Over the last 18 months, this company has embraced a few initiatives related to content-driven customer experiences. One was a separate blog and social program developed to educate technical buyers around a new product and approach that, 18 months later, was no longer new. They had dedicated a well-heeled team to this approach, including two technical writers, a content strategist, a social media “community manager,” and an editor. There was only one problem.

It wasn't working anymore.

The blog wasn't attracting new subscribers. The content was adequate, but more and more of it was being used in other areas of the business. The traffic and purpose of the whole platform had become unclear. Further, the company needed more resources for another innovative content-driven idea.



VP: “How do I make a business case for adding headcount for this new idea?”

Me: “Why not just kill the blog and pivot the people working on it to work on this new idea?”

VP: “We can’t do that. Those folks are on the VP of E-Business’ team. If we move them, he loses that project and the people on it. He won’t give them up.”

Me: “So the business is going to hire unproven people for the innovative thing and keep the skilled, proven people on the antiquated, unproductive thing?”

VP: “Right.”

That old blog is a pet cat. It has to go.

Not every content platform we stand up succeeds. And not every successful content platform succeeds forever. We often talk about our need to stand up new content platforms in an agile and flexible way. Heck, this is the promise of many web content management providers today. But just as important is our ability, when appropriate, to dismantle and disassemble those platforms and to recycle, reuse, and reintegrate important bits of that content back into the business.

A scalable strategy — one that provides a sustainable competitive advantage — doesn’t always mean building and adding. It can mean unbuilding and subtracting too. Removing things. Like cats that have roamed the halls for too long.

*Originally published June 13, 2015*





# Who Runs Your Content Show?

Here's something you may know about Hollywood and television. Hit TV series — like *Game of Thrones*, *Blacklist*, *Scandal*, and *Modern Family* — have multiple directors and writers. For example, *Game of Thrones* has had 18 directors and seven writers over the course of five seasons. *Blacklist* dwarfs that with 19 directors and 24 writers over just two seasons. That's almost a new director and writer pair for every episode.

Given the unique creative vision, artistry, and talents of each writer and director, how do these shows maintain a consistent tone of voice and story arc?

Enter, the show runner.

Show runners, well, run the show. They control daily operations — everything from who directs, to who writes, to who does just about everything. Quite simply, it's their show to run. You may have heard of some famous show runners, like Matthew Weiner of *The Sopranos* and *Mad Men*, David Benioff of *Game of Thrones*, and Shonda Rhimes of *Grey's Anatomy* and *Scandal*.

I got to thinking about this because I actually, mindlessly, asked (and then had to explain) this question at a recent client engagement. The VP of Marketing there was frustrated by the turnover in his content group. Along with the challenge of replacing the talent, he grappled with the inevitable question, “How do I keep a continuous quality and tone of voice when I keep switching these content folks?”

I asked, “Who's running the show?”



It's an increasing challenge that I see in larger organizations. As thought leadership, entertainment, and useful content become bigger strategic pieces of what we do, maintaining quality, tone, brand, and an overall value becomes more and more important. In the past, many companies have responded by creating a set of guidelines — a book, in some cases — that can act as the rules of the road for how to develop content for the brand.

But guidelines, while important, are not a solution. What's needed is a person — or a team — who can maintain the spirit, the values, the story, and the overall continuity of the content being developed. Show runners.

As content strategists — marketing and otherwise — begin to take leadership positions in organizations, they may want to look at the skills of show runners. These people are leaders, improvisers, and collaborators:

**Leaders:** They know the team, motivate them, hire and lead the right people for a content effort that becomes a strategic force within the organization.

**Improvisers:** They understand that their job goes beyond generating new content daily or weekly or monthly to dealing with the adversity of turnover, to handling missed deadlines, to diving into the writing themselves.

**Collaborators:** They maintain a vision even as they bring out the unique talents of the freelancers, guest stars, and other talented people that fill the roster in any given week.

The show runner is the highest job in television. Lists of top show runners include some of the most powerful people in Hollywood. I predict that one of the most sought-after positions in the next five years — whether we call it chief content officer or something else — will be the brand show runner. It will be a hugely differentiated career path for those who make strategic content the show they run.

Who runs your content show? You?

