

# How to Develop a Content Strategy in 7 Steps: A Start-to-Finish Guide



Discover how to create a content strategy plan that will attract your target audience at every stage of the funnel.



A free marketing resource from

## Inbound 281

[inbound281.com](http://inbound281.com)



# Why You Need An Updated Content Marketing Plan

Whether you're just starting out with content marketing or you've been using the same approach for a while, it never hurts to revisit your content strategy plan and make sure it's up-to-date, innovative, and engaging for your prospects and customers – no matter when or how they intend to buy.

If you're having trouble planning for the upcoming year or need some fresh ideas to include in your plan, read on.

In this post, we'll dive into what content strategy is, why your business needs a content marketing plan, and what steps you need to take to create your strategy. Plus, we'll explore some examples of effective content marketing strategies for inspiration.

We hope you find this information helpful. If you have any questions, feel free to reach me at 800-834-4910 or at [inbound281.com](http://inbound281.com).

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# What Is Content Strategy?

A content strategy is a plan in which you use content (audio, visual, and/or written) to achieve your business goals. A successful content strategy will attract your target audience at every stage of the funnel and keep them engaged even after a purchase.



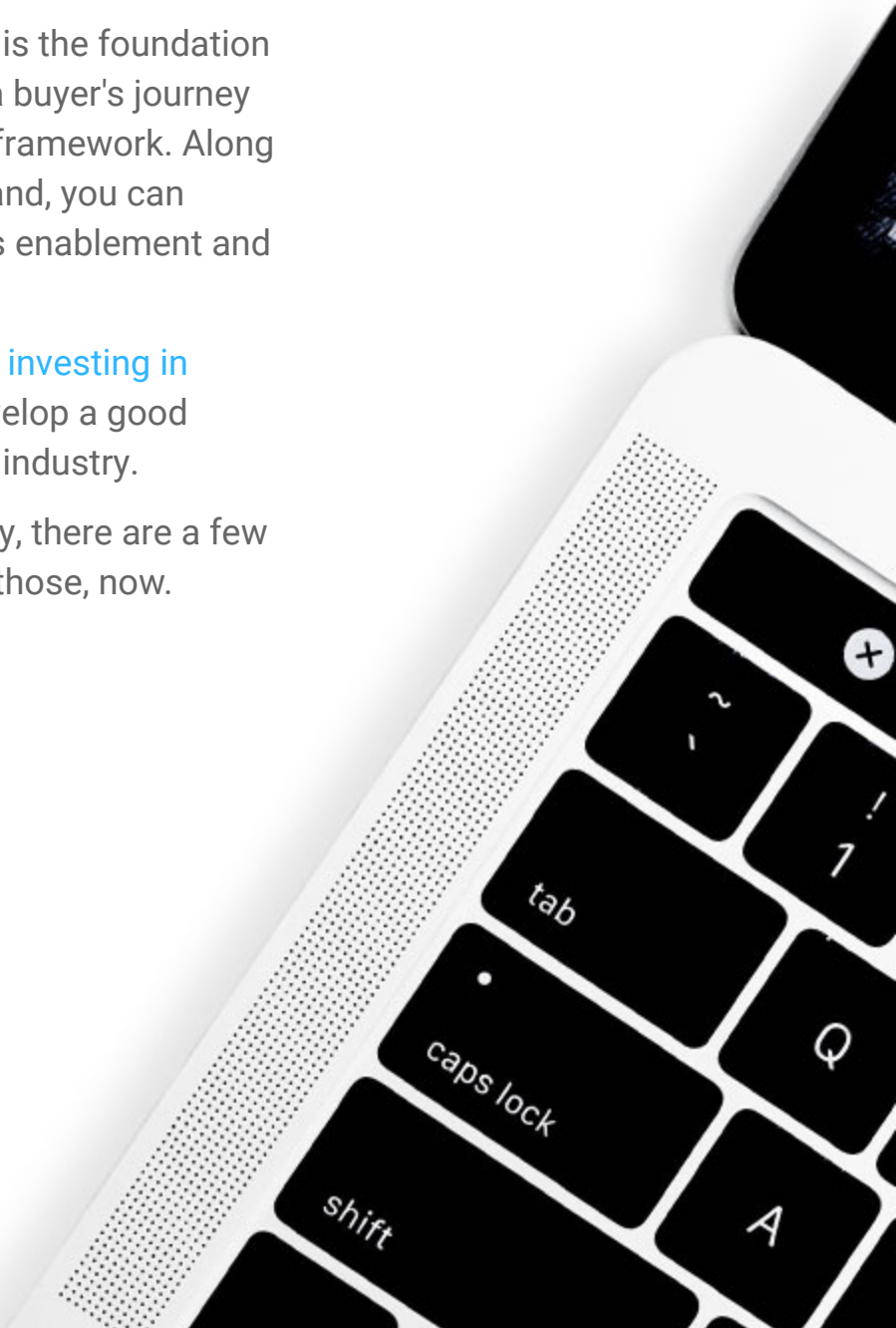
Say your business goals include increasing brand awareness. To achieve this, you might implement a content strategy that focuses on SEO to increase your website's visibility on the search engine results pages (SERPs) and drive traffic to your products or services.

