



What to Expect from Your Content Strategy Project

How your content strategy team can guide you on a journey toward loving your content again.

Start here!

The first step is admitting you have a problem.

It's OK. It's nothing to be ashamed of. We often meet new clients who blush and meekly confess: "Our content is a mess." Or: "We're a very fragmented organization." Or: "*There's too much to do and never enough resooooourrrcessss"*

If this sounds like you (or the voice in your head), stop and take a deep breath. Now repeat after us:

Content dysfunction is a normal part of business.
We are not alone.
It can be better.

If:

Your website content has grown stale, out of date and unruly

15 different departments are cranking out content fast and furiously for the same audience with no alignment ...

You're paying thousands of dollars and spending months knocking out white papers that simply get buried on your website ...

Your employees use your competitor's website to look up information instead of your own company's ...

Your SEO isn't working anymore and you want to turn your website into a lead-generation machine ...

Your blog has become just another place to slap up your press releases ...

You're one of the countless companies struggling with the chaos of business content.

Organizations have always suffered problems with content — too much, not enough, overlapping, conflicting, repetitive, stale, boring, inappropriate, ignored.

Yet in recent years, the challenges have grown greater with all the new channels companies need to populate: websites, social media, email, blogs and more. Now, the rise of content marketing for improving search results and lead generation has resulted in companies powering up the content machine, which takes more fuel and people to run than ever.

Sound familiar? There's no need to keep wallowing. The journey toward content greatness begins here.

Adventures in content strategy

It won't hurt much. You might even have fun.

Content strategy is the process of figuring out how to get from where you are today to where you want to go, and how to sustain that success. It takes time and participation from some of your people. But in the end, it can help your company:

- **Create focus** for developing content that serves both your customers' needs and your business goals
- **Position yourself** as an organization with unique expertise and knowledge — building preference for your brand
- **Organize and prioritize** content to make it easy to find and understand and put the most important messages front and center
- **Orchestrate the telling of your brand story** across channels, audiences and time, making your communications stronger by supporting one another

Why well-orchestrated content *really* matters.

Caring about content isn't just for recovering English majors anymore. Your content matters so much in today's world of multi-channel, transmedia, machine-driven marketing. The ideal state of content we describe on the previous page matters because it affects:

Demand generation and lead nurture

Relevant, substantive content is invaluable in enticing prospects to convert to leads, and for nurturing those leads along the sales funnel. People crave information to help them in their research; being the company that provides them that information, in a unique and selfless way, helps you drive more leads and speed up sales cycles.

Website performance

Strategic content that draws in visitors and makes them stay considerably boosts the value of your company's website. Time on the site increases; the bounce rate drops; and more people will be willing to fill out your conversion forms as they spend time with your meaty, valuable content.

Search engine results

The world of search has shifted: with Google's recent changes, search engine optimization has become less about keywords and linking and more about building content that people reference and share. It's nearly impossible to "trick" search engines into finding you without this content now. SEO needs to be carefully considered as part of a content strategy.

Customer loyalty and relationships

A program of ongoing, relevant content pays off over time. Customers reward companies for this kind of content with higher-value engagements, longer relationships, and improved brand affinity. Content plays a big role in the value you bring to customers and the brand experience you build for them.

Getting from here to there

We truly see content strategy as a journey. You'll start by unraveling a lot of things – preconceptions, the way you communicate and create content today, ideas about your brand – in a quest to put them back together again into a cohesive and effective strategy.

What will emerge is a clear path toward well-orchestrated content: a strategy for content focus, standards and sustainability that will serve as your roadmap on the way to successful brand communications.

Join us on the journey!

Your content strategy team at Suite Seven will embark on a number of exercises before we make any recommendations or let you write a single word!

We perform roles as varied as journalist, detective, user advocate, organizer and cat herder, all leading to a strategy that gives your content focus and your resources a process to follow. This allows your brand story to unfold seamlessly and helps you achieve business goals.

Discovery

This part of the project sometimes feels long. But a well-executed discovery phase pays off. This is when we begin to understand:

1. What's different about your organization
2. Where you want to go with your business and brand
3. What your customers really want and need
4. How your customers look for information and make decisions

Where the four factors above overlap is where your content strategy is born. It's the sweet spot of your brand story.

DISCOVERY | STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

We start by asking *lots* of questions.

