



Content that Connects

How content strategy connects your mission and your audience

Hilary Marsh, June 2022

Today's agenda

1. What is content strategy, why it is important
2. How to identify and adopt a content strategy
3. A business case for selling content strategy to management/leadership
4. How to assess your content strategy maturity
5. Increasing your maturity: where to start

What is content?

- Information about your programs and services
- Stories about the people you serve (grantees, clients, etc.)
- Donation details
- Updates about the issues that matter to you
- Impact statements
- Marketing materials
- Executive/board biographies
- Etc., etc., etc.

Content takes different forms

- Web pages
- Blog posts
- Infographics
- Images
- PDFs
- Video
- Audio
- Articles
- Brochures
- Reports
- Social media posts
- Podcasts
- Courses
- Etc., etc., etc.

**Content is the way
our work
is manifested
in the world**

What is content strategy?

The right content

To the right person

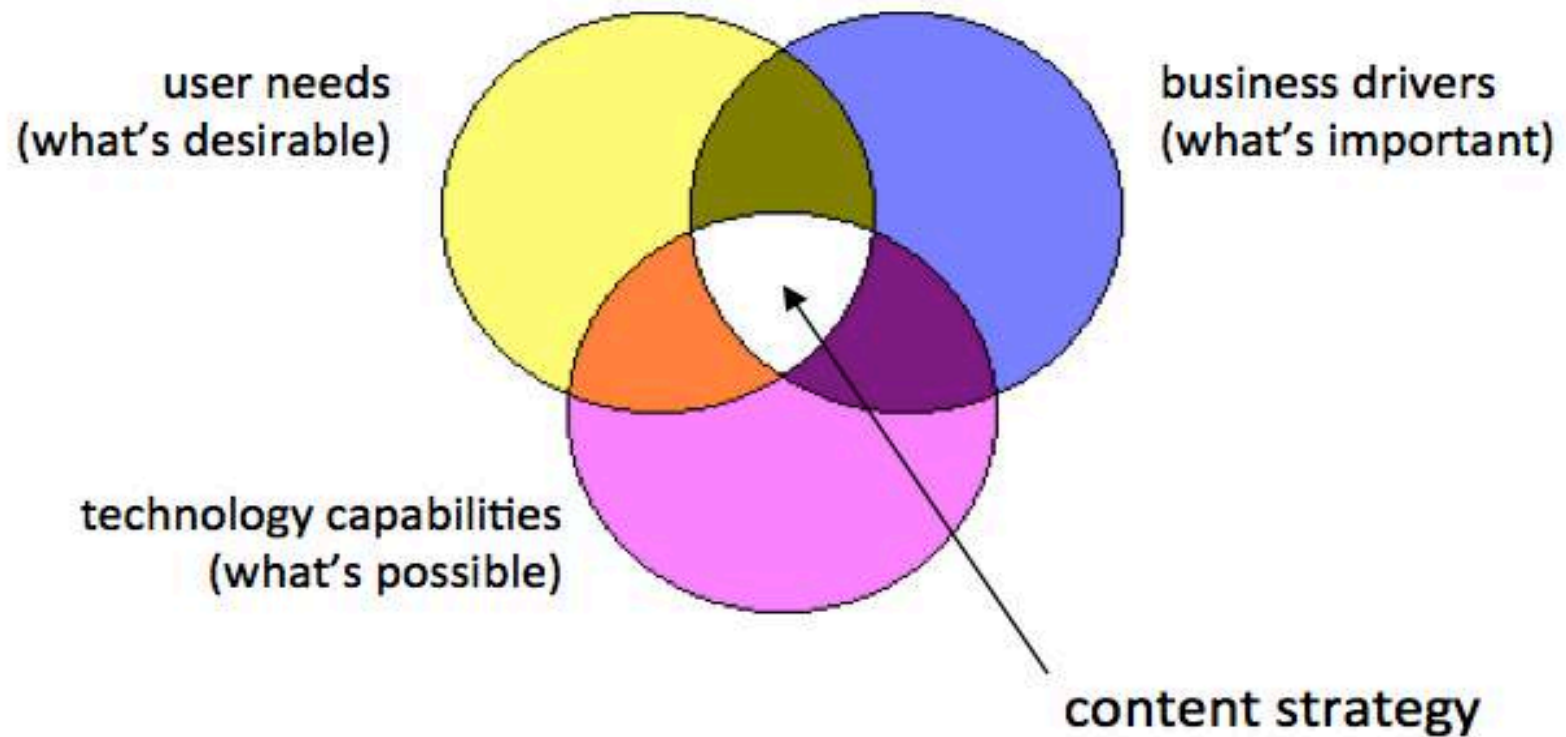
At the right time

For the right action

Put another way....

Content strategy is the practice of planning for the creation, delivery, and governance of useful, usable, **effective** content.

Three faces



Multiple parts

- A strategic statement tying content to business goals
- Guidelines and policies: Who, what, when, where, why, and how of publishing content
- Defining people, roles, and processes



