



Own Your Content

A Content Hub Primer

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If you don't have an audience, then you don't have customers. In today's media environment, you must think in terms of managing your customer audience. Like any publisher or media mogul, you are on the leading edge from a thought leadership perspective. The solution is simple:

- 🎯 Create content.
- 🎯 Grow your email list and monetize your audience.
- 🎯 Produce and promote more of the content that leads to people purchasing your products and services.

Sounds simple. Nothing is simple.

The problem, as marketing pioneer John Wanamaker wryly pointed out: "Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half."

Marketers still have trouble understanding "which half" of their budget is wasted, even as their digital media technology budgets expand. It's your problem too.

Today, you produce more and different types of content -- at least it feels like you should. Much of it is probably very good, but are you running your content strategy with data that connects the content and your team to your business goals?

Small and mid-sized companies have begun to respond in earnest to demands for relevant, authentic content.



Recent [research from SEMRush](#) identified that organizations are increasingly more focused on their SEO content publishing.

- 🕒 Over 70% of businesses believe that their content efforts were more successful than the previous year.
- 🕒 10% fewer organizations outsource their content needs.
- 🕒 [Proving an ROI](#) is now a key challenge for content marketers (up 14%).

Our own research consistently shows that [content strategy](#) and sustainable production are the two biggest hurdles most organizations face.

The nub of the problem is that technology has changed the way you acquire and manage customer relationships. Your team needs different skills. You need new tools, growth and accountability.

A new kind of marketing system may be necessary to succeed given all the disruption of the last year. And that system must have specific kinds of content to produce results.

That system is a branded content hub that you own.

Some say that publishing is dead. We disagree. You MUST be a publisher today, whatever your customer demo or distribution medium. This book is about sharing a proven way to own your content and organize a purpose-driven media publishing system to create revenue and build influence in the markets you serve.

Let's delve into why an owned content hub would be an important contributor to delivering improved business results for you. There's actually three types of content.



Earned, Paid And Owned Content

The best content strategy targets your audience with earned, paid and owned content. As alluded to, content hub is the centerpiece of your owned content strategy, because it enables you to understand whether or not your content syncs with your business goals.

This primer will help you define the owned content you will produce for your branded content hub. First, let's agree on the definitions of earned, paid and owned content.



01

Earned Content

Earned content is what other people say about you: word of mouth. With a digital audience, you must broaden the definition of “mouth.” Earned content includes social media shares and posts, as well as reviews, recommendations, and news reports. If someone else says it about you for free, then the content is “earned” -- even if the mention isn’t “on message.” Search engines take earned media into account when they assign organic rankings to your content.

Think of earned content this way: You are stimulating a variety of conversations that occur on- and off-line. These can come through a variety of partners such as publishers, bloggers and other influencers, as well as your customers in the form of testimonials and referrals on social media. Customers and search engines assign a high degree of credibility to these sources.



02

Paid Content

Paid content is advertising on someone else's platform.

Essentially, you're renting someone else's audience on the premise that their users will click through to your site and buy stuff. The advantage over earned content is that you have complete control over your message. Conversely, your ad will compete against other ads for the click throughs you crave.

In addition, paid media includes the good things that influencers are paid to say about your products or services.

Pair your brand with the right influencer or platform, and you can boost your earned media mentions and click throughs, which can translate to better search engine rankings.



03

Owned Content

Owned content consists of your website, social media channels, blogs, webinars, brochures, and more. Even a retail store can be considered an owned media channel. You define this content, and you control it. Owned content is the center of all your activities, because it's what folks talk about with earned, and it's where advertising platforms and influencers send their audiences. Get your owned content right, and you will have a greater probability to generate revenue, engage your customers, and build your brand.

Earned, owned and paid content are all ways to get your message to your market. They must be intentional and targeted, so your marketing strategy must balance these three types so that they work off each other. This kind of concentration of effort in delivering your brand messaging to your customer audience is your leverage in a crowded market. It's the secret to your success.

With these working definitions, this primer focuses on placing a branded content hub at the center of your owned content strategy.



