

CASE STUDY: _____

Scaling Content Strategy

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Any content plan should be developed with the purpose of helping a business, however large or small, to achieve its goals by enabling the creation of compelling content for its customers.



THIS ARTICLE OFFERS a comparative case study on content strategy for a small business versus a large enterprise. The results demonstrate that there are several broad areas to be considered when developing a content methodology, including resources, systems and processes, technology, structure, guidelines, and tools. Although there are differences in the way content creation is executed in organizations of differing sizes, there is a basis on which principles can be applied across all companies to enable the development of content at scale.

It's enlightening to work as a content strategist in organizations both large and small, to have the opportunity to collaborate with stakeholders, and to align the content strategy to meet the business need. It's also fascinating to learn how that approach differs from one company to another, whether there are common factors which are shared by all organizations and what can be determined by comparing and contrasting the approaches taken by different-sized businesses.

Here we consider business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) companies and their approach to digital content delivery—that is, an overarching view of all types of content that are consumed digitally, and all collateral that has an impact on a company's digital content presence.

Content is a key business asset, sitting at the heart of an organization, whatever its size. The approach to content can influence not only its ideation and creation across the board, but also how it should be structured and deployed from a technical perspective. The principles described here of a content strategy and how best practices are applied in the context of a small business and a large enterprise are drawn from real-life experiences. Broadly, the case study examples comprise:

Company A: A European-focused composite of two companies with differing approaches to content creation—including in-house writers, contractors, and subject matter experts—with either limited (European only) or no translation requirements. Employees number 150 and 4,000.

Company B: An amalgam of two international organizations, with large teams of content writers, content managers, and content designers, translating their content into 20+ languages for customers in hundreds of countries worldwide. Employee numbers are around 18,000 and 95,000.

Content strategy is a core element of organizations implementing digital transformation, change management, or governance programs. The ongoing evolution of digital content requires a collaborative mind-set and a willingness to interact with multiple functions and stakeholders across the business as the discipline continues to evolve and gain credence.

From Concept to Reality

Any content plan should be developed with the purpose of helping a business, however large or small, to achieve its goals by enabling the creation of compelling content for its customers. Collaborating with stakeholders across the business to gain clarity on the organization's vision enables a content strategist to define a clear approach. This shouldn't be a complex process for Company A or Company B. The difference arises when a company starts to consider the scale of the content. Scaling up the various elements while retaining quality involves a number of factors, including:

- ▶ The volume of content to be created
- ▶ Taxonomy required to support findable and searchable content elements
- ▶ The capabilities of the team creating the content
- ▶ The technical or non-technical nature of the content being created
- ▶ Content management system (CMS) specifications (i.e., how and where the content is stored)
- ▶ Editing, checking, and regulatory requirements
- ▶ Collaboration with UX, design, testing, and subject matter experts
- ▶ Tools and automation available to support content creation

Structuring Content for Scalability

The creation of thoughtful content offers businesses flexibility around content creation, findability, and delivery. Artificial intelligence (AI) and cognitive computing have impacted the content discipline, increasing the awareness of the need to structure the content so that it is future-proofed and can keep pace with the evolution of content consumption on a wide variety of devices and in many formats.

On a small scale, Company A isn't impacted as it stands, but should it choose to grow and expand into new markets, it won't have the technology in place to seamlessly scale up. Company B, however, has realized that the technology infrastructure can offer an effective solution to scalability, and by implementing a long-term content strategy, they can, to a large extent, mitigate many future delivery issues and take advantage of opportunities arising as new technologies are developed.

Structured content is an ideal way to prepare content for future opportunities, as each element has its own field in the CMS, enabling full reusability. Creating discrete components, with a solid naming convention, enables total flexibility in the way that content is deployed. This enables the delivery of engaging content which is focused on specific user types, products, and lifecycle stages. In effect, this is a headless CMS where the content is stored independently from the presentation layer and is delivered to users with the format being applied during the publication process.

Content Strategy Best Practices

The tools in a content strategist's toolbox should include the following resources, regardless of the size of the organization:

- ▶ Style and tone of voice guidelines to ensure that the content is on brand and aligned with the company's purpose
- ▶ Terminology glossary, including company- and industry-standard terms, acronyms, and abbreviations
- ▶ Guidance on writing in plain English, including writing for translation and search engine optimization (SEO) best practices

These tools and applications can be scaled to take into account the specific needs of an organization, depending on how and where that content will be deployed.

Style and Tone of Voice Guidelines

Tone of voice reflects the language used and the manner in which the business is perceived by the audience segment consuming an organization's product and marketing content—in other words, what you say and how you say it. This guidance should be used by all organizations, from the smallest Company A to the largest Company B.

As organizations move toward short-form content that is findable and usable on a wide variety of devices, it is key to their success that they raise customers' perception of their trustworthiness. From a content perspective, one way of achieving this is through adherence to the tone of voice across all content and all formats—not only the written word, but also interactive and visual content.

Terminology Glossary

Terminology has a marked impact on the consistency of the content being produced across all channels. There is a correlation between the clarity of content and the engagement of an organization's customers. If authors have access to a term database that they can use for reference, there will also be a noticeable increase in the speed of content creation.

Once set up, the majority of terminology glossaries aren't time consuming to administer. They can be scaled up for different-sized organizations. Small businesses may find it useful to store the data in a spreadsheet. This was the approach carried out by Company A. Larger organizations should consider an in-house database. Multilingual requirements can be supported by some of the available tools that guide content authors through term management, tone of voice, and style guidelines in more than one language. This was the approach followed by Company B.

Writing Plain English

In order to remove any friction and to enable customers to consume content quickly and easily, remember that you only have a few seconds to capture their attention, and follow some common-sense rules, including:

- ▶ Write with an active voice.
- ▶ Involve the audience.
- ▶ Break the content down into succinct messages.
- ▶ Making the content easy to navigate and benefit-led.
- ▶ Avoid creating barriers that might be created by using colloquialisms, abbreviations, and confusing acronyms.

This guidance should be followed by all organizations, regardless of scale.

A note on translation and localization: When translating content, plain English (or the chosen source language) is the basis of any straightforward translation. When localizing content, countries or markets may each require a unique approach to capture their audience's attention. Tone of voice is not ubiquitous, and some locales might require a formal tone, while others allow a more relaxed approach. This level of attention to detail is required by Company B if its content is being created for international markets.

Lessons Learned

The basic principles for content strategy are shared across organizations of all sizes. However, the rigor in the way that best practice is applied varies from business to business. This variation is largely out of necessity, and includes:

- ▶ Company A doesn't have the resources to implement technology supporting content creation at volume. Conversely, they don't have the day-to-day need for it, and they are able to bring in additional resources on a per-project basis.
- ▶ Company B requires robust processes and systems that, together with automation, enable the management of a higher volume of content with a more complex structure.
- ▶ Company B is also more likely to take advantage of the external tools available to support content creation at scale.

When it comes to resourcing the content function however, there are many similarities:

- ▶ Both Company A and Company B have a core team of Content Managers and Content Writers with some additional technical support, for example a Content Architect.
- ▶ For digital transformation, website rewrites, and other significant projects, most businesses use the services of contractors, consultants, and agencies. They bring on board Content Designers, Editors, Writers, Strategists, and Project Managers, and they outsource translation and localization tasks. ■

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