Content Components People Components

The ultimate vision

Audience-centric

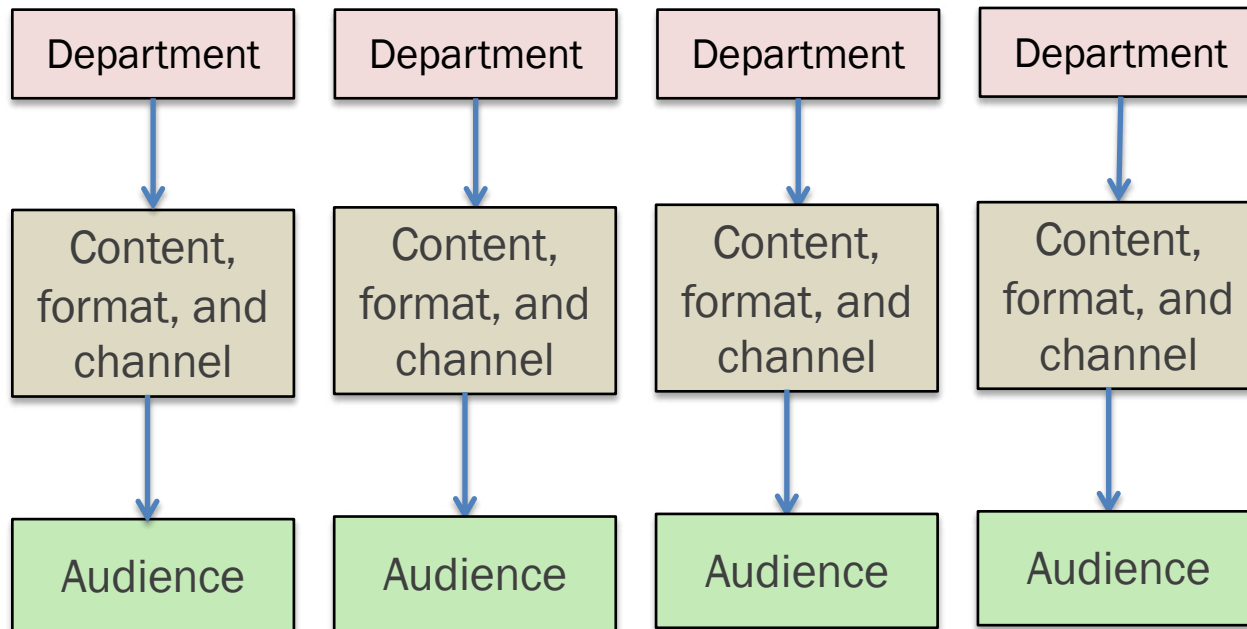
Business-sensitive

Content

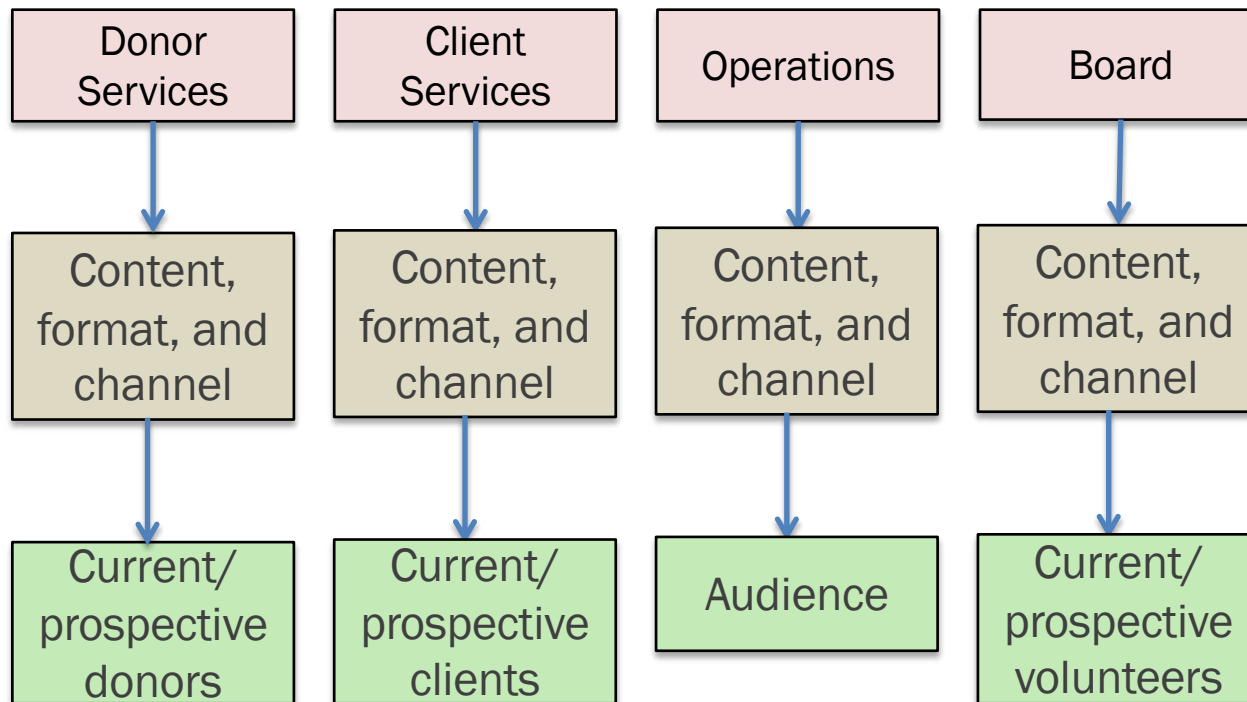
Principles

- The organization creates content that its audiences want
- The organization creates content that helps it meet its goals
- Content has success metrics and is measured against those
- Content that is no longer relevant is no longer available
- Content is promoted, surfaced, and cross-linked based on its topic, not its source
- Content is created in the organization's voice
- The organization manages content platforms, tools, and channels in a way that ensures their effectiveness

Old thinking



Old thinking



Silos



Different views of the audience



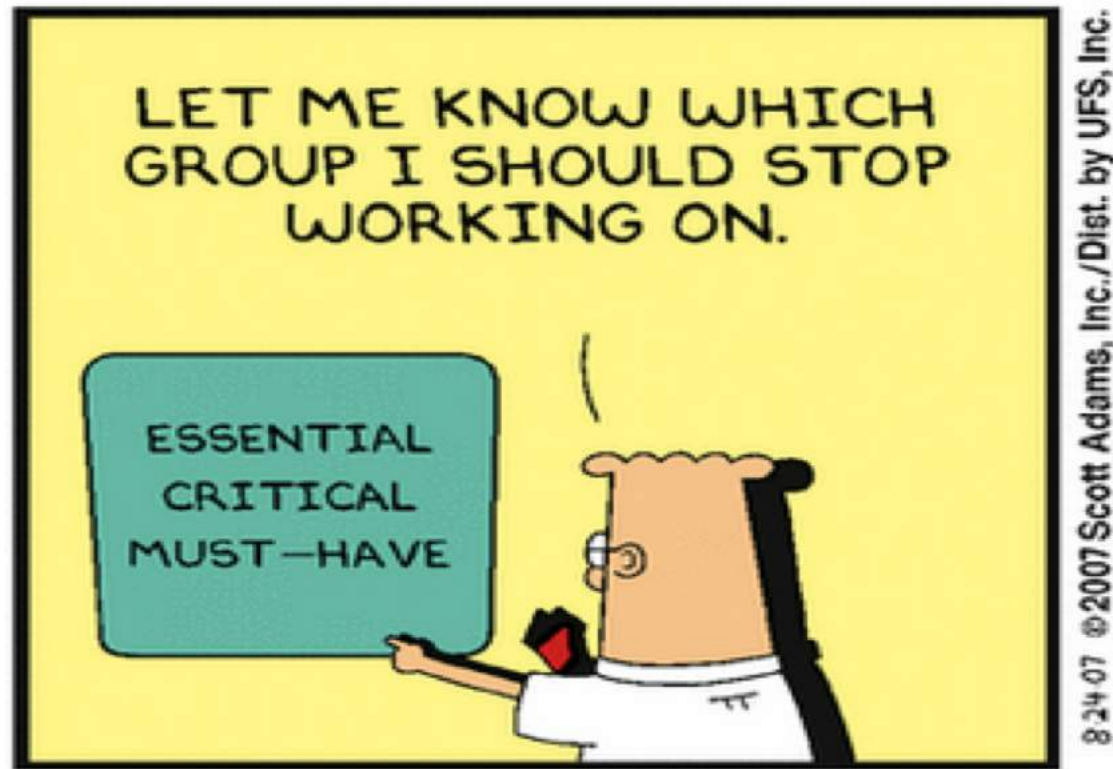
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Blind_men_and_elephant.png