The Technology Behind Your Owned Content

The problem is that it's difficult to build your customer audience, because we live in an over-saturated media market. Building an audience takes resources -- people, technology and, especially, content. If you have a system that works, you can save a lot of time and money, and that same proven system will make more money in less time.

Though known by various names and supported by ever-evolving technology, content hubs are not new. Ben Franklin invented the concept nearly 300 years ago. Unchanged over these years are the basics of good content:

- 01 Engage your audience.
- 02 Define beliefs.
- 03 Prompt understanding.
- 04 Direct your audience's action.

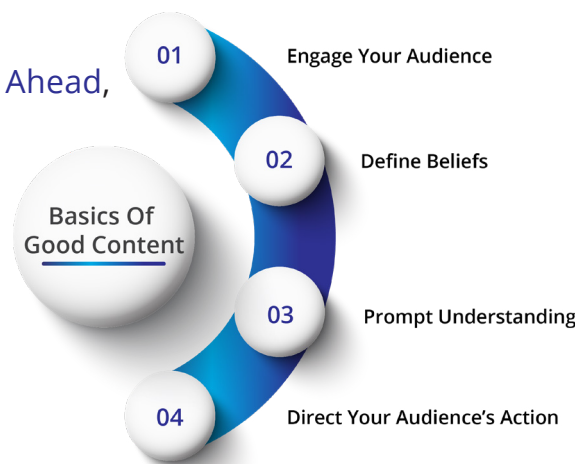
Moreover, these actions must generate value for the audience, as well as your return on investment.

Franklin got it right, as have others who followed -- among them William Randolph Hearst, Joseph Pulitzer, Malcolm Forbes, Rupert Murdoch and Ariana Huffington.

"But," you say, "they are publishers," and you are exactly right.

Today, marketers must think (and act) like publishers.

Think along the lines of The Hartford's [Small Business Ahead](#), or the Cleveland Clinic's [Health Essentials blog](#). These successful publishers do not simply tell great stories; they surround their material with a comprehensive program of promotion, events, distribution, feedback, analysis and reporting.





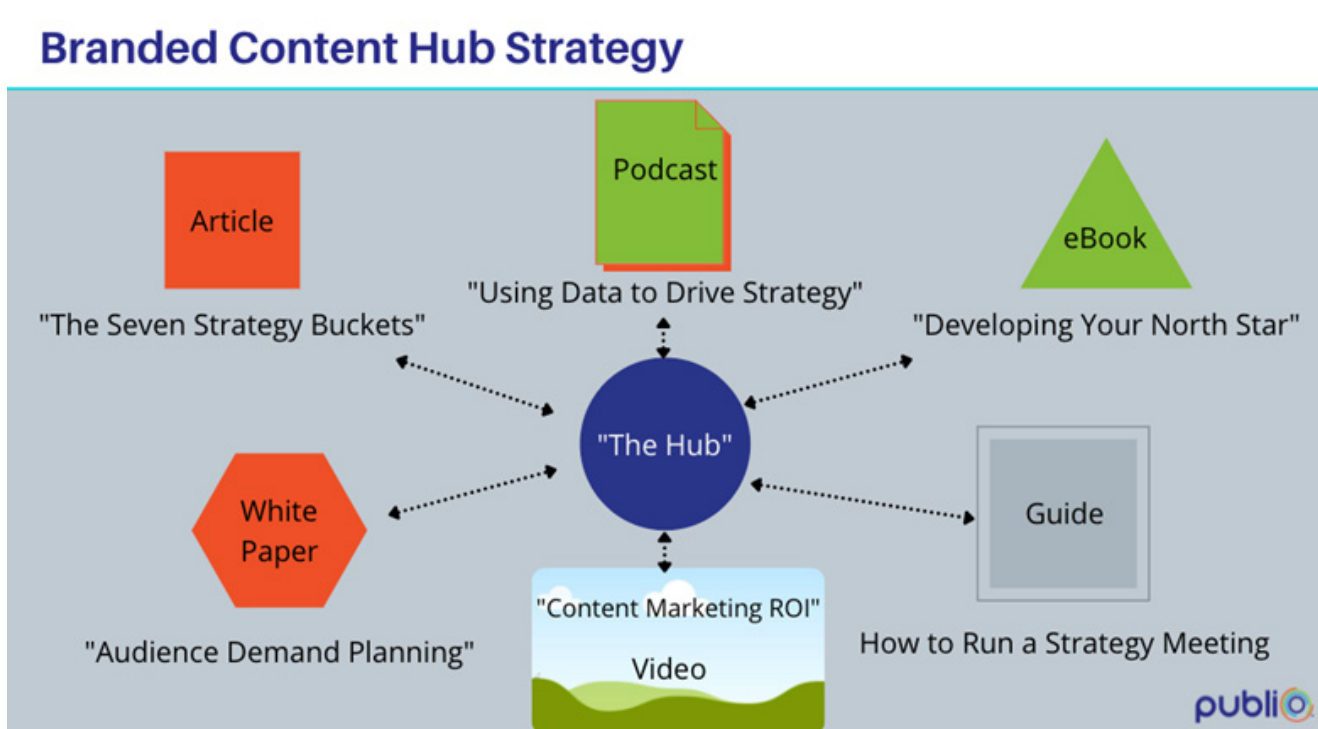
How Can A Content Hub Advance Your Business?