*Originally published July 18, 2015*





# Leave 'Em Wanting More

One of the things that intrigues me most about golf is that the entire goal of the game is to play the least amount of it. The winner of the game is the one who swung the club the fewest times. It's a beautiful aspect of the game — one that we can learn a lot from in our content and marketing strategies.

One of the questions I'm most often asked in workshops and consulting engagements is "How much content should we be producing?" Of course, there's only one correct answer:

"As much as you should."

I can't give this answer, of course. It would be highly unsatisfying to people looking for quantitative guidance — not to mention people looking for a way to gauge their rank among their peers. How do I answer, then? Until recently, I've said this:

"As much as you can be great at."

The problem is that basically this answer says, "As long as it's remarkable content, you should produce as much as you can." I now think that advice is wrong.

Why? Consider this. The mark of any great concert, television series, movie, or novel is that when you get to the end, you find yourself wishing that it would go on. You're satisfied, you're moved — and you want more. In fact, the better and more impactful the experience — the shorter it can be. *The Great Gatsby* is only 180 pages. *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is only 160 pages. The classic film *Casablanca* is 100 minutes. That's not to say that long content, or a lot of content, can't be effective. *War and Peace* wouldn't be *War and Peace* if it weren't 1,200 pages. But not every book should be that long.



From now on when people ask me how much content they should be producing, I've decided on a new answer:

“As little as you can while still creating the impact you want to create.”

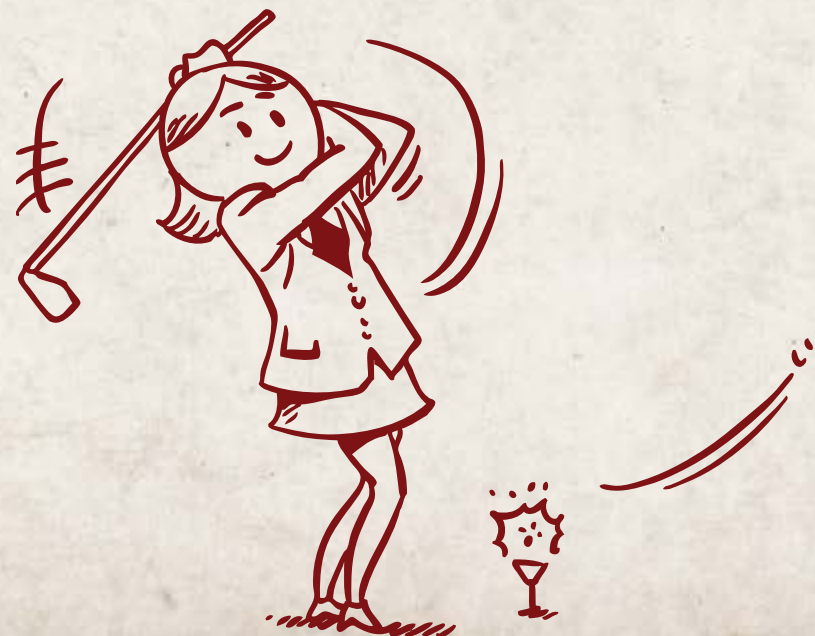
It's in this way that I think content strategy should be like golf. We should not aim to produce overwhelming amounts of content — even if we can be great at it. Rather, we should aim to produce just enough to deliver the value we intend, to create the change in behavior we are trying to effect. No more. Get through the course in as few swings as possible.

As we've said before, at CMI we're learning as much as anyone in this new world of content and marketing. This week marks the first week that we are integrating our intelligent content articles into the broader experience of the main CMI blog. There are several reasons for this, but primarily we realized how much content marketers can — and should — learn from content strategists. Focusing on things such as [governance, tone, and user experience](#) (to name a few) will help provide a better customer experience across the entire brand and make your content marketing more successful. In short, we want to provide the content marketing community with more value and talk about topics that many of them aren't thinking about (yet).

In short, we're working on our swing.

Fore!

*Originally published July 25, 2015*





# How Many *Star Treks* Are You Sitting On?

Sometimes a story needs help finding its time.

The legendary show *Star Trek* debuted in 1966. (That's the year I was born. Coincidence? I think not — but that's a different story.) Now, not a lot of people know that in its first run, which lasted until 1969, the ratings for *Star Trek* were horrible. After three seasons, NBC cancelled it. It wasn't until the series started to repeat in the 1970s in syndication that it became a huge hit, ultimately becoming a cult classic and one of the most influential and popular TV series of all time.