<http://www.amazon.com/Have-Always-Done-That-Way/dp/184728857X/>

Consequences

Difficulty prioritizing



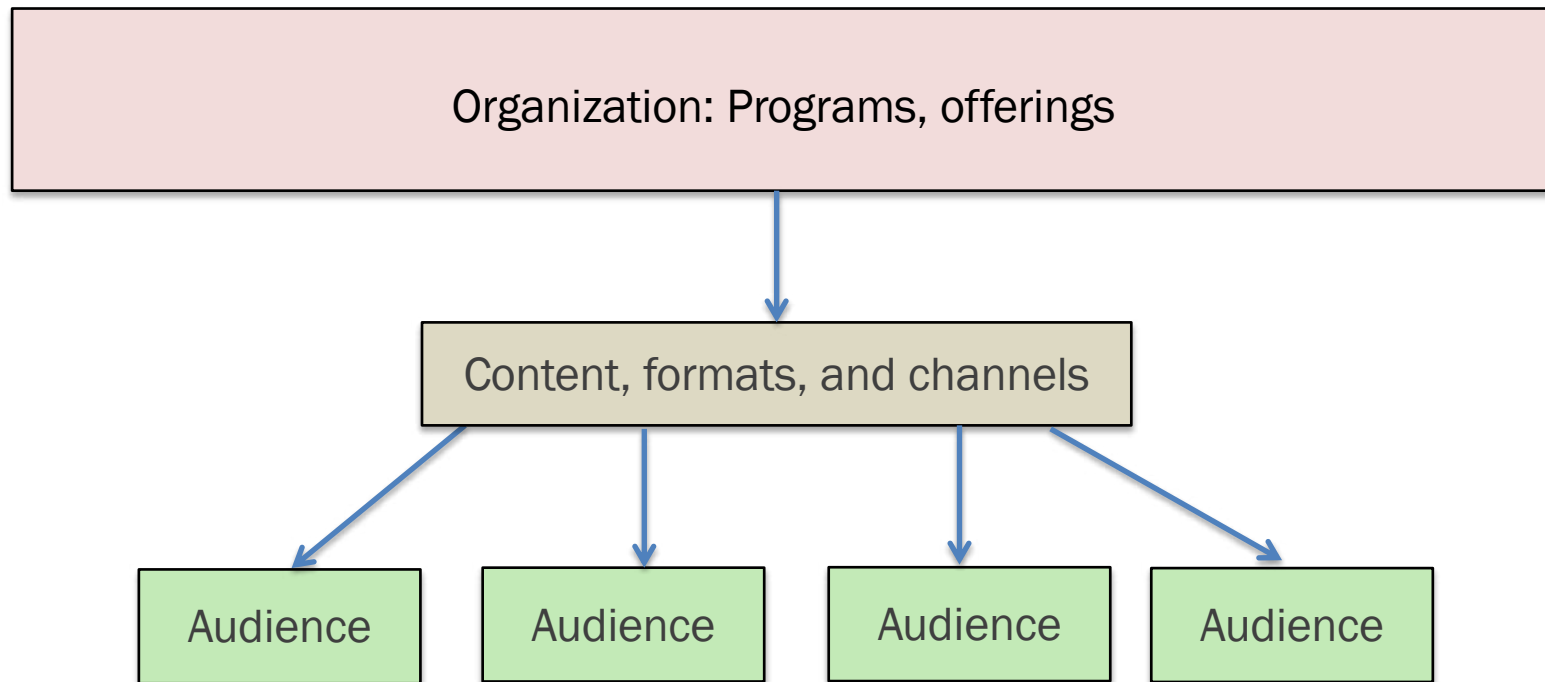
**Diluted
impact**



**Lack of
understanding
of your value**



New thinking



English Español Polski



Schedule Volunteer Shifts

Get Care Get Involved About Us Contact Us

Patient Portal

Donate



More than a Free Clinic

QUALITY HEALTH CARE FOR ALL.



Am I Eligible?

I would like to become a patient.



Volunteer

I want to get involved.



Patient Resources

I am looking for health information.

ENGLISH ▾



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PROTECT COLOMBIA'S PEACE

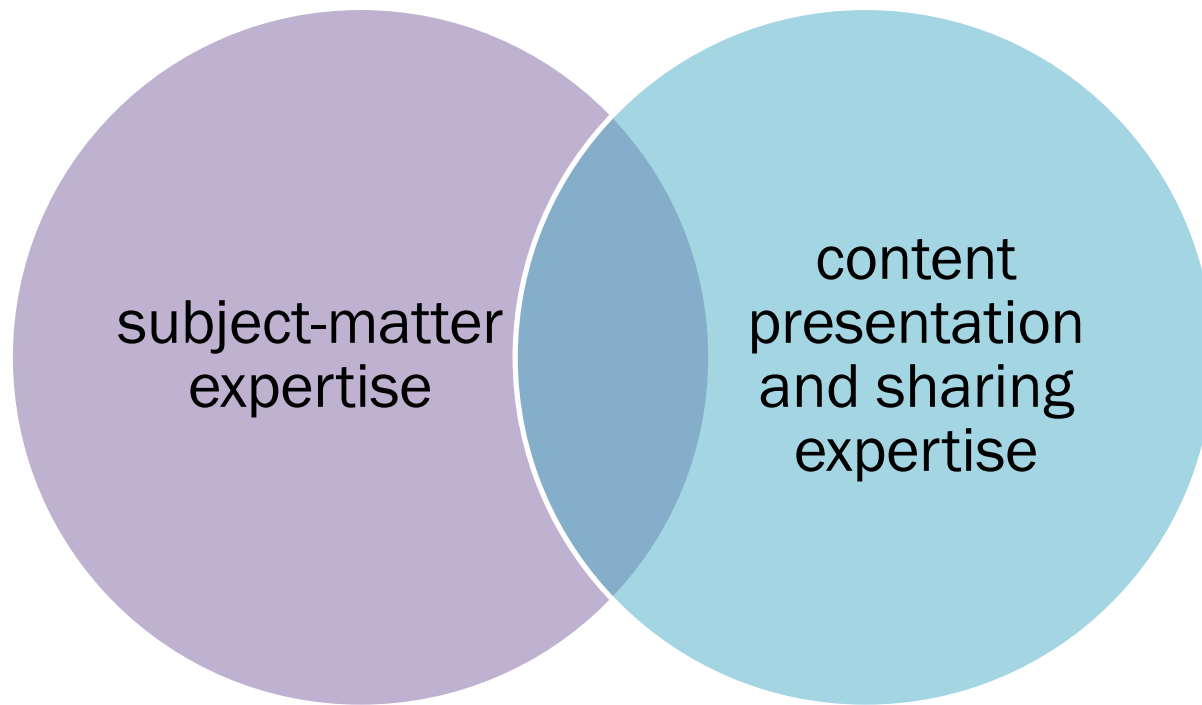
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**“Users don’t care about your
org chart.”**