A branded content hub concentrates and distributes your digital media, and connects to your offline events. All of this activity builds credibility with search engines, so pay attention to search engine optimization (SEO).

Here is the “why” for investing in publishing SEO content: For most organizations, 80 percent of new business comes from prospecting.

A great SEO content strategy will not only help you create content for the roughly 20 percent of people who will find your business through organic search and paid promotion, but will provide the context, or experience, for those you meet through personal networking.

After all, most people check you out on the web before they follow-up with your sales team.



Google is not typically interested in driving traffic to your website unless the search is for a branded keyword, like your company name.

Designed correctly, a content hub that can build and sustain an audience actually increases your business' authority and trust with search engines. This can enhance organic traffic to your sales website, too.

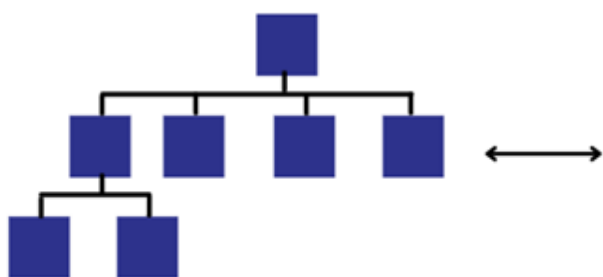
You can see this is more than simply pulling traffic to a website. This is a carefully planned owned-media property that distills your messages and becomes a force multiplier. A content hub is your solution to a mainstream media that continues to shrink and focus on your largest competitors.

A well-constructed content hub of owned media enables you to raise your brand's profile and achieve success in your market, even as your industry transforms. Your content must speak directly to the customer goals that your company serves.

In doing so, your content hub will position you as a thought leader. This will serve to increase the SEO authority and trustworthiness of ALL your content -- including your sales and marketing material -- with search engines and humans alike.

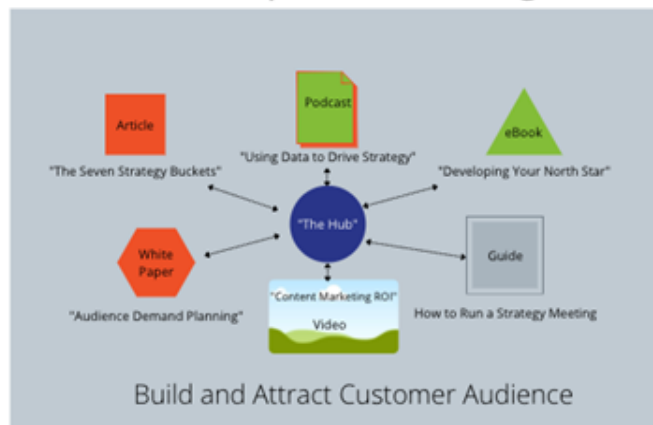
Branded Content Hub Strategy

Hierarchical Business Website



Marketing, Sales, Service, Investor Relations

Hub & Spoke Publishing



←.....
SEO: Authority & Trust





Owned Content Fundamentals: Your Northstar Idea

Before you spend another dollar on your content hub, you must define the central idea that guides the publication of your content, defines your media distribution strategy, and connects your stories to your audience.