New business owners might assume a content strategy is a nice-to-have, but not necessary early on. However, producing high-quality content can be invaluable in building trust with new audiences and succeeding in the long haul.

In essence, a good content strategy is the foundation of your [Attract and elight stages](#) in a buyer's journey that follows the inbound marketing framework. Along with attracting prospects to your brand, you can leverage a content strategy for sales enablement and customer satisfaction.

Plus, with [70% of marketers actively investing in content marketing](#), it's critical to develop a good content strategy to compete in your industry.

When you develop a content strategy, there are a few questions to answer. Let's dive into those, now.





## 1. Who will be reading your content?

Who's the target audience for your content? For how many audiences are you creating content for?

Just as your business might have more than one type of customer, your content strategy can cater to more than one type of user.

Using a variety of content types and channels will help you deliver content that's tailored to each persona.



## 2. What problem will you be solving for your audience(s)?

Ideally, your product or service solves a problem you know your audience has. By the same token, your content coaches and educates your audience through this problem as they begin to identify and address it.

A sound content strategy supports people on both sides of your product: those who are still figuring out what their main challenges are, and those who are already using your product to overcome these challenges.

Your content reinforces the solution(s) you're offering and helps you build credibility with your target audience.



### 3. What makes you unique?

Your competitors likely have a similar product as yours, which means your potential customers need to know what makes yours better — or, at least, different.

Maybe your main asset is that your company has been established for many years. Or perhaps you have a unique brand voice that makes you stand out from your competitors.

To prove why you're worth buying from, you need to prove why you're worth listening to. Once you figure that out, permeate that message in your content.



### 4. What content formats will you focus on?

To figure out what formats to focus on, you need to meet your audience where they are.

While you may be tempted to launch a podcast since it's grown so much in the last few years, or launch a YouTube channel, find out first where your audience lives.

Otherwise, you may waste time creating content that either won't reach your audience or capture their attention.

Once you identify the best formats, start [creating a budget](#) to assess what resources you can allocate to execute this strategy.



## 5. What channels will you publish on?

Just as you can create content in different formats, you'll also have various channels you can publish to, from your website to social media.

This, again, will reflect where your audience lives. If your audience prefers long-form video content, you may opt to publish your content on YouTube. If you have a younger audience that likes quick content, you may opt for TikTok and Instagram.

We'll talk more about social media content strategy in the step-by-step guide later in this article.



## 6. How will you manage content creation and publication?

Figuring out how you'll create and publish all your content can be a daunting task.

Before you execute your plan, it's important to establish:

- Who's creating what.
- Where the content's being published.
- When the content is going live.

In a small team, this may be easy enough as you may be the sole decision-maker. As your company grows, you may need to collaborate with several content teams to figure out an effective process.

Today's content strategies prevent clutter by managing content from a *topic* standpoint. When planning a content editorial calendar around topics, you can easily visualize your company's message and assert yourself as an authority in your market over time.



## Why Marketers Need to Create a Content Marketing Strategy

Content marketing helps businesses prepare and plan for reliable and cost-effective sources of website traffic and new leads.

