



## Digital content – time to get serious

It can never be said too often: ‘content is king’ for business websites. They only succeed if they offer site visitors fresh and original material.

So content strategy needs to be nailed down, and fully committed to. Fundamental questions need to be asked – and answered: Who do you want to reach out to? Why they should listen to you? And what you want to achieve as a result.

A content strategy gives focus and a clear objective. When everyone in the business understands it, as well those producing the digital content, there’s little chance of any embarrassing or ‘off-brand’ material getting through.

Patience is needed. Instant results are rare. Eventually, you’ll know if the strategy is working and, if not, it can be refined. This isn’t failure – it’s learning. More is risked by doing nothing at all.

### Getting productive

The thought of having to produce engaging content on an ongoing basis can seem daunting. So it’s best to start gradually and let the momentum build up.

Your company has a wealth of resources to tap into for content. Those people with specialist knowledge and experience may not be accomplished writers – but they can provide valuable raw material for a copywriter and designer to shape into compelling content.

### Start socialising

An important consideration is how to format and deliver all the great content that can be generated. At first, it might just mean adding a few extra pages to your existing website. But in the long term, you really need to ‘think social’.

Social media – including the likes of Facebook, YouTube and Twitter – are a relatively recent phenomenon. In 2005, there were no social websites among the internet’s top ten sites. Today, they make up more than half of it.

Setting up a Facebook page, for example, may not be appropriate for your brand or its strategy. But what’s important is to realise how these sites have changed the mindset and expectations of your website visitors. People no longer want you to treat them as passive readers or viewers. Rather, they need to be seen as a community or network of users.

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### **The medium can be the message**

The simplest way to address the social media wave is for a blog or a 'blog-like' section to be set up on your website.

A blog works much like a diary, with a series of posts ordered by date of publication. The advantage is that the content of a blog is searchable and can be re-arranged by the user according to subject, tagged keywords, author and other variables.

It's a very straightforward way of publishing and managing your company's content, without requiring endless modifications to your current website's architecture. It can be highly flexible too, capable of incorporating all kinds of content. If you choose to, you can allow your blog's visitors to leave comments under each post, giving the opportunity to build a useful dialogue and relationship.

In conjunction with an email newsletter, you then have a powerful social media programme in place. One that encourages sharing and interaction, with the potential to engage a much larger audience than you're used to.

### **Down to the nitty-gritty**

At its most basic, content is simply words on a screen. And yes, that's still a powerful tool, especially if your site takes an interesting editorial position or presents exclusive information. But think how those words might be made even more engaging:

- **Images** – digital technology means that photos and other imagery have never been easier to create and publish. A series of relevant snapshots will improve even the driest article. Many facts and figures are more easily understood in the form of a chart or diagram.
- **Video** – product demonstrations, case studies, tutorials and more all come vividly to life with the moving image. Many people would rather watch a short clip than simply read the same information. These can be uploaded to your own website and/or to YouTube.
- **Podcasts** – perhaps your target audience is routinely out and about – trade end-users on site or working through their daily job call agenda, for example. A downloadable audio file featuring news and interviews makes your brand portable and memorable.
- **Micro-blogging** – Twitter allows you to talk directly to people in quick and easily digestible chunks. These can point your company's 'followers' towards more in-depth information that you've published elsewhere.

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### **It's about standing out**

So there are numerous possibilities for creating digital content. And while it takes patience and determination to make it work, it's an investment that can pay handsome returns in brand recognition and new business.

The ultimate aim is for your company to stand out from your competitors and to show that yours is the one that offers added value.

Increasingly, in every sphere of business, your digital identity is the main point of contact with customers – on a global scale.

So it makes sense to ensure that your digital content, strategy and execution is handled properly. After all, the world is watching.

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