(And we listen analytically to what you say.)

We start every project by asking questions to get at the heart of who your company is, where you are today, where you want to go, and how we can help you tell your story.

During these **stakeholder interviews** we ask questions that you might think don't have much to do with content. We will explore:

- How you sell (and how people buy) your products
- Your business history, current situation and goals for the next few years
- Your brand situation and marketing goals
- The current market landscape
- Who your customers are: their needs, their pain points and how they make decisions
- How you create and manage content today: what's working and not working

We'll ideally talk to your leadership team, key representatives of your business functions, and people who are on the front lines working with and talking to customers. And speaking of customers — we like interviewing them too.

WHAT STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS LET US DO

These conversations give us insight into where you need to head with your brand and business, and how your content can help you get there.

They also let us see if everybody is on the same page and shares the same vision. (It's often surprising what kinds of disparities emerge from these conversations.) It's best to work out misaligned expectations now, rather than when you're far down the road with your content development.

This presents a remarkable opportunity to get everyone on the same page on your content and communication goals.



Getting to know your customers

One thing we're sure to ask is if you've done any audience research or have defined user personas.

Understanding your users' interests, needs, motivations and challenges is key to creating content that's relevant to them. If you haven't created your personas, we'll make that part of the work we do.

Stakeholder interviews open our eyes to the expressed challenges of your content and process — and the opportunities to make things better.

DISCOVERY | CONTENT ANALYSIS

We dig deeply into your content.

It's time-consuming, but oh-so revealing.

You may think you know what content your organization has out there — but your understanding may only scratch the surface. The thing about content is that it has a tendency to multiply like rabbits. Like an archaeological dig, only when you excavate and inventory each piece with care can you make the true discoveries.

We perform a **content audit and analysis** of everything that's on your website (and, depending on the type of project, of emails, newsletters, publications, print materials, and other relevant content assets). In this analysis, we look at:

- Structure, depth and complexity of your content
- Messaging and tonality
- Redundancies, gaps and patterns
- Content quality: readability, freshness, accuracy, clarity
- Content “gems” — great content that's buried or that needs to be salvaged

WHAT A CONTENT ANALYSIS LETS US DO

Sometimes we hear clients say: “Just throw out our current content and start over.” We argue that a content analysis is essential to your success going forward.

An analysis reveals any problems with how content has been created in the past, and establishes a baseline of where you are today so we can set goals for content quality, architecture and effectiveness.

It also helps us identify any unknown issues — for example, letting you see if a particular department has been creating wildly inappropriate content, or revealing content about products you didn't even know existed. It's important to address these issues now, to make sure everything is properly represented and guidelines are securely in place for quality.

Finally, an analysis helps us mine the gold in your content. There's always at least a nugget or two in every parcel. Sometimes it's the deeply buried content that sparks the biggest ideas, or that can be repurposed into high-value content for your audiences.



What comes out of a content analysis?

The content analysis is a big, honkin' spreadsheet — overwhelming to most. But we find it to be a fascinating study of your existing content: uncovered treasures buried for years, content production patterns, breakdowns in quality, and issues you'll need to address. It's one of the best things you can do for your business communications.

Content Category	Page Name	Type of Value	Relevancy and Frequency	Accuracy and Freshness of Content	Usability	User Experience	Mobile	SEO	Analytics	Page	Internal	External	Content Type	Page Recommendations
Home	Home Page	Hero and 3 columns	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	Hero and 3 columns	Review the hero message to ensure it's on-brand.
Second Opinion	Second Opinion	Hero and 3 columns	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	Hero and 3 columns	Review the hero message to ensure it's on-brand.
Reference	Reference	Hero and 3 columns	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	Hero and 3 columns	Review the hero message to ensure it's on-brand.
Our Doctors	Our Doctors	Hero and 3 columns	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	Hero and 3 columns	Review the hero message to ensure it's on-brand.

Taking the time to audit and analyze your content lets us see where you came from — so we can map where you need to go.

DISCOVERY | COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

We dissect what your competitors are saying.

To position you uniquely, we look at your brand in context with your market.