—Lou Rosenfeld

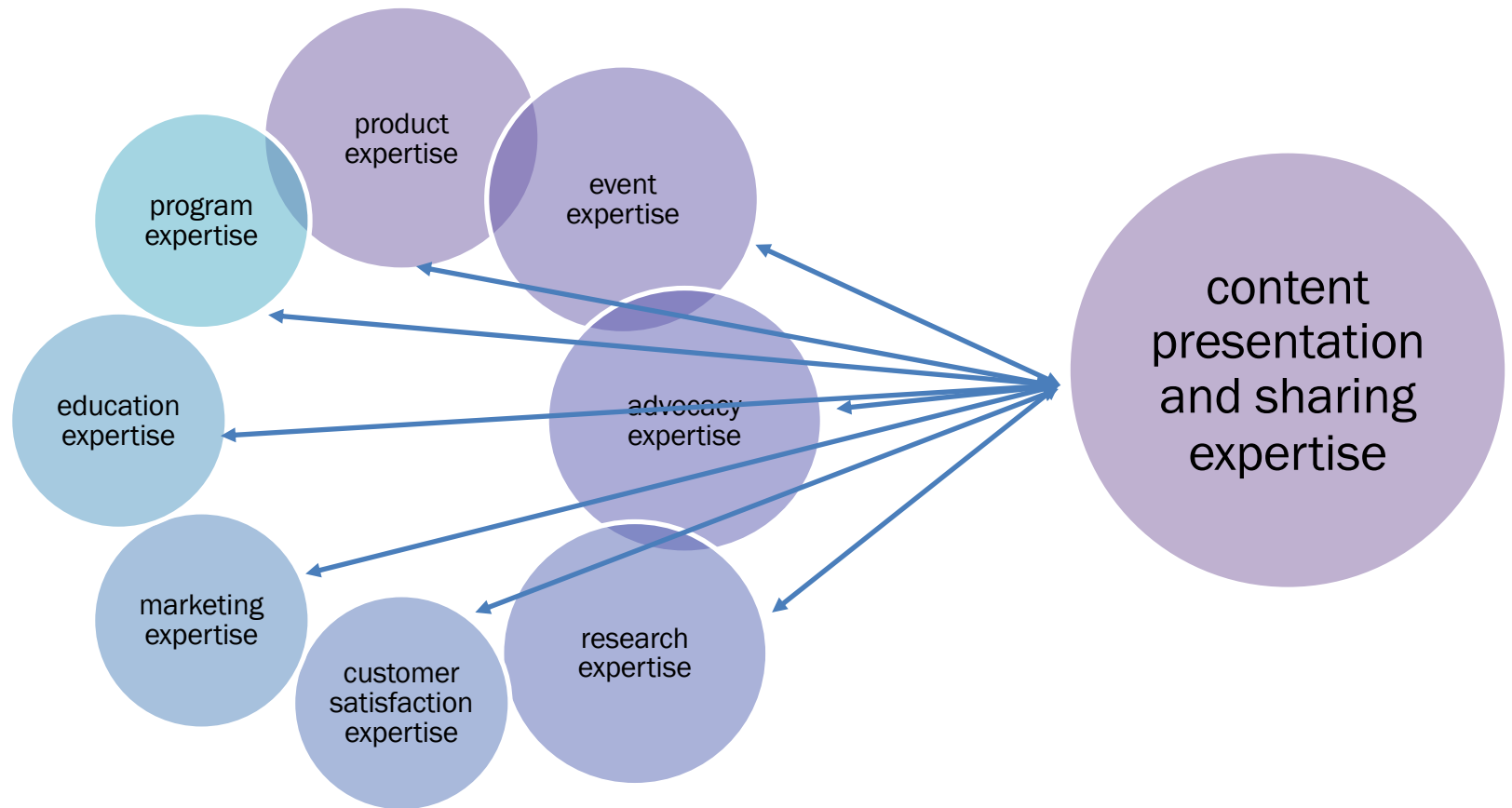
Author, *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web*