This kind of “serendipity” for successful content in entertainment is quite common. Have you ever heard of Gloria Jones? She recorded a song called *Tainted Love* in 1964. That song wouldn't become a hit until Soft Cell brought the dark synth-pop production to it almost 20 years later. Here's another example. Until 1997, *Men In Black* was the name of a highly obscure comic book with a niche following. That all changed when it was brought to the big screen, where it ultimately made more than \$500 million.

I was reminded of this idea last week as I worked with a software company that had found tremendous success through a series of thought-leadership white papers. By chance, these white papers had been shared by an influencer and then been picked up by a publication, at which point they went viral. They ended up driving a huge amount of success for the company.

Those white papers were almost five years old. The VP told me, “We had forgotten about them. If only we had promoted them earlier, I wonder what would have happened.”



Repeating ourselves, or promoting something from the past, is an unused muscle for most marketers. Campaign-based marketing has trained us to tell ourselves, “New is better” and “Don’t repeat yourself” and “If it didn’t work the first time, don’t do it again.”

But great content is not a marketing campaign. If we create value for customers with a piece of content, there’s a good chance that the value is evergreen. And that content may not have found its way initially. Various things — the time, the context, or a million other things — can keep a valuable piece of content from finding success the first time around.

We don’t have to rely on good fortune. We can learn from media companies and help existing content find its serendipitous success.

TV shows rerun every summer — just in case you missed them. Then, if they last five years, they rerun in syndication forever. Feature films have an entire lifecycle repeated in theaters, then they’re repeated via the Internet, airplanes, DVDs, and television. Novels are transformed into movies. Movies are transformed into comic books and vice versa.

Media companies don’t rerun shows because they are lazy. No, they do it because they’ve invested in an asset, and they understand that to get a return they need to maximize that asset’s chances of becoming successful.

As our marketing operations increasingly look like media companies, we can learn from this model. The stories we create, the assets in which we invest, may find second and third lives through different channels, different times, or different contexts. And we can help them find that serendipity by not giving up on them. We can repeat them. We can re-promote them — and we can build on them by taking them to different formats.

How many *Star Treks* are you sitting on?

*Originally published August 1, 2015*





# Hacking Content Experiences

Last week, *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart* aired its last episode after 16 years. As I watched the finale, it struck me just how innovative the show was for its time — a show that lampooned not only politics but also the people covering politics.

Recently, as I listened to the Beatles album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, I remembered what a breakthrough it was for its time. Time Magazine called it “a historic departure in the progress of music.”

This is how innovation happens in the world of media: Someone pushes things in a new, unexpected direction. Think of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings or Apple's 2007 reinvention of the telephone.

What does innovation look like in the world of content?

Let's start with what it does not look like. Innovation does not look like churning out the same old things. We content professionals can fall into a rut following best practices — proven ways of creating experiences that benefit both the sender and the receiver. Nothing wrong with doing that — it's just not innovation.

Consider the content types that many of us create: e-books, videos, white papers. We do what we do without a second thought, repeating what has worked before. Sure, we may create a better e-book. We may spiff up our videos. We may write our best white paper ever. But efforts like that don't qualify as innovative. (Why are white papers still called white papers anyhow? The term originated with the British government and consisted of policy and public-record documents.



These days, we think of a white paper as any “thought leadership” piece longer than a blog post. Oh, and it has to be a PDF.)

How do we innovate in the world of content? We rethink content quality, yes. We rethink content strategy, of course. We also rethink content containers, the media themselves.

Here’s an example: Just this week, I saw a [wonderfully innovative use of Instagram](#) targeted at smartphone users — Mercedes-Benz used hundreds of photos to create a timeline of side-scrolling composite images that tell the history of the Mercedes brand.

What’s out there next, waiting to be reimaged? One of the larger technological breakthroughs of the last few years has been the relative ease with which digital content can flow across channels and be optimized across interfaces. It’s easy to repurpose content for new interfaces. What’s hard is reimagining the interfaces themselves. For example, consider the way [card-based interfaces](#) have changed our experience of the web.

Content strategists and marketers need to push interfaces beyond their traditional boundaries. (How quickly yesterday’s “innovative” becomes today’s “traditional.”) We need to imagine ways to hack content-driven experiences.