Every great media property, from magazines to TV shows to podcasts, has a Northstar Idea. This is the guiding principle that creates an immediate intellectual and emotional connection with your customer. As with all investments, you must begin with solid market research.

What information do your customers look for when they begin their buying process? The market intelligence firm SiriusDecisions has famously reported that [67% of the buyer's journey is digital](#). Therefore, you must understand the voice of the customer -- what they are looking for and the problems they're trying to solve.

Now you're able to develop customer personas, a fictionalized description of your best customers. In a B2B context, you must understand if you will deal with CEOs, chief marketing officers, directors, or a marketing associate who is conducting research.

- 🎯 Where do they fit demographically?
- 🎯 What makes them unique -- hobbies, values, or recreation?

This is the information your content creators, writers, videographers and graphic designers will assimilate into their work. Round out your research with surveys and interviews with customers, sales reps and industry leaders, as well as a review of literature from relevant sources.

Give Your Content Hub A Name

Now you're ready to name your content hub.

Would you consume content called Blog? Hell no. You have to invite people into your world!

Think in terms of a name that connects your publication to the goals, wants and needs of the personas you've identified.

The name you choose should speak to their emotions and intellect. It should convey your value proposition.

Sometimes, your hub's identity is as simple as your company's name, particularly when your brand is well-established. Sometimes, your brand needs a little help in a specific market space, which requires a more thoughtful naming strategy.

Six Content Hubs That Connect With Their Audiences

The Home Depot Blog tells you exactly what to expect in its articles because the brand is widely associated with do-it-yourself (DIY) home improvement. The blog relies on contributors who themselves are branded in the DIY space -- influencers. Their articles focus on specific projects with plenty of photos that illustrate specific steps. Between the trusted contributors and a "Shop This Project" callout in most articles, conversions and sales are a daily event.

The Home Depot Blog's symbiotic approach to content creation builds consumer trust as much as it helps the contributors burnish their own brand recognition.

Chief Packaging Officer is published by Esko, which markets SaaS label and artwork management applications that automate the label and packaging process.

This content hub seeks to elevate the people who develop packaging for their company's products. Theirs is a strategic function that has multiple touchpoints throughout an organization including legal, marketing and innovation. These managers are responsible for designing and delivering packaging that meet these multiple requirements, including return on investment.

The process, according to CPO's editorial mission, is complex. As such, the packaging professional's contribution to their company's success should be recognized as deserving a seat at the management table. The editorial team provides news and information for the packaging community; shares ideas and experiences that improve package delivery; and sparks conversations around packaging's ability to meet business objectives as well as the packaging professional's evolving role.

Hertz Travel Blog's Northstar Idea transforms Hertz from a car rental company to a lifestyle brand. Topics range from how to pack before you go, to what to do once you get there. Categories include Things to Do, Places to Go, Planning a Trip, and Business Travel. Videos and articles feature insider tips, such as making the most of hotel stays, as well as can't-miss sight-seeing excursions. The blog's immersive storytelling appeals to the traveller's sense of adventure and preparedness.

The Forecast is operated by enterprise cloud software company Nutanix. The news site publishes three to five stories a week that are focused on topics of interest to IT influencers, company investors, tech decision-makers and IT professionals. The articles, videos and podcasts provide an insider's look at the people, technologies and business trends that advance digital transformation.

The Forecast raises awareness of Nutanix' brand, and reaches an audience that traditional PR and demand-generation marketing cannot tap. In 2020, The Forecast racked up nearly 200,000 unique visitors, and more than 365,000 page views -- up 137 percent year-over-year. Moreover, their weekly newsletter subscribers grew by nearly 1,100 for a year-over-year growth rate of 332 percent. Increasingly, readers find The Forecast through search engines. Organic search results rose to 19 percent, up five points from the previous year. All of their digital marketing efforts allow Nutanix to re-target their demand generation offers to Forecast's site visitors.

Gary Vaynerchuk is the blog for the digital marketing agency [Vayner Media](#). An early internet adapter, Vaynerchuk accurately describes himself as a serial entrepreneur. His backstory shows that he understands how publishers operate, and how publishing is the path to growth and influence. Vaynerchuk’s articles, videos and podcasts focus on all things digital marketing: how to do it, who to hire, social media strategies as well as introductions to new products, services and trends.

P&G Good Everyday is a case study in knowing (and following) your Northstar Idea. Originally named “P&G Everyday,” this branded content hub provided recipes, ideas and inspiration for your home, as well as coupons for Procter & Gamble products.

A P&G study, “It’s Our Home,” revealed that nearly three-quarters of people want to improve sustainability at home. Respondents said “not knowing how” was the biggest barrier to making environmentally conscious choices. P&G Everyday became P&G Good Everyday. The change is more than cosmetic.

Consumers earn reward points when they engage with P&G Good Everyday, and this content hub gives them plenty of opportunity. The “Good News” section publishes content on sustainability, gender equality, and diversity. The opportunity to earn rewards and support positive goals for sustainability and diversity keeps P&G’s audience engaged. In return, P&G learns more about their customers so that they will be able to pivot for the next big shift in consumer expectations.



Focus on all things digital marketing.






Your Own Owned Content Editorial Strategy

Connect everything to your Northstar Idea.

This idea tells your entire team about your audience and the types of content that will connect with them. A successful Northstar Idea also tells your customer audience exactly what they need to know about you.

Be authentic. Be creative. Find the themes that actual human beings are trying to address. Determine which of your topics are best-suited for each audience segment, and create content around those themes such as white papers, feature articles, curated news, infographics, videos or webinars.

Chances are, you already have content that is suitable for your program. Audit your materials, existing events and activities.

-  Can they be updated and repurposed?
-  Identify the information gaps that you should fill.
-  Can you present existing materials in different formats?

Pillars of Content

Think of themes as pillars of content that supports your customer's interests and needs. Generate subtopics across multiple formats to repurpose, expand and enrich the value you provide.





Plan a year of pillar content and events in outline form, then create a detailed three-month timeline that outlines your team's work.

Work three months ahead of yourself. Balance the need for thoroughness and consistency with the need to be agile -- you must jump on new opportunities and respond to change.

Editorial Calendar

Next, match the content types to actual content, and your editorial calendar begins to take shape. Now you have a strategy that tells you who will create which piece of content, and identify the sources and subject matter experts for the content.

Set your deadlines:

-  When are drafts due?
-  How much time for reviews and approvals?
-  When will the content be published?
-  How often will you publish?

Be sure that your content is sticky, such that people will see the value and stay on your site to read, view or listen to the entire story. The time that your audience spends on your site is a relevant metric for search engines, because sticky content signals that your site is authoritative on a particular topic, and relevant to the audience. Stickiness also indicates that your audience will talk to their friends, colleagues and peers about your brand. Congratulations, you've just picked up some earned content.