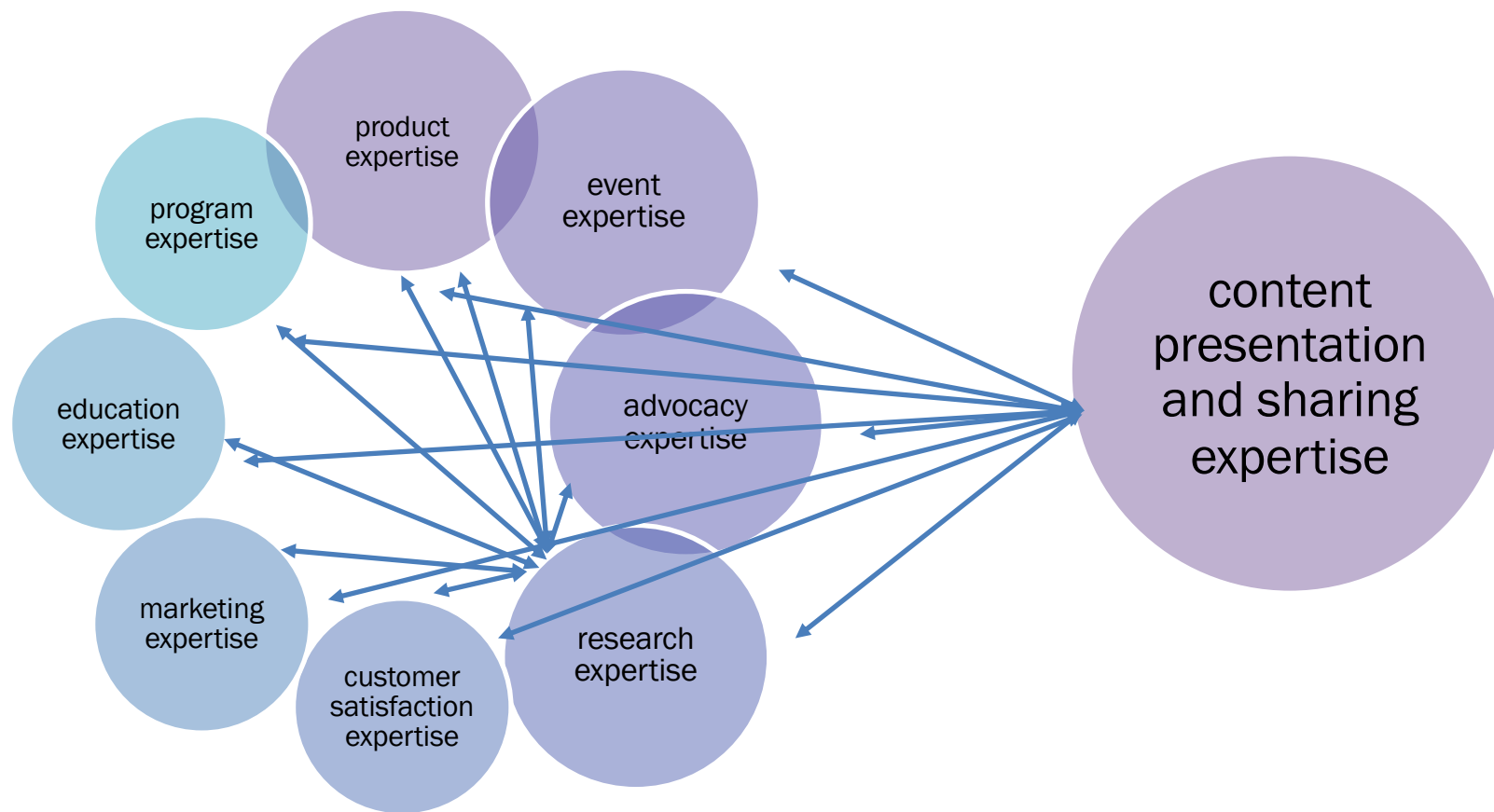
Spirit of partnership

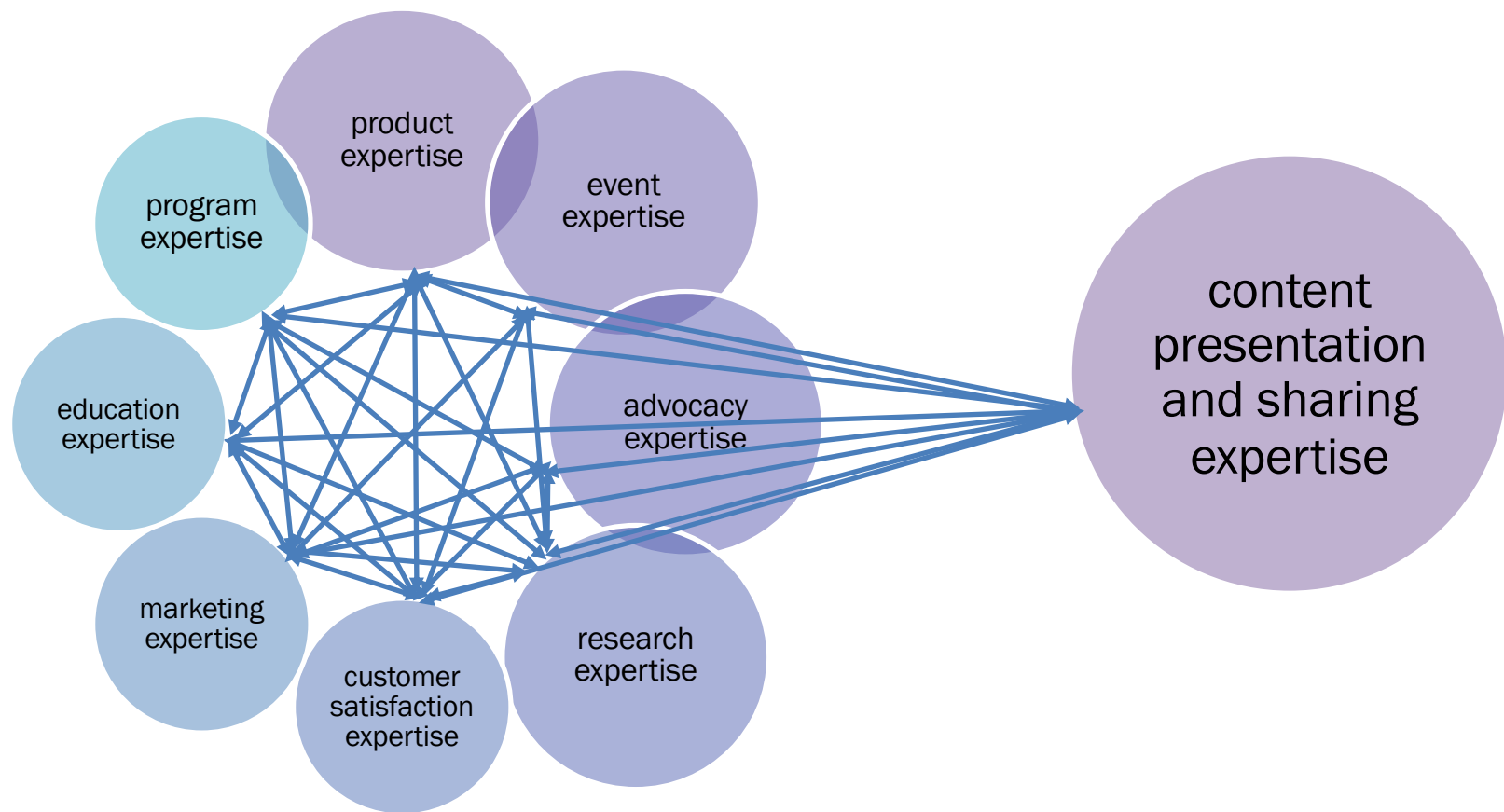












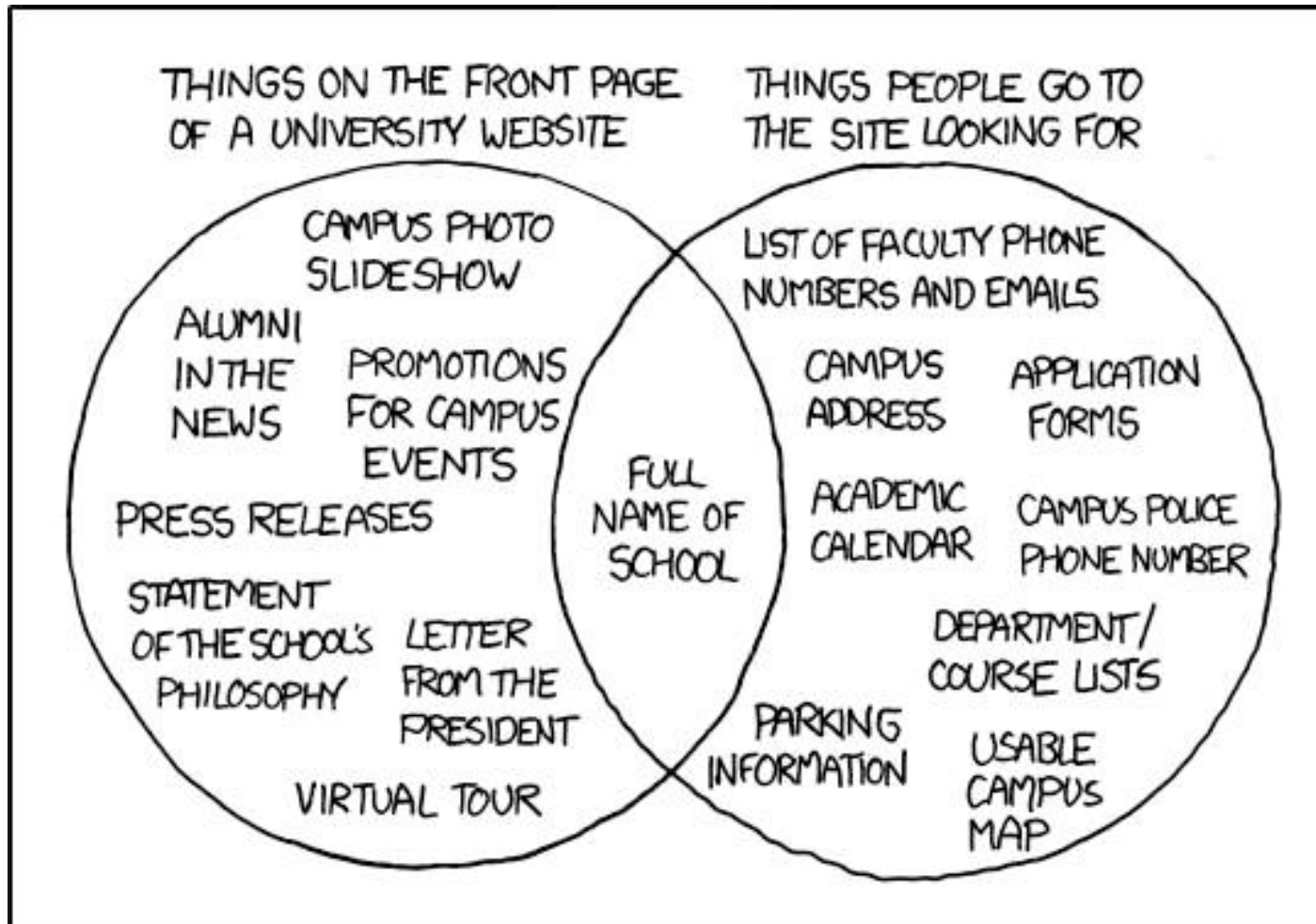


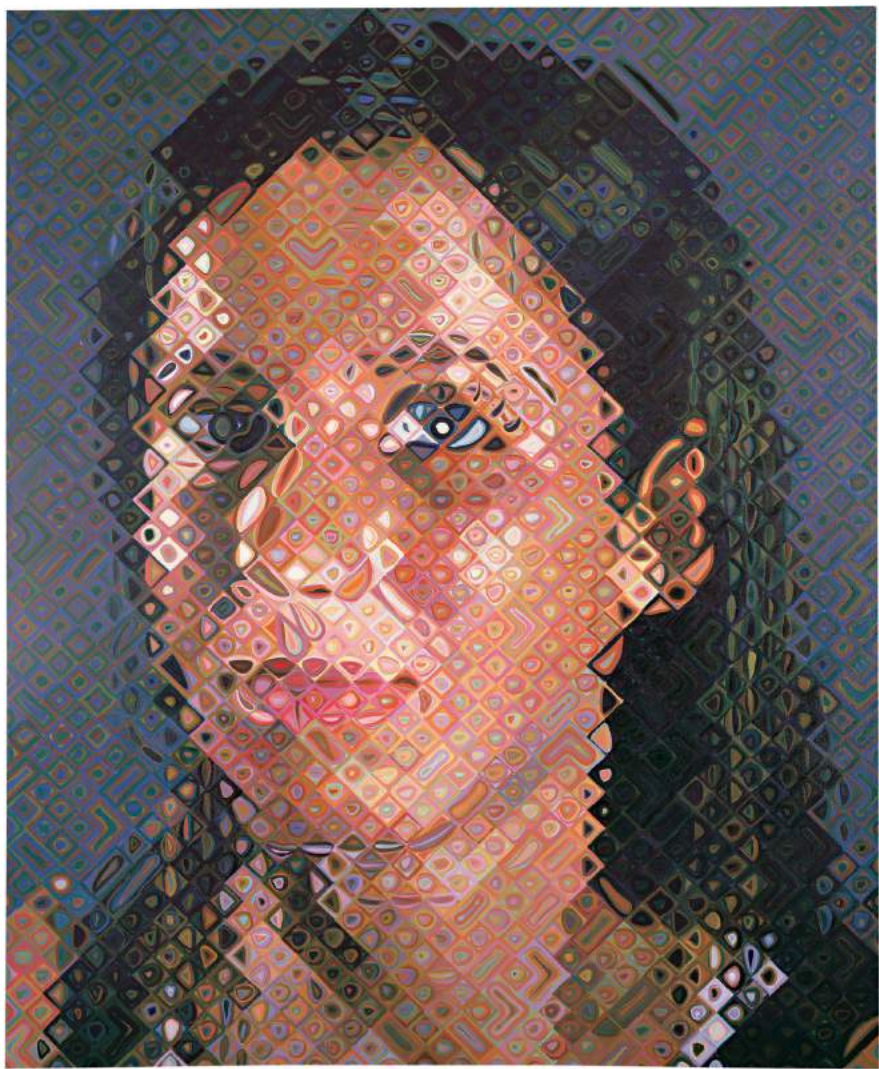
http://chuckclose.com/work253_zoom.html

We do not see things
AS THEY ARE.

We see things
AS WE ARE.

ANNAÏS NIN
Seduction of the Minotaur





To connect

Know your audience

- Their context – how your content solves a need or pain point
- Their level of expertise/familiarity with the topic
- The language they use to name the topic

What do you know about them?

- What are they already experts in?
- What don't they know now?
- What keeps them up at night?
- How tech-savvy are they?
- What do they read?
- What do they do outside of work?