“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles,” wrote Sun Tzu in *The Art of War*. Studying the messaging, tonality, content and organization conventions used by your competitors (or by other companies like yours in other verticals) plays an essential role in developing your content strategy. A **competitive or peer analysis** helps us:

- Understand how others are positioning themselves so we can help you differentiate yourself
- Identify content best practices and ideas
- Find gaps and see opportunities for “owning” a topic, message or approach

WHAT A COMPETITIVE OR PEER ANALYSIS LETS US DO

Even if you believe you’re in a class of your own, you can learn so much from studying what other companies in the market are doing with their content. For one thing, you can determine where another company has begun to develop its message, expertise and thought leadership — so you can find a different perspective or niche for your own brand. You’ll also benefit from seeing where the bar is low, giving you the chance to become truly best-in-class.

We often hear: “We don’t really have any competitors.” If that’s true, great! But even if there isn’t another company doing exactly what you’re doing, you pretty much always have competitors, even if they’re not companies in the same vertical. If you sell SaaS software, your competitor might be desktop software or an outsourced solution. If you sell jewelry, your competitor might just as easily be a luxury vacation or a new car as it is another jewelry store. Don’t be overconfident and fail to see the bigger picture.

There are always companies similar to yours that are doing amazing things with content — and you can learn a lot from them. So even if you feel like studying your direct competitors is a waste of time, we’ll examine companies with similar business models, sales approaches or customers.



See your opportunities

A competitive analysis shows you what your competitors are doing well, but it also shows you what they’re *not* doing well — and where you have an opportunity to stand out. Seeing where there’s a need in the industry that others aren’t filling can be the greatest outcome of the competitive analysis.

Don’t approach your content strategy in a vacuum. A competitive or peer analysis lets you develop a compelling story that stands out in your market.

DISCOVERY | SEO RESEARCH

We get inside your customers' brains.

Effective search engine optimization requires you to think like your customers think.

These days, there's virtually no difference between writing for humans and writing for search engines. Search engine optimization is an exercise in thinking through when, where, why and how people search for information at different points in the buying cycle, and meeting them at the door with relevant content.

We research SEO keyphrases during discovery so we can map them to the customer journey, planning relevant content with the right keyphrases in the right places. We'll take this research into account as we build your content plan. Our SEO research enables us to:

- Build a content plan with keyphrases targeted to specific topics, mapped to how people research information throughout the buying journey
- Develop metadata, including title tags and meta descriptions, that feature targeted keyphrases



SEO today is all about the content

With all its recent releases, Google can now recognize truly organic content and see how it moves through cyberspace. Essentially, the "sharing economy" has surpassed the "link economy," and SEO activities must shift accordingly – from building up links to building up real connections.

That means that while we need to continue thinking about strategic placement of keyphrases in your content, we also need to develop a plan for fresh, high-quality, relevant content that works harder for your brand. Content that people link to and share does more for your search engine success than the old calculations of link-building and keyword density. That's one reason content strategy is more important than ever.

Strategy

Now we get to the good stuff! We bring together everything we learned in that exhaustive discovery phase (*whew!*) to provide two types of strategy documents:

- 1. The strategy playbook:** This guiding document brings focus, sustainability and standards to the content you'll develop going forward
- 2. The plan:** A finite plan with specific content recommendations, based on the strategy playbook, for what to do with your content in the immediate future

Think of this phase as your blueprint, setting the parameters and shaping processes that help you execute successfully on the content strategy.

STRATEGY | THE PLAYBOOK

We develop a roadmap for your content.

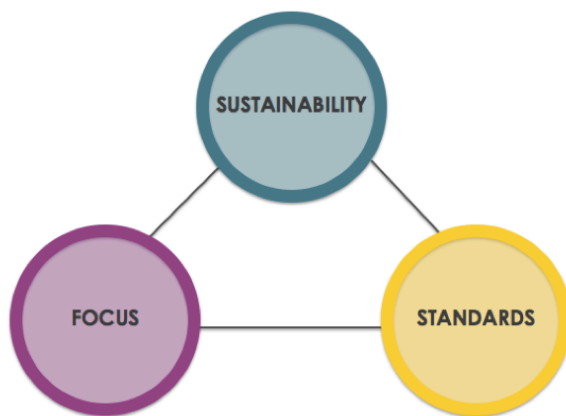
(Including directions, road signs and traffic laws to keep things orderly.)

The term “content strategy” typically means everything that goes into the thoughtful planning and management of content. But before we jump into tactics, we always create a content strategy document that establishes all the parameters of your content.