If you can create just one blog post that gets a steady amount of organic traffic, an embedded link to an e-book or free tool will continue generating leads for you as time goes on – long after you click "*Publish*."

[HubSpot's](#) blog team found this to be key to increasing traffic to the Sales Blog over time – read about HubSpot's [blog strategy here](#).

The reliable source of traffic and leads from your evergreen content will give you the flexibility to experiment with other marketing tactics to generate revenue, such as sponsored content, social media advertising, and distributed content.

Plus, your content won't just help attract leads, it will also continue to educate your prospects and generate awareness for your brand.



# How to Create a Content Strategy Framework

1. Define your goal.
2. Conduct persona research.
3. Run a content audit.
4. Choose a content management system.
5. Determine which type of content you want to create.
6. Brainstorm content ideas.
7. Publish and manage your content.



Now, let's dive in to learn the specifics of how to create a content marketing plan. Curious how former HubSpot Head of Content SEO Aja Frost put together their content strategy? Here it is.



## 1. Define Your Goal

What's your aim for developing a content marketing plan? Why do you want to produce content? Why do you want to create a content marketing plan?

Know your goals before you begin planning, and you'll have an easier time determining what's best for your strategy.

*[Download this goal planning template for help figuring out the right content goals.](#)*



## 2. Conduct Persona Research

To develop a successful plan, you need to clearly define your content's target audience – also known as your [buyer persona](#).

This is especially important for those who are starting out or are new to marketing. By knowing your target audience, you can produce more relevant and valuable content that they'll want to read and convert on.

If you're an experienced marketer, your target may have changed. Do you want to target a new group of people or expand your current target market? Do you want to keep the same target audience? Revisiting your audience parameters by conducting market research each year is crucial to growing your audience.

*Featured Tool:* [Buyer Persona Kit](#)



### 3. Run a Content Audit

Early on, most brands start with blog posts. If you want to venture out into different formats, you can [run a content audit](#) to assess your top-performing and lowest-performing content. Then, you can use that information to influence which direction you take next.

If you've been in business for a while, you should review your previous content marketing efforts and last year's results.

Figure out what you can do differently in the upcoming year and set new goals. Now is a great time to align your team's goals with the rest of your organization's goals.

Whatever stage you're in, a content audit will help you determine what resonates best with your audience, identify gaps in your topic clusters, and brainstorm fresh content ideas.



### 4. Choose a Content Management System

A few vital parts of content management include content creation, content publication, and content analytics.

You want to invest in a CMS to create, manage, and track your content in an easy and sustainable way.

With the [HubSpot CMS](#), you can plan, produce, publish, and measure your results all in one place.

Another popular CMS is WordPress, to which you can add the [HubSpot WordPress plugin](#) for free web forms, live chat, CRM access, email marketing, and analytics.



## 6. Brainstorm Content Ideas

Now, it's time to start coming up with ideas for your next content project.

Here are some tools to get the juices flowing.

### Feedly



The Feedly RSS feed is a wonderful way to track trendy topics in your industry and find content ideas at the same time.

You start by telling the software what topics you're most interested in and its AI tool will do the rest.

You won't need to scour the internet to find new content ideas anymore. Instead, you can go through your curated list, compiled from news sites, newsletters, and social media.

### BuzzSumo

Want to discover popular content and content ideas? This company offers several market research tools, one of which uses social media shares to determine if a piece of content is popular and well-liked.

This information helps you see which content ideas would do well if you were to create content about them.



## Blog Title Generator



Get your mind gears going with the Ryan Robinson blog title generator. This tool generates creative blog title ideas and headline examples using your target keywords.

This brainstorming technique helps you put general ideas in contexts that would be appealing to your target audience. Once you have a headline you like, choose your favorite blog title, copy, and paste into your content.

## CoSchedule Headline Analyzer

You can get blog post ideas for an entire *year* with [HubSpot's Blog Ideas Generator](#). All you need to do is enter general topics or terms you'd like to write about, and this content idea generator does all the work for you.

This tool analyzes headlines and titles and provides feedback on length, word choice, grammar, and keyword search volume.

If you have an idea in mind, run a few title options through the Headline Analyzer to see how you could make it stronger, and to move your idea further along in the brainstorming process.