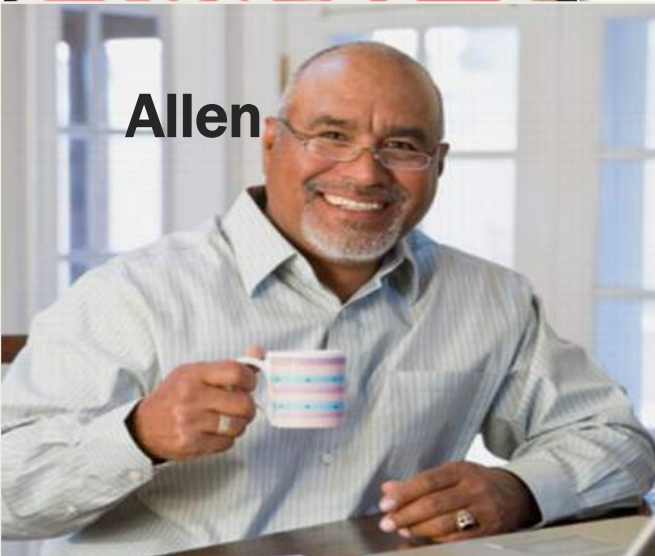
<http://www.slideshare.net/est3ban/empathybased-personas-gaining-a-deeper-understanding> resen



Anthony



Susan



Allen



Maggie



What audiences want

1. Give me benefits, not just information
(What's in it for me?)
2. Approach me as a person, understanding my life stage and struggles
3. Give me the freedom to use the site as I want
4. Make it peer-centric
5. Simplify! Shorten! Avoid jargon!
6. Don't waste my time when I'm trying to find what I need

Source: American Medical Association member study



“So what?”

WIIFM?



“Mom test”



<https://bellegardens.wordpress.com/2017/03/24/a-love-note-to-my-mom-concerning-aprons/>

Write it to them

Connect with the reason for the person's visit to your website

- What problem are they having?
- How does your organization solve their problem?
- What benefits can you offer?
- What results can they expect to achieve?

To do this

- Focus more on the visitors than on your business.
- Talk about them and their needs.
- Visitors don't care about your organization until they know your org cares about them and their experience.

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Registration is open!

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IMPACT

Each year approximately 400 educators from more than 80 countries participate in Fulbright Teacher Exchanges. These fellows teach a total of **75,000 students** annually when they return home. If each fellow teaches an average of 15 more years, these exceptional educators will reach approximately **1.5 million students**.

**World Totals
since 2009**

90
countries & territories

5,721
alumni

Every teacher who participates in a Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program reaches, on average, 180 students per year.

A tool to assess this

<https://customerfocuscalculator.com>

- FYI, most of the nonprofit sites I tested were 100% focused on the org



Typical project roadmap



Typical project roadmap

1. Understand organization and project goals
2. Understand the dynamics and goals of top-priority audiences
3. Audit and assess content
4. Analyze content from competitive organizations
5. Develop content creation and publishing guidelines
6. Identify roles, content lifecycles, workflow, governance models

Typical roadmap

7. Facilitate the creation of a single, organization-wide taxonomy
8. Plan for content transformation and migration
9. Create a framework for content planning and promotions
10. Determine staffing needs
11. Plan for sustainability/operations – implementation, communication, training

A group of four business professionals (three men and one woman) are seated at a conference table, clapping their hands. They are all looking towards the left side of the frame. The setting appears to be a modern office or meeting room with large windows in the background. Through the windows, a scenic view of a lake or bay is visible, with a boat and distant hills under a clear blue sky. The lighting is bright and natural, suggesting daytime. The overall atmosphere is positive and professional.

**Working
together
for audience
satisfaction**

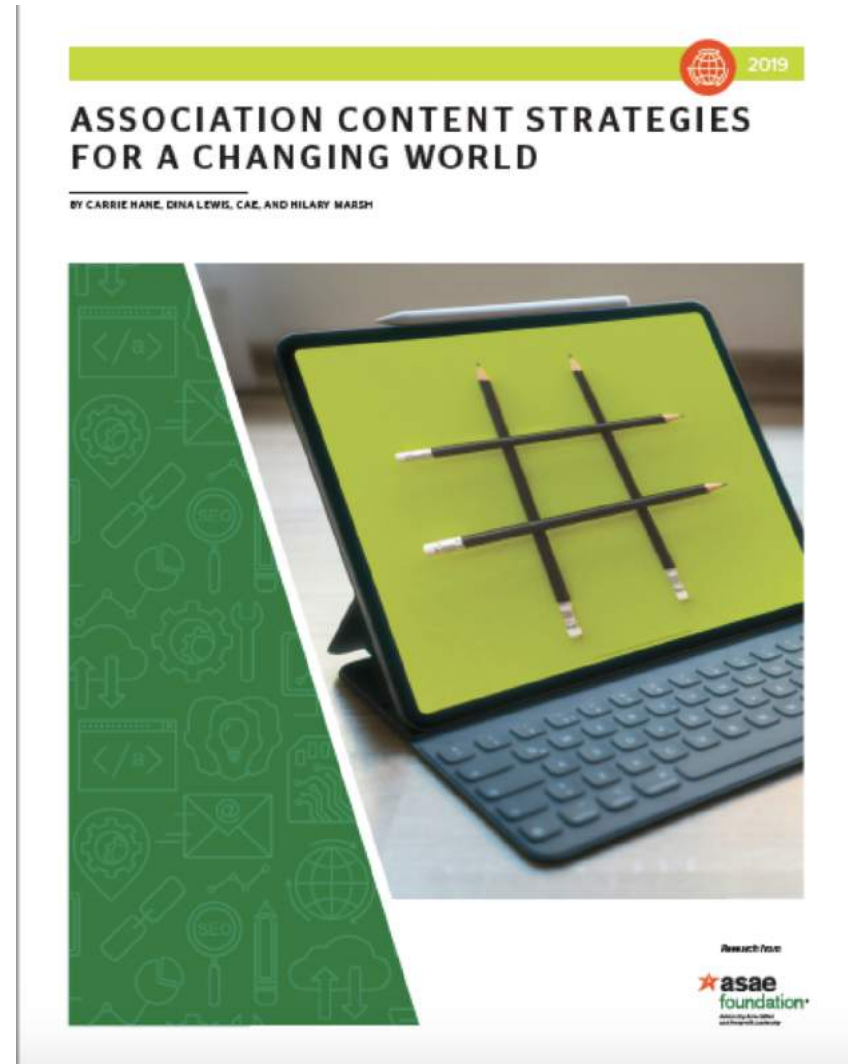
How to sell content strategy to the CEO

1. Identify the challenges
2. Theorize how to solve them with content
3. Conduct pilots to validate and learn/revise the vision
4. Present to the CEO, get approval
5. Defend to the org – it's approved!