I leave you with a quotation that I was reminded of this week when a friend — a content strategist at one of the largest companies on the planet — gave a presentation to the leaders of his enterprise on the future of content and their business. He knows that the biggest obstacle to the innovation they need is not technical. It’s cultural. His first slide quotes Charles Kettering, one of the most innovative businesspeople in history: “If you have always done it that way, it is probably wrong.”

If you have always done it that way, it’s time to get hacking.

*Originally published August 15, 2015*





# Who Should Tell Your Stories?

On the eve of Content Marketing World, and fresh off a content marketing strategy consultation, I'm thinking of one of my favorite Hollywood quotes. It comes from William Goldman (who holds a special place in my heart because he wrote *The Princess Bride* — but I digress). On the subject of telling stories he says this:

*“Nobody knows anything. Not one person in the entire motion picture field knows for a certainty what’s going to work. Every time out it’s a guess and, if you’re lucky, an educated one.”*

One of the most common challenges I face — especially in more complex industries — is when a client gets frustrated about the “story” or “experience.” The CMO wonders why the content isn’t resonating. It’s technically accurate; it’s being produced by some of the top subject matter experts in the world; and we’re promoting it in a robust way! Why don’t people care?

Because they don’t.

Commonly, the rest of the organization is afraid to push back on the status quo. The thinking goes, “Well of course the product people should own the story because they are the experts.” Or “Of course corporate communications should own the story because they know the pulse of the industry.” Or “Yes, marketing owns the story because, you know, brand!”

Maybe, just maybe, the product people don’t know how to tell a compelling story. Perhaps corporate communications folks are too close to the noise to hear the signal. Perhaps the marketing people are too caught up in selling to understand the underlying value of the story.



It's about this time that the business throws up its collective hands and says... what?

"Let's hire an agency. They'll solve it for us."

Instead, why don't we transform our processes and strategy and understand that a great, layered story takes a community — each contributing to a stronger, better experience for an audience.

More than 500 people work on the average A-list Hollywood movie. Each person does a specialty job to make that one story better. *Iron Man 3* (not my favorite, for sure) has more than 3,000 people in the credits. Is that too many? Probably, yeah. Certainly this example supports the notion that more people don't necessarily make the story any better.

Just as no one "owns" the customers, no one in the business "owns" the stories. Storytelling has to combine accuracy, compelling packaging, and a value that's in demand. If a story lacks any one of those elements, nobody will care. Nobody cares if your content is accurate if it isn't creative and compelling. Nobody cares if it's compelling and creative if it doesn't represent what is interesting to the audience.

Now, should the story be led? Absolutely. Every great story has a storyteller. When, recently, a CMO asked me, "Which department should lead my content strategy effort?" I said, "Yes." He just looked at me. I said, "It doesn't matter where it's led from, just make sure they're great at leading it."

Creating a successful story for the business will always be a guess. But, led well — and with contributions from all — it will be an educated one.

*Originally published September 5, 2015*



# Teaching to the Choir

Are you a thought leader in your industry?

I don't mean your business — I mean you, the person.

There's a cartoon going around social media that describes the process of becoming a thought leader. It says:

**Step One:** Claim you're a thought leader.

**Step Two:** You're now a thought leader in your industry.

That cartoon notwithstanding, if you're going to lead the thought in your market, here's something that strikes me as important:

You have to teach as much as preach.

A business group I know struggles to get its big idea out into the world. It's a complex idea, and many (especially the thought leaders within the group) are proud of this complexity. When you attend their conferences and meet-ups, the ones who "get it" are amazed at the amazing things that can be done with this amazing approach. The beginners are stumped and walk away confused. Attending their conferences is like attending a chess conference taught by grand masters. If you know what the Queen's Gambit or the Sicilian Defense is, you're in. If you're still trying to figure out whether the rook can move diagonally, you're lost and fail to see the value in the game.

By the way, don't be impressed — I had to look up both of those chess moves.

The point of the story is that this business group is struggling to expand its membership and its approach. The cocktail conversations among the leaders in this group are often about how this approach is unappreciated and how, if "normal businesses" would somehow just "get it," all would be right with the world.



There's a lesson here for those of us that are using content — and, by extension, thought leadership — as a means of moving our businesses forward. It's easy to get caught in two traps:

**Trap One:** Keeping up with the Joneses: “Everybody should know the basics, so, to look like thought leaders, we need to continually push the most sophisticated part of the approach.”

**Trap Two:** Preaching to the choir: “Those who already know this stuff will appreciate our skills, and those who don't won't buy from us anyway.”

The CMO of a retail bank outside the U.S. recently schooled me on this very thing. We were talking about ways the bank might become a thought leader in its market, how it might create experiences that illustrate financial literacy and might teach people about things like interest rates and the difference between credit cards and debit cards. He looked at me and said, “You need to understand, for a good part of our market, people don't even read much less know what a bank does. The ones we need to reach, we need to teach something different.”

Bang. Big lesson for me.

As marketers, learning to teach rather than preach can be a tricky thing. We naturally want to talk about what we sell and why it's an important part of your life. We don't have the time or patience to teach you how to ride a bike so that one day you might buy our cool high-tech gear package. That's years from now. We're focused on “How I can close you next month?”

I would humbly posit that if we're going to be thought leaders and think about our future in the long run, we have to be open to a wider approach. Our job is not to teach the ones who know; it's to teach the ones who don't know.

Want to be a thought leader? Teach a *new* choir to sing.

*Originally published September 26, 2015*





# Is Backward the New Forward?

I'm at a pharma conference this week. I'm here because I was asked to talk about the way content is transforming marketing. Maybe 20% of the attendees are in marketing. The rest are in the regulatory and compliance departments in their companies. I'm hearing a lot of talk about the tension between productivity and compliance.

"We can't keep up," says one attendee.

"These social content channels are killing us," says another. "We're always the last consideration. We get a lotta junk from marketing — and it's always late by the time it gets to us, and they expect us to fix the junk while we're trying to make sure it's compliant."

It's fascinating to me to see this side of the business. I find myself writing this down: *Working backward puts the important stuff first.*

In an impromptu discussion with a few of the attendees, I floated this idea:

*"In my experience, marketing is frequently in triage mode, trying to reactively keep up with what the business should be saying. We create campaigns where we're not sure what we're going to say next week much less next month. We think of editorial strategies that require us to create eighteen blog posts, four thought-leadership papers, and two webinars — and we don't know what they'll cover. We want to use social media to respond to cool, newsworthy conversations, and we're always awkwardly trying to make those conversations relevant in a direct-marketing kind of way. In short, we operate in a publishing cadence that says, our only requisite to publishing the content is that it's finished."*



Lots of heads nodding.

*“What if we figured out, in advance, the content-driven experience we were trying to build, and then worked backward to understand the major components that would make up that experience? And what if we then worked to strategically figure out when those ‘tent pole’ pieces would be published, like release dates of a product? Then, what if we put those pieces through their compliance and regulatory paces — no rush?”*

Then, I asked, could we agree that all the satellite pieces we create around those pieces — the social posts, the webinar abstracts, the blog posts — could be fast-tracked?”

“Yes,” was the answer.

I know that this approach doesn’t solve the more “newsroom” type of marketing content workflow-compliance-governance challenges. But it strikes me that it’s yet one more benefit to thinking of the *collection of content* as the thing that creates value in the business. If we can get out of the mindset that blog posts, social media, webinars, and white papers are created in isolation as discrete marketing assets to support just-in-time-developed campaigns, I think we can make our process more efficient.

If we start with the end in mind, work backward, and create a long-term content strategy that we can stick to, we can put strategic pieces of content through whatever paces the business has in place to support risk management. We may even make things go faster. We certainly open up new opportunities to work toward something better.

Backward may just be the new forward.

*Originally published October 10, 2015*





# The Content-Driven Experience and the Hedgehog

In his book *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't*, Jim Collins talks at some length about being a hedgehog. What's that, you say? Well, the story of The Hedgehog and the Fox is originally attributed to a phrase by the Greek poet Archilochus: "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing."

As Collins says, "It's not a goal to be the best, a strategy to be the best, an intention to be the best, a plan to be the best. It is an understanding of what you can be the best at. The distinction is absolutely critical."