Why is this important? The primary reason content goes off the tracks is because creating it is a complex, long-term process involving many different people, ideas, priorities and approaches. Without a published strategy and set of guidelines, the content creation process will quickly devolve.

A **content strategy playbook** sets the direction for moving ahead, and guides everybody involved in content development and management in how to create quality content for the brand.

Three essential elements of successful content initiatives defined by the content strategy playbook



Focus

Remember that “sweet spot” we talked about earlier — where your business goals, your unique characteristics, your audience’s needs and how your customers make decisions all converge into a strategy? This is where that happens. Focus guidelines set the parameters for your brand’s:

- **Point of view:** This is your unique story and perspective, summarized in a succinct and overarching mission statement. The point of view guides everything you do with content.
- **Content framework:** The framework guides what you create and publish as part of your content program. It includes goals, themes, mix, and content types and channels — all defined by your customers’ needs at different stages and your own point of view.

STRATEGY | THE PLAYBOOK



Sustainability

You can't treat content as "set it and forget" anymore. Changing search engine parameters, as well as evolving customer expectations, require you to have a long-term plan for how to keep your content up to date and continuously publish new content that meets customers' needs. The content strategy helps you plan for sustainability by establishing guidelines for:

- **Content development processes:** Defining who assigns, creates, reviews, edits, publishes and archives content in your organization, and how long it takes for each step, enables you to predictably publish and stick to your goals.
- **Governance:** It may sound like a foreboding idea, but a governance model will aid your efforts. Deciding upfront who will manage content, own or contribute to content efforts, review content pieces, and help guide the strategy will enable you to keep the "content machine" running smoothly and stay the course.
- **Content lifecycle:** Getting the most out of your content efforts takes thoughtfulness about how you can get the most mileage out of a piece of content. We guide you in making decisions about how to repurpose a piece of content so you can get the most bang for your buck.
- **Editorial calendar:** This is probably the most familiar tool to content producers — and often the most abused. A calendar keeps everyone focused on maintaining the right content mix and staying on a regular publishing schedule. Treat it as sacred. It isn't just a suggestion, but a real plan with real deadlines. *(See the next section for more details.)*



Standards

Contrary to what you may have heard, content quality still matters very much. Just because people type in shorthand using SMS and Twitter doesn't mean they don't still expect quality. But standards for what quality means to a company can differ widely. Your content strategy sets the quality baseline, gets everybody to agree to standards, and then provides tools to hold content to those standards over time. The content strategy lays out:

- **Quality definitions:** At all costs, we expect content to be _____. Clear? Timely? Entertaining? Set these guidelines and goals and use them to evaluate content before you publish.
- **Voice guidelines:** What should your content sound like, and how do you get it to sound like that? Clear guidelines and examples of voice can help any writer provide his or her own point of view while maintaining a consistent voice.
- **Style guides:** How do we capitalize our headers? How do we refer to our company? Style guides help you document style details that help you appear professional and communicate clearly in every piece of content you publish.



Measurement

Before we hand off a content strategy, we always address measurement — benchmarking where a company is today, then defining short-term and longer-term goals and how to measure results.

Typically we may choose one or two metrics for the short term: page views, social shares, website lead conversion, etc. Then we'll work with you to monitor and analyze results and help you optimize your content to do more of what's working.

STRATEGY | THE CONTENT MATRIX

We get granular about your content mix.

More spreadsheets! Now we get to the good stuff.

Finally, we get to the moment everybody's been waiting for: the tactics! We create a **content plan** that lays out all the nitty-gritty details of the content to be created. This can take two forms, depending on the kind of project:

- **Website content matrix:** For website development projects, this very large spreadsheet lays out each page, its location, key messages, calls to action, source material or existing pages, SEO keyphrases, metadata, associated assets, and more. This document reflects the visual site map and saves considerable time during copywriting and site development.
- **Editorial calendar:** If we're working on a content marketing or thought leadership strategy for you, we'll map out the next several months of content across time, channel, audience, and content type.

WHAT A CONTENT MATRIX LETS US DO

The beautiful thing about the content matrix or editorial calendar is that it allows us to see all your content in one place. It helps us ensure that we're achieving the desired content mix, serving your different audiences, and telling a well-orchestrated story across your channels.

It's also a handy tool for the production part of the job: great for assigning, planning, tracking and keeping a record of what you've done. You can see everything coming up and everything that's been.

Finally, you can use the matrix as a way to represent, and follow along, your audiences' touchpoints with your brand. Thinking of the matrix as an experience map helps you understand how each piece of content contributes to the relationship and experience customers have with your brand.



How the content matrix streamlines design and development

The content matrix isn't just for writers anymore. Designers and developers love it too.

Why? Because when designing a website, designers use the matrix to understand all the elements that need to be on a page, the most important messages that need to rise to the top, and what images exist to use in the design.

Developers love it even more, because it gives them a single source for a website's entire structure, along with all files associated with a page, the metadata to enter into the back end, and cross-linking information for sidebars.

The designers and developers with whom Suite Seven works swear by this tool, saying it dramatically reduces the time necessary to design and produce websites and enables them to create a more effective user experience.

Launch Services

Hallelujah! You have a content strategy that's beautifully aligned with your business objectives. You've nailed down your unique point of view and are totally tuned into your customers – the questions they want answered and which channels they use to find information. Leads are in the air!

Our work here is done!
Actually, not really.

We don't just hand off the strategy and walk away: we offer services to implement your strategy and ensure your success.

LAUNCH SERVICES

Nobody puts content strategy in a corner.

If you don't have a plan for success, your strategy will collect dust on a shelf. We're determined not to let that happen.

You know all that money you've paid to consultants over the years, resulting in 200-page PowerPoint decks and gorgeous reports? Where are they now? (Chances are they're clogging up your hard drive with their robustness.)

Strategy should never sit on a shelf. It should be a living document, dog-eared in its usefulness, and it should guide every decision made and every tactic executed in your content project or program. Yet too many times we hear the client team oohing and aahing over their new direction in the board room, then watch the content strategy fizzle (sometimes with a barely perceptible hiss) as the everyday realities start cropping up — things like lack of resources, apathy among other teams, ownership conflicts, changing roles, new management. Without a solid strategy rollout, your shiny new content strategy doesn't stand a chance.

That's why Suite Seven offers launch services to support the successful rollout and adoption of a content strategy.



Content Toolboxes

We can develop a customized toolbox that your people can use to create focused, sustainable, high-quality content. Your toolbox will directly support all the activities to support your specific content strategy, and may include:

- Style guides
- Writing checklists and style sheets
- Editor quality checklists and score sheets
- Decision trees and guides
- Process charts
- Taxonomies for tagging and metadata
- Content planning and tracking tools

Training and Workshops

Creating great content is hard. You'll need to identify the right people within your organization to lend their talents to your content marketing. Then you need to get everyone on the same page, which is like herding cats.

To make the process easier, we offer training sessions (group or one-on-one, remote or in-person), including strategy implementation, brand voice and writing workshops. We'll also be on-hand to coach your content managers and contributors and periodically audit content to make sure it fits the strategy guidelines.



Governance

We'll work closely with you to streamline your publishing processes and work out all the speedbumps that can throw a content strategy off course. We can also help you create, launch and run a content steering committee that guides the success of your website or marketing content going forward.

Editorial Management and Content Development

We can actually stay on to run your content marketing program and develop your content too. That's right, we write. (And edit, manage and produce, too.) Even if you're planning to bring your content in-house eventually, we can help you get started on the right path and gradually transition content management over to your team. But we're also very happy to be your content team, too.

You've only just begun ...

Your content strategy is complete. But the adventure is just beginning.

Content never sleeps. Your strategy launches, you publish your first wave of content or your new website — and the next day you'll need to get up and do it all over again. Content is a long-term commitment, and its benefits only pay off if you publish high-quality content consistently over time. So start your content engines: there's a whole adventure ahead.

Luckily, because you now have a strategy, you can have *fun* with your content. You have a plan to get on top of the demand for content, and an exciting vision for the big story you're telling piece by piece. When content goes from being dysfunctional, unfocused and unruly to being smart, cohesive and well-orchestrated — content becomes your biggest ally. And the results you'll start to see will be magnificent.

Learn to love your content. Start your content strategy adventure today.

Learn more about how the Suite Seven team can develop a content strategy that paves the way for success. Get in touch for a consultation!

Visit www.suiteseven.com or call 510.292.4454 to start chatting today.

