

When people begin the search for where to get a loan, educate themselves on financial wellness, or learn about homeownership, they head to the internet. While using content to market online is not a new concept, how we use content to market our product or service and the tools used to reach our customers have changed dramatically over the past few years.

That's why we have developed this guide. This Content Marketing Guide will give you an overview on how to create a content strategy and use content marketing to leverage your CDFI's marketing efforts in the digital landscape, so you have a cohesive message that resonates with people and drives results.

You probably hear these two terms being discussed a lot at the office. You may even think of them as the same practice, but they are different. Content strategy is all-inclusive while content marketing refers to a single part of an overall content strategy. **Content strategy** is your plan to market your content, and your **content marketing** is all the photos, words, audio, and video that are used to create your CDFI's story online.

Understanding the differences between content marketing and content strategy, and planning how they can work together, is one of the most important things you can do for your business.

Content Strategy

A content strategy is a blueprint that lays out exactly how your content will be used to accomplish your goals. Blueprints are extremely detailed and plan out every aspect of a home build before the foundation is ever poured. These maps detail precise measurements, where to run electrical wires and plumbing, where your support beams will go and even where to put appliances, doors, and shrubbery.

By developing a great content strategy, you will know exactly what, why, and how your business is planning on using content to better accomplish your goals. The content strategy you create for this year should not just be reused for next year. You will want to meet your audience's ever-changing needs. Rework your content strategy every year, and make adjustments when necessary.

Content Marketing

Content marketing is a way to attract customers and retain them through creating and delivering relevant, meaningful content. It's essentially a combination of sales techniques and organic marketing, all in one. The trick is disguising your efforts well enough that your customers don't know they're being sold, but rather feel like they are becoming better informed.

In content marketing, you designate specific audiences that you want to "pitch" content to, and once they bite, you work to drive profitable customer action through consistently curating content you feel will help shape their behavior to result in conversion.

Content marketing can be blog posts, case studies, public relations, social media marketing, SEO, and more. It is a part of your overall content strategy and focuses on creating, measuring, and publishing content marketing pieces for specific audiences. Your content marketing strategy should focus on what motivates customers to engage.

Going back to the blueprint analogy, you would never build the walls and roof of a house without building a foundation first. This is the same with a content marketing strategy, it only works if you have a strong content strategy foundation. This foundation helps to align branding, messaging, and pretty much all aspects of content marketing to the overall content goals of your company before you begin to actively market it.

Think of content marketing as a campfire. Each piece of content is kindling that helps to build a bigger campfire so people can gather and have a conversation.



How to Develop a Content Strategy

Your content strategy is a blueprint for how to plan, develop, and manage your online marketing materials so that you can reach your business goals.

In order to develop a good content strategy, we recommend you answer the following!:

- Why is this content going to be published?
- What type of content do your customers want?
- Where are you going to publish the content (website, Twitter, Facebook)?
- Is this the right channel for this content?
- Who do you want to view the content?
- What do you want the viewer to do?

Once you are able to answer the above, you can dive into some more detailed questions like:

- What types of content do your multiple audiences need or want?
- How should you organize and structure your content?
- Who is posting and maintaining your content and how often is content being published?
- How does your audience find and interact with your content?

Your blog. Facebook and Instagram. Emails. Twitter. Videos. Newsletters. To thrive online, you should try and include a balance of content. Think of content like this:

- **Quarterly/bi-yearly:** This will be your large initiatives. This could be creating a whitepaper on homeownership or an infographic on steps to build better credit.
- **Monthly or bi-monthly:** This can be an update on what your CDFI is doing in the community or a newsletter. You could also do a blog post that shows thought leadership and engages the reader to respond.

- **Weekly:** Deliver quick and consumable content through your Facebook and Instagram posts. This could be a link to a mortgage calculator, a notice that you are hosting a class, or a reminder to turn back the clocks. You can also include fun, relationship building content like wishing Happy Holidays or a feel good story related to your CDFI's community.

We will discuss how to use the different platforms further in this guide.

Creating an Editorial Calendar

Before you start creating content, you'll want to create an editorial, or content calendar so you can map your content mix—blogs, video, social media channels, emails, etc.—on a weekly, monthly, and seasonal schedule. Make sure your calendar is visible to the entire marketing team and get buy-in from key stakeholders.

To organize your calendar, you can use an Excel spreadsheet or Google calendar.

Here is a list of the variables and information you may want to include in your editorial calendar:

- Date the content will be published
- The area of business the content is supporting
- Who is the target market (auto loan, mortgage, financial wellness)
- Content type (blog, Facebook, Twitter, email newsletter)
- Who is creating the content
- The URL to where the content is directing

Before you complete your editorial calendar, you'll want to interview various stakeholders to determine what they will need help promoting, what type of content should be produced to support the initiative, and who will create the content.