## HubSpot's Website Grader



This is a great tool to use when you want to see where you're at with your website and SEO efforts. The Website Grader grades you on vital areas of your website performance and sends you a detailed report to help you optimize.

With this tool, you can figure out how to make your website more SEO-friendly and discover areas of improvement.



## 7. Publish and manage your content.

Your marketing plan should go beyond the types of content you'll create – it should also cover how you'll organize your content.

With the help of an [editorial calendar](#), you'll be on the right track to publishing a well-balanced and diverse content library on your website. Then, create a [social media content calendar](#) to promote and manage your content on other sites.

### HubSpot Tool: [Free Editorial Calendar Templates](#)

Many of the ideas you think of will be evergreen (i.e.: just as relevant months or years from now as they are today). That being said, you shouldn't ignore timely topics either. While they may not be the bulk of your editorial calendar, they can help you generate spikes of traffic.

Most people count on incorporating popular holidays, like New Year's, in their marketing efforts, but you don't have to limit yourself to these important marketing dates.

If there are niche holidays that might appeal to your audience, it could be worth publishing content on your blog or social media. Check out this [ultimate list of social media holidays](#) – keep an eye on it when you're planning your calendar.

# Content Strategy Template

Ready to get started with your own content marketing strategy?  
[Download this helpful workbook.](#)

It includes key readings and activities to help you fine-tune your plan and develop a robust strategy. You'll learn how to:

- Generate content ideas.
- Create topic clusters and pillar pages.
- Promote your content.
- Repurpose your content based on your needs.

## a Content Creation Framework

work is a structure of processes for publishing content – from the  
st-publication.

1

Section 1

## The Power of Storytelling

Everyone loves a great story. People want to feel connected to a group, to belong. Stories give us a reason to communicate and rely on. Stories make us feel better, smarter. Business storytelling is similar. It's about prospects and customers. But telling your brand's story is more than social media. It's your value, your audience – wherever they are.

into practice.



## The Purpose of This Workbook and How to Use It

Welcome! You're here because you want to grow your business and career by becoming a marketing expert.

To start, what is content marketing?

ing is a strategic marketing and business process focused on creating content and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience, which leads to profitable customer action.



## Content Marketing Strategy Examples

To understand what a content strategy is, let's explore some examples of real-life content strategies based on a few business goals.

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Let's start with Evernote, a note-taking app, that developed an SEO-driven content strategy to attract new prospects to their website.

I'm a huge fan of Evernote's blog, which offers a wealth of knowledge on the topic of productivity. The blog post, [How To Stay Disciplined When Times Are Tough](#), incentivized our content writers to grab a pen and write down some of the tips they liked best.

But *why* is a company that sells a note-taking app writing about discipline?

Because it's how their website is found when people search "How to stay disciplined" on Google.

People interested in reading content related to productivity are likely the *same* people interested in downloading Evernote's note-taking product.



On the contrary, if Evernote's marketing team simply created content for the sake of increasing traffic – like publishing "Our 10 Favorite Beyonce Songs" – it wouldn't be considered a content *strategy* at all, it would just be content.

A strategy needs to align content with business goals. In Evernote's case, the strategy aligns content (blog posts on productivity) with the business goal of attracting leads (people interested in note-taking) to their site.

Let's take a look at another example to see how a good content strategy can help businesses with sales enablement.



Consider the following scenario: A prospect calls a sales representative at Wistia and asks questions related to Wistia's video hosting service.

As the Wistia sales rep speaks with her, he learns her business is using a few other tools to convert leads into sales, including Intercom.

Bingo.

Once the call ends, the sales rep sends the prospect a follow-up email with a blog post about [Wistia's integration with Intercom](#), which enables Intercom users to further personalize messages to prospects based on video-watching data they collect through Wistia.

This is a prime example of how you might use a content strategy as a sales enablement tool.

On the surface, it might seem odd that Wistia has dedicated content regarding *another* business tool. However, this content is a great resource for Wistia's sales team, particularly when prospects have concerns regarding how Wistia's product can integrate with their existing software or processes.

Now that we've explored a few examples of content strategies, let's dive into the *types* of content marketing assets you can develop.