I was reminded of this story this week as I traveled by train through the German countryside from Berlin to Frankfurt. The four-hour trip was made even more enjoyable by a long, relaxed discussion about content with the VP of marketing of a UK-based software company. We were talking about differentiation. He said:

*"We've actually reduced the amount of content we create. We used to create tons of customer-loyalty leadership content across the whole industry. You know, news, trends, all that. Now, we've taken the hedgehog approach and decided that there's one area that none of our competitors are covering from a content perspective, and that's what we're going to be the best in the world at it."*

He then said, "We've built a whole digital experience around the concept. It has taken us 18 months to get there, but it was so worth it."

As you might expect we had lots to talk about.



From a content perspective, there are many corollary thoughts to the hedgehog approach. You've got Simon Sinek who says, "Start with why." You have Youngme Moon, whose book *Different* is a wonderful approach to differentiation. One thing I like about Collins's *Good to Great* is this set of questions that we can apply to developing content-driven experiences:

- **What can you be the best in the world at? And what can't you be best at?** As my colleague Joe Pulizzi says, "No successful media company sets out to be the fifth-best magazine or third-best news network." Just because our business has a competence in a particular vertical doesn't mean we can, or should, provide thought leadership in that vertical. Asking ourselves where we can be the best is critical.
- **What drives your economic engine?** From a content perspective, I might shift this to "If our customers got terrific value from our content, what business outcome would be the most likely?" In short, if our customers got tremendous value and wanted to subscribe to the content-driven experiences we produce, how might they "pay us" for that content? Might they raise their hands as active leads? Might they stay subscribed to our service longer? Might they be better served and decrease our support costs? Might they provide us with such rich, accurate data that we could better target our advertising and thereby drive down advertising costs? Might they literally pay us for that content?
- **What is your organization deeply passionate about?** This answer seems like it should be a no-brainer because an organization's passion is what should feed the content-engine. But passion can be a tricky thing for businesses. The word passion suggests that we have a distinct point of view and will not back down from it. It means that, as much as we're right for some people, we're willing to be wrong for others.

Combined, these three questions form a sort of Venn diagram. Where your answers overlap, there lies your content mission. If you're a hedgehog, that content mission is part of your one big thing — the deep, differentiating advantage that moves your business forward.

*Originally published October 17, 2015*



# Who's Afraid of Strategy in Content?

There's a lot of fear in the world right now. And that fear creates divisive views on how to best move forward. When you peel back the layers of that reluctance to move, it all comes down to a fear of what's different. Fear of change.

When we look at the opportunities today's businesses have to use content to optimize their customer experiences, we see that, here too, the fear of change holds them back. Seeking to minimize risk, companies reward the skeptical manager — the one who says “no” the most and protects the company from initiatives that may crash and burn.

This mentality shows up in annoying ways in marketing. One of the most troubling is when I hear marketing practitioners lament that they can do something only if they “prove the ROI” before getting approval for an innovative program — as if that were possible. Trust me, if I could prove the ROI of anything, I'd be doing something else with my life. Now, it doesn't matter whether an executive has, in fact, made this impossible request or whether someone has misinterpreted an executive's request to build a stronger argument. The result remains the same: an inability to move forward with anything innovative.

At the beginning of each session of CMI's Content Master Class, I ask the attendees to write on a sticky note the answer to this question: “What one thing must change in your company for content to take off as a strategic function?” Inevitably about 30–40% of the answers are something like, “I have to convince my management that this is worth doing.”

Meeting this challenge is almost entirely what the class is about. This exercise gives me a way to illustrate how common the challenge is.

More remarkable to me is how *difficult* this challenge is.

Content strategists struggle with relevance in the business. They seek to show why companies should treat their content as the business asset it needs to be. Content marketers struggle



to make the case that owned media should be a key piece of a marketing strategy. And all content practitioners struggle to make time to devote to quality, adaptability, and reuse of all the content they create and manage.

It's like that classic scene from *I Love Lucy*, where Lucy and Ethel struggle to keep up with all the candy coming off the conveyor belt. I often hear managers say, "We'd love to focus on quality, but content comes at us so fast, we just have to publish it to keep up." Or they say, "Our editorial calendar isn't based on strategic decisions; it's just a backlog of content we haven't published yet."

In many businesses today, the only prerequisite to publishing a piece of content is that it's "done." We ask, "When should we publish it?" And the answer is, "Well, when it's done, of course. It's already late."