<https://bit.ly/selling-cs-to-mgmt>

Content strategy maturity

bit.ly/assn-content-strategy-report



Content strategy tactics

Strategy

- **Content strategy statement:** Serves as an organization-wide mission statement for content.
- **Stakeholder interviews** with staff or volunteers to better understand business and content needs and objectives.

Operations

- **Content governance:** policies, processes, roles, and standards for content creation and management.
- **Job descriptions** for content authors or managers that includes accountability for content work.
- Training for content authors on **how to create digital content**.
- Collect, analyze, and use **digital analytics** to measure content effectiveness and make decisions.

Content strategy tactics

Content quality

- **Content audits** catalog and evaluate content.
- **Editorial style guide** or **content writing guidelines** establish the organization's voice/tone and style

Audience understanding

- **Personas:** Prototype profiles that describe audience needs and motivations.
- **Customer journey maps:** Show what top-priority audiences want, and how to deliver that through our offerings (programs, products, services, tools, resources, etc.).
- **Usability testing** or **audience surveys** measure satisfaction with content.

Content strategy tactics

Content planning and marketing

- **Central content calendar** that all content creators contribute to.
- **Search engine optimization strategy.**

Taxonomy/metadata

- **Single controlled vocabulary** (i.e., taxonomy) to categorize content in all databases and repositories.
- **Metadata strategy** that describes content so that it can be reused across platforms and systems.

Content strategy tactics

Content structure

- **Content models** to plan for and document definitions of the elements of each content type.
- **Structured content** approach ensures that content is planned, developed, and able to be connected or referenced in any print or digital interface.

What we found in the study

- Organizations of all sizes and types are doing at least some content strategy activities
- The tactics helped us create a model of maturity for content strategy work
- There are common pain points, with pathways out of each one



Beginning

- Feel excitement
- Have permission

I'm planning

Content Strategy Focus

- Tactics
- Mindset
- Aspirations

27% of orgs surveyed



Intermediate

- Feel uncertainty
- Have responsibility

I'm executing

Content Strategy Focus

- Risk: Bust silos → Build bridges
- Fear: New models needed
- Growth: Small → Big wins

55% of orgs surveyed



Advanced

- Feel confident & accomplished
- Have collaboration

I'm iterating

Content Strategy Focus


- Less about how
- Tactics are part of processes
- Creating/sustaining culture

18% of orgs surveyed

Where are you now?

- Do this assessment with your colleagues
- Map where you are now
- Choose which areas to address first

<http://bit.ly/contentstrategy-maturity-assessment>

Content strategy maturity assessment tool						
<p>Instructions for the online version of this tool: On each colored row, enter a 1 in the column that most closely describes where your organization falls. (Numbers in the dark green column equal 5 points, in the light green column equal 4 points, in the peach column equal 3 points, in the light red column equal 2 points, and in the dark red column 1 point. Exception: the content governance and content planning calendar rows are worth double, because those activities are especially valuable.)</p> <p>Instructions for the print version of this tool: On each colored row, enter a number in the column that most closely describes where your organization falls. Enter a 5 in the dark green column, a 4 in the light green column, a 3 in the peach column, a 2 in the light red column, or a 1 in the dark red column. Exception: the content governance and content planning calendar rows are worth double, because those activities are especially valuable.</p>						
		Yes, and all content owners use it	Yes, but only some content owners use it	We're working on that (e.g., did it once but not regularly)	Maybe—I'm not sure	No
Strategy						
We have a content strategy statement that serves as an organizationwide mission statement for content.						
We conduct regular stakeholder interviews with staff or volunteers to better understand business and content needs and objectives.						
Operations						
We have established content governance policies including processes, roles, and standards for content creation and management.						
If someone is responsible for creating or managing content, their job description includes accountability standards for content responsibilities.						
We provide training on a regular basis to authors/subject-matter experts on how to create digital content .						
We collect, analyze, and regularly refer to digital analytics to measure our content effectiveness and usage and to make decisions about future content creation.						
Content quality						
We conduct regular content audits to catalog and evaluate the content we produce.						
We have an editorial style guide or content writing guidelines for the content we produce.						
Audience understanding						
We have personas , or profiles, that describe our top-priority audiences' needs and motivations.						
We have created customer journey maps to help us understand what our top-priority audiences want from our organization, and how to deliver that through our offerings (programs, products, services, tools, resources, etc.).						
We conduct regular usability testing or audience surveys to measure satisfaction with the content we produce.						
Content planning and marketing						
We have a central content planning calendar that all content creators contribute to.						
We have a search engine optimization strategy.						
Taxonomy/metadata						
We have established a single controlled vocabulary (i.e., taxonomy) to categorize content in all databases.						
We have a metadata strategy that describes our content so that it can be reused across platforms and systems.						
Content structure						
We use content models to plan for and document definitions of the elements of each content type we produce.						
We have adopted a structured content approach to ensure our content is planned, developed, and able to be connected or referenced in any interface, print or digital.						
		0	0	0	0	0
Scoring		Total: 0				
Advanced: 80–110		Beginner: 40–59				
Intermediate: 60–79		Not yet started: 39 or less				

What you can work on starting now

- Know where you are
- Start with your pain points
- Identify your champions
- Have measurable goals for your content
- Pilot, build buy-in, and grow from there



Crawl/Walk/Run Content Strategy Adoption Plan

The report *Association Content Strategies for a Changing World* <bit.ly/assn-content-strategy-report> identified 17 tactics, or activities, that comprise content strategy. These activities don't themselves add up to "content strategy" – they are building blocks to a more strategic approach.

As a next step, this article organizes the activities into seven groups, listed in order from most strategic to most tactical:

1. Strategy
2. Content operations
3. Content quality
4. Audience understanding
5. Content planning and marketing
6. Taxonomy/metadata
7. Content structure

This plan addresses the fact that there are different degrees of depth to each tactic. It also includes a few more activities not explicitly mentioned in the research study.

There are several ways to use this plan:

- Identify which group interests you most, start at the beginning, and move on to another one.
- If more than one group interests you, start at the "crawl" level with one and then move on to the "crawl" level for the next.
- If you've already done some of the activities, feel free to choose others that seem to address pain points your organization is experiencing.

The key here is to keep in mind that content strategy is a journey, and every organization's journey is different. There's a lot to do – and a lot of progress to be made. The more you do, the more you'll see the organization change through the activities, and the more effective your content will become.

<https://bit.ly/cs-crawl-walk-run>



Thank you!

Hilary Marsh

hilary@contentcompany.biz

<https://contentcompany.biz>

@hilarymarsh on Twitter

[linkedin.com/in/hilarymarsh](https://www.linkedin.com/in/hilarymarsh)

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Photo by [Joanna Kosinska](#) on [Unsplash](#)