# Types of Content Marketing

1. Blog posts
2. Ebooks
3. Case studies
4. Templates
5. Infographics
6. Videos
7. Podcasts
8. Social media



These are the eight most popular types of content marketing you can create for your readers and customers.

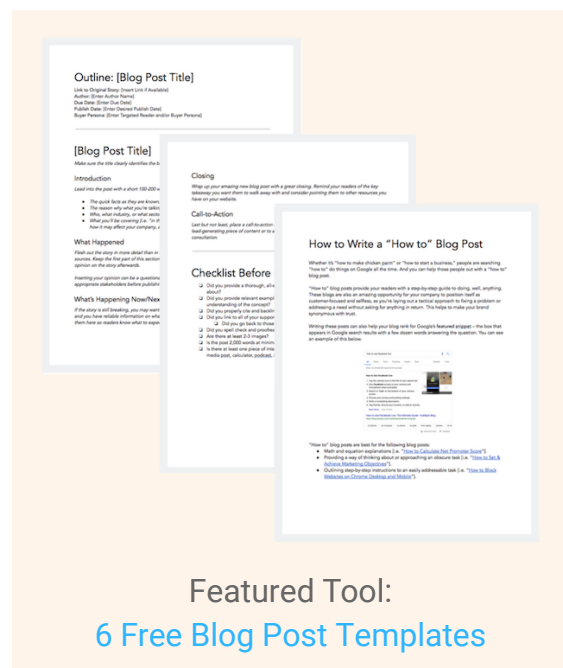
## 1. Blog Posts

Blog posts live on a website and should be published regularly to attract new visitors.

Posts should provide valuable content for your audience that makes them inclined to share posts on social media and across other websites.

We recommend that blog posts be between 1,000 and 2,000 words in length, but you should experiment to see if your audience prefers longer or shorter reads.

Check out HubSpot's [free blog post templates](#) for writing great how-to, listicle, curation, SlideShare presentation, and newsjacking posts on your own blog.



**Outline: [Blog Post Title]**  
Link to original source (must be a URL)  
Author (Name, Author Name)  
Date (Date, Day, Month)  
Publication (Name, Location, Publisher, Date)  
Image (Image, Image Name, Image URL)

**[Blog Post Title]**  
Make sure the title clearly identifies the topic.

**Introduction**  
Lead into the post with a short 100-200+ word intro.  
• The goal: Hook, inform, engage.  
• The reader only stays if you're interesting, relevant, and useful.  
• What you'll be covering (e.g., "In this post, we'll explore your company's...")

**What Happened**  
Start out the story in more detail than in previous steps. Keep the focus on the action itself, not the story elements.  
Answer your question for the questions appropriate subscribers before posting.

**What's Happening Now/Next**  
If the story is still ongoing, give your readers a heads-up on what's next. If the story is over, give your readers a heads-up on what's next.

**Closing**  
Wrap up your article with a clear closing. Remind your readers of the key takeaways and your main point. Thank them for reading.

**Call-to-Action**  
Lead but not force. Offer a call to action that generates more of content or a consultation.

**Checklist Before**  
• Did you provide a thorough, in-depth overview?  
• Did you provide relevant external links?  
• Did you provide a clear and specific call to action?  
• Did you use an all caps for important words?  
• Did you use an all caps for important words?  
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**How to Write a "How to" Blog Post**  
Whether it's "How to make chicken pot pie" or "How to start a business," simply writing "How to" is enough to get you started. And you can help these people out with a "How to" blog post.  
"How to" blog posts provide your readers with a step-by-step guide to doing, well, anything. From fixing the car to writing speeches for your company to getting back on customer feedback and advice, you're being out a better approach to being a position or addressing a need without asking for anything in return. This helps to keep your brand relevant and useful.  
Writing how-to posts can also help your blog rank for Google's featured snippet. The box that appears in Google search results with a few short words answering the question. You can see an example of this below.  
"How to" blog posts are best for the following blog posts:  
• How to create a business plan (e.g., "How to create a business plan")  
• How to get a job (e.g., "How to get a job")  
• How to start a business (e.g., "How to start a business")  
• How to write a resume (e.g., "How to write a resume")  
• How to write a cover letter (e.g., "How to write a cover letter")

Featured Tool:  