We would never do that with a product. We would never do that with a service. We would never do that with an earnings announcement. And we'd never do it with a contract. But, for some reason, customer-facing content — *the thing that creates the customer experience our business will be known for* — is treated differently. When a company is stuck in this pattern, content is far from a strategic asset. In fact, it may be hurting the brand.

We have to change. We have to get over the fear of the different. The C-suite must see content as one of the most important things to get right.

What if you stopped publishing tomorrow? Every channel. Would anyone miss your content? If not, that might make your CEO consider treating it more strategically.

I don't have a big answer. But one small thing that seems to help is something I discussed with a manager in my last Master Class. After the class, she had done all the work and had assembled an impressive content marketing strategy. It was truly ambitious. She said: "This is far too big a bite. If I show this to my management team, they'll freak out."

Fear.

She and I worked on a small part of the strategy where her team might start. I told her: "Only you need to know that this is a single layer with many layers to come. You can take them one at a time." She smiled and said, "Yup, that kind of change feels a lot less scary."

*Originally published November 21, 2015*





# A Business Case for Gratitude

“Content is a business asset worth managing strategically.”

I’m grateful to Scott Abel and others in this community for inspiring that line. I use it almost constantly now.

In fact, it’s the basis of a new call to action I like to use when talking with a VP or a CEO about content in their business. I’ll say:

*“It’s funny how no one quibbles about legal, sales, accounting, or even marketing processes as strategic. But isn’t it odd that content — which the business produces more of than its products or services — is still seen as a simple attribute of everyone’s job? What should we do about that?”*

That brings us to technology. I’m grateful for machines and software that help us scale our content efforts. But technology is also the source of a challenge we face when treating content as a strategic asset.

Ironically, content and communication used to be more strategic and considered. Fifty years ago, every ad or marketing brochure had to be strategic because it took weeks or months to create one creative piece. Now, companies dash off new versions of sales and marketing collateral with no more difficulty than the typical “edit/save as” routine. Thirty years ago, rich media was an incredibly considered process. Creating a high quality audio or video piece required teams of people, equipment that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, and a post-production process measured in terms of weeks of time it would take. Today, our iPhones have video and audio capture quality that equals what used in any commercial projection cinema. And we can click off digital edits on our personal computers in hours.



Heck, 25 years ago, we still sent carefully typed interoffice memorandums that were photocopied, placed in large envelopes, stuck into small mail cubicles, and delivered via cart. Today, we dash off hundreds of emails per day, sometimes with little thought.

Things are starting to change. Some marketers are seeking technology solutions that can help us scale and structure content effectively and simply. Technology aside, many of us are also looking to reassess our content-related processes, deemphasize quantity in favor of value, and seek other ways for our content to better serve our companies and our customers.

Meanwhile, we're frustrated that our content is not strategic. We're overwhelmed by the amount of content we produce — and we can't find the time to work on quality, or structure, or anything resembling an optimized customer experience. Sometimes we even let people know about it — but not our own companies. We post about it, grouse on private message boards, and sit at conferences and lament, "Well, at least we're not as bad as that company."

This holiday season, I'm grateful for all of you, this community of smart, cool, intellectually and emotionally stimulating content professionals. As management guru Ken Blanchard has said, "None of us is as smart as all of us." How will we meet all the challenges facing us regarding creating and scaling this thing — content — that's at the core of our jobs and that is increasingly becoming recognized, once again, as one of the most strategic aspects of business?

Together.

*Originally published November 28, 2015*





To hear from more Robert and other forward-thinking marketers, attend [Intelligent Content Conference](#). This is the one event for marketers focused on creating remarkable customer experiences and making your processes more scalable.

### About Content Marketing Institute

Content Marketing Institute is the leading global content marketing education and training organization, teaching enterprise brands how to attract and retain customers through compelling, multichannel storytelling. CMI's [Content Marketing World](#) event, the world's largest content marketing-focused event, is held every September in Cleveland, Ohio, USA, and the [Intelligent Content Conference](#) event is held every spring. CMI publishes the bimonthly magazine [Chief Content Officer](#), and provides strategic consulting and content marketing research for some of the best-known brands in the world. CMI, a UBM company, has made the Inc. 500/5000 list from 2012-2015. Watch this [video](#) to learn more about CMI.

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