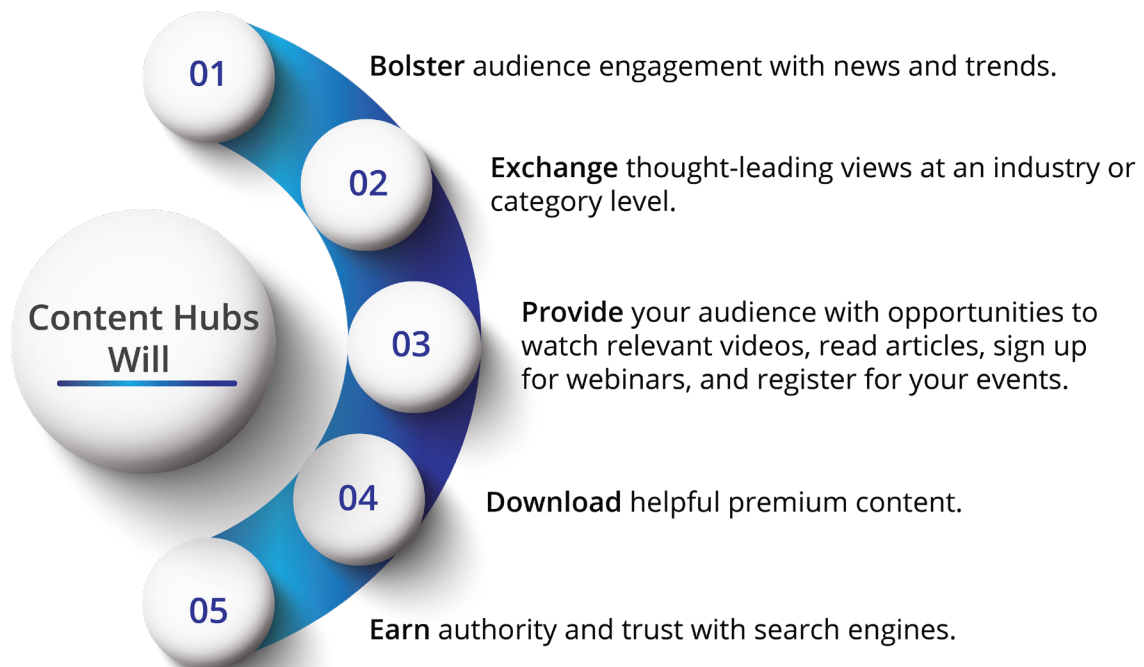
Content Hubs: Your Owned Media HQ

A branded content hub is a publishing method that concentrates and distributes your digital media and connects to your offline events. The media on your content hub must be consumable by people in your audience, as well as their search engines.

Built on a technology platform, your content hub will:

- 🎯 **Bolster** audience engagement with news and trends.
- 🎯 **Exchange** thought-leading views at an industry or category level.
- 🎯 **Provide** your audience with opportunities to watch relevant videos, read articles, sign up for webinars, and register for your events.
- 🎯 **Download** helpful premium content.
- 🎯 **Earn** authority and trust with search engines.

With a content hub, your customer audience should feel like an honored guest at your show. The experience must align your brand with the audience's values. One caveat: Be sure your organization is also aligned. Your customer audience will want to talk to human beings in your sales and customer service functions, so make it easy.



Content hubs are typically smaller than corporate websites, but larger than a blog with various kinds of multimedia content. The key differences between a branded content hub and a website or blog:

Richer experience:

A branded content hub uses a media property approach to production.

Achieve an outcome:

Your multimedia material must provide information for your audience that will achieve an outcome in a more sophisticated way. In other words: Think like a publisher.

Generate ROI:

Unlike a traditional media outlet, content hubs focus on the value of a new lead for your sales pipeline, instead of advertising revenues. You may also place a value on customer audience retention.

A reliable customer relationship management (CRM) system creates a feedback loop. A CRM gives you the kind of attribution that allows you to establish your ROI. You'll also have the data that will inform your content marketing program's evolution and continuous improvement.

The sky's the limit on how you present your content. A content hub serves as a flexible niche-building forum for your business. Give it some personality -- a journalistic or magazine vibe with a custom look and feel. Some companies extend their branded content hub to their trade shows and customer events. Others might have several smaller hubs to serve customer segments, leverage keywords, or generate SEO authority.



Your Customer's Journey

The key is to map your content to the buyer's journey.

TOFU:

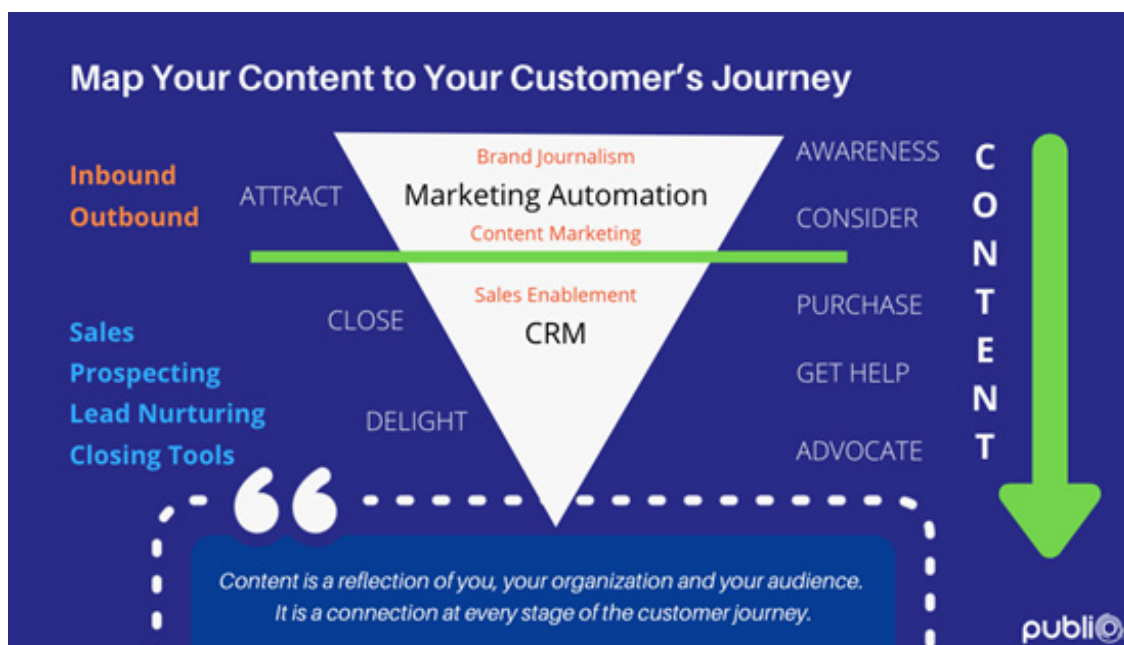
Top of the funnel content may use a brand journalism technique to tell stories about your company, people and practices.

MOFU:

Further down, middle of the funnel content focuses on “feeds and speeds” and other messages that tell your audience how your products and services operate.

BOFU:

Bottom of the funnel messages could use sales enablement techniques that include decision making guides, or tools that help a buyer perform a complicated task.








Your well-executed content hub should be subtle, but more powerful than hard-sell advertising. It should also be more flexible than any individual marketing campaign.

This framework can adapt to a small one-person business with limited resources, or scale up to larger multinational enterprises with teams of experts and loads of support. The latter is where these ideas come from. The former needs them today because of the changes introduced by the pandemic and the technology in our lives.

What Successful Content Marketing Looks Like

The key is to tie all sources of traffic into your marketing automation and CRM systems. This will create a feedback loop that will allow you to establish your ROI, as well as data that allows you to improve.

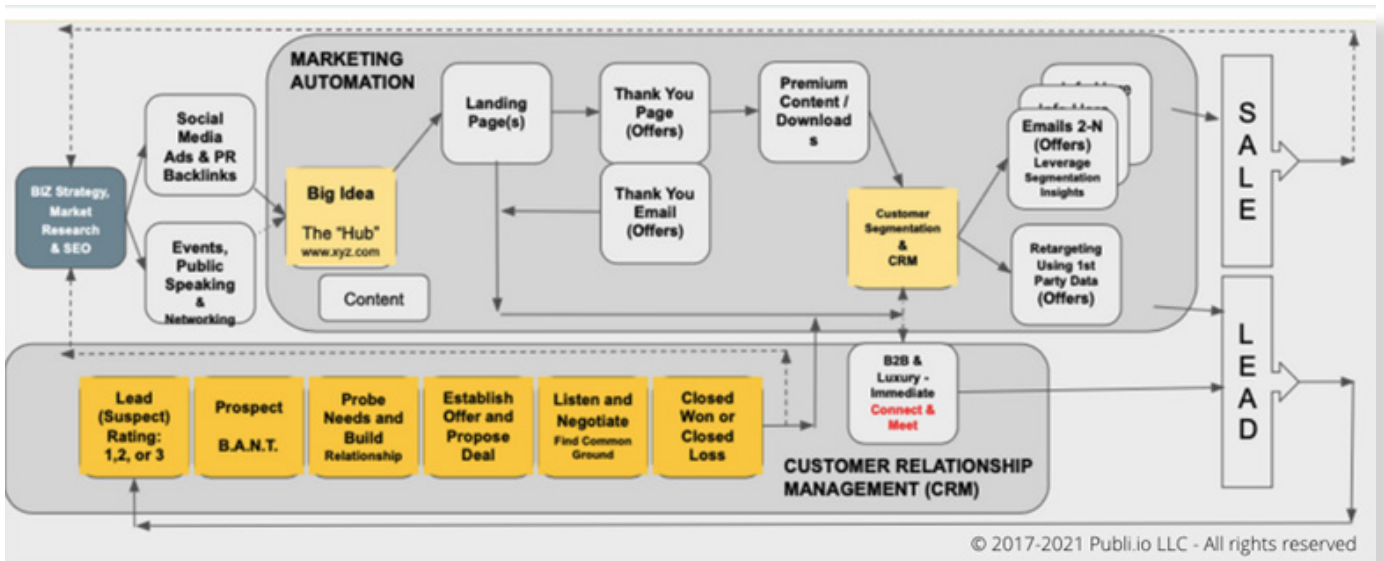
More than a website, your content hub is a destination that aggregates your demand generation content, such as:

-  Curated, feature-quality external articles
-  Video
-  Branded thought leadership
-  User-generated stories
-  Social media

Customer relationship management systems are every bit as important to content marketing success as your relevant, engaging content. Your content hub must connect your company's sales and marketing activities into a single funnel. A systems approach will bring the interactivity that allows a digital business to give its audience a unique, real time experience.

Marketing automation solutions such as Act-On, Eloqua, Hubspot, Infusionsoft, Marketo, SharpSpring, Zoho -- or one of the hundreds of others -- will allow you to scale your conversations with prospects, and manage your deals in an orderly manner. Each piece of your marketing automation efforts must work together as a system. Your CRM must integrate all of your systems and processes, and tie all of your content elements to the customer journey.

As a result, you will be able to scale your efforts and capture attributable results to content consumption and measurable outcomes for your content hub. Now your program has strength and impact -- and you will achieve your business goals.



**Technology aside, this is how it's done.
No matter what size company you are.**





Your Path to Success: The Publisher's M.O.™

This formula has worked very effectively. It's called the Publisher's M.O.,™ and it has monetized audiences for three centuries, regardless of the predominant media -- print, radio, TV or the internet. It's all one continuum.

Think of this modus operandi as a “seven bucket” model to develop your content strategy.



The Publisher’s M.O. is leverage for your content hub. It describes how media savvy companies grow. Instead of renting a platform to gain an audience, your brand can thrive by building an evergreen audience that is based on the value of a business lead.

With paid content, you stop getting attention when you stop paying. With earned content, your audience may not get the story right. Owned content is your direct path to influence, qualified sales leads, partnerships and backlinks that support your campaigns.

So, OWN YOUR CONTENT and make your mark with customers. Here are some more resources.

Next Steps To Own Your Content

Read “The New Content Culture”

Our book will help you think like a publisher to grow your business. We introduce the Publisher’s M.O.,™ your modus operandi to generate a return on investment with content marketing. Our “7-by-7 bucket” approach will focus your strategy and implementation through the entire content marketing process including:

1. Develop your content hub’s mission and strategy.
2. Assign roles and responsibilities.
3. Define your ROI model and set metrics.
4. Utilize successful meeting protocols.
5. Get your team on board.



Available in paperback on Amazon for \$12.95, or Kindle for \$9.99

[Buy Now on Amazon.com](#)

Show Your CEO That Content Marketing Boosts Revenue

It's free! Our ROI calculator will help you make your case for a content hub. Two truths will advance your proposal:

1. You're not asking to spend more money.
2. You're showing how you can make more money for your organization.

Here's how to prove it. This handy tool will allow you to make both points convincingly.

[Download your free ROI calculator.](#)



Complimentary Consultation

We call it marketing therapy. Set up time to talk to our content marketing experts about your biggest problem with owned content. The time is yours, so you set the agenda.

Yes, Let's Talk!