A good editorial calendar will include the following information:

- A list of the content—both existing and what will be created—for a campaign and what channels will be used
- A list of the people creating the content
- When the content will be created and when the content will be published
- A call to action that will show where the content will drive the user

There are many free templates for editorial calendars online, but we recommend using these templates from The Content Marketing Institute. You can learn more about editorial calendars and download free templates here:

<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2017/04/editorial-calendar-tools-templates/>



Content marketing is good for your bottom line – and your customers. Three key reasons to use content marketing:

- Increased sales
- Cost savings
- Better customers who have more loyalty

Getting Started with Content Marketing

Now that you have an editorial calendar and your key initiatives it's time to start thinking about all the great content you are going to create for your community. For instance, you may be creating content to build a buzz about a class. You may want to inform people about their loan options. Or, even better, you may want to get the word out about a successful project your CDFI supported.

No matter what your motivation, the first thing you have to do is establish a goal, decide which channels you feel are appropriate, and determine how you are going to measure success. Also, remember, you not only want to know what worked but also what did not work and why.

The goal of content marketing is to attract new customers through informative, credible, entertaining content that encourages them to take profitable action. There are two essential elements to every successful content marketing plan:

- An understanding of your goal(s); and
- A mission statement – this is your company's reason for existing and the priorities and perspectives it upholds in pursuit of that mission.

You should keep these in the forefront of your mind when creating content. Content must support at least one core marketing or business goal. Think of what you want the content to do for your CDFI:

- Do you need to raise awareness for your company?
- Do you want to build your email list?
- Do you need to nurture potential borrowers along in their process?
- Do you need to convert your audience to customers?
- Do you need to retain customers and/or increase their borrowing (up-sell/ cross-sell)?

Always ask yourself, "How does this support our goals?" If it doesn't, then chances are that it should not be a priority.

71% of consumers trust content that provides useful information without trying to sell something²

Your audience should never be “everyone”

Be as specific as possible, and then get to know this person as well as you can. You may have a few different audiences you plan to target with your content, and that’s perfectly fine.

If you’re wondering where to “draw the line,” consider whether their informational needs are different. If they are, you will likely need to consider them separately.

Creating valuable content

To set a clear goal and to create valuable content for your audience, there are a few things your CDFI should consider.

- **Define your culture**—clearly define your values and attitudes and how your CDFI acts and interacts with the communities you serve. Knowing this information will help you to establish your voice and who you are.
- **Content marketing should be integrated**—your content marketing should look and sound like your other marketing efforts.
- **Dedicate a person or team**—select a person or two to ensure you are reaching your content goals. One of these people should be your editor to make sure everything is consistent. This person will also maintain your content calendar.
- **Know where you are directing your user**—when you post on a social network or sending out a newsletter, think about where you have the user land on your website. For example, if you tweet about a loan, have the user land on a page highlighting loan details and information.

This is your long-term strategy, based on building a strong relationship with your target audience, by giving them high-quality content that is relevant to them on a consistent basis. Eventually, when those customers make a lending decision, their loyalty already lies with you and they will use your organization.



Don't skip it!

Creating a good content strategy can take time, so too many people completely skip it and focus solely on content marketing (the fun stuff). While focusing on content marketing can bring you some limited success, it will likely fall short of the overall impact you could have made, had you assessed how your content was going to be used and implemented on every level of your business. In essence, you are relying on your creative side without taking into account your strategic side.

It is tempting to publish content on your website to get it out to the masses and feel like you're doing something content-wise, but don't just create content for the sake of creating content. Create content that has purpose, that aligns with your company goals and that has been designed to produce a calculated response – all of the things you would map out beforehand with a good content strategy. This is the way to truly maximize your content marketing efforts.

A solid content strategy (paired with a valuable content marketing strategy) is one of the biggest tools your business can utilize in maximizing your reach online. Make sure your content strategy foundation has been well planned out before rolling out your content marketing strategy.

Suggested Reading

This guide is an overview of how to make content marketing and strategy work for your CDFI. If you wish to learn more we recommend the following books:

- **Content Strategy.** Author—Kristina Halvorson. Considered by many the first and only book you need for content strategy.
- **Everybody Writes.** Author—Ann Handley. Learn everything you need to know about writing for the web.
- **Managing Content Marketing.** Author—Robert Rose. Learn how to manage, organize, and put content marketing to work for your business.

Sources:

¹ <https://www.searchenginejournal.com/whats-difference-content-strategy-vs-content-marketing/125716/>

² <https://www.krusecontrolinc.com/trust-deficit-automotive-content-marketing-your-best-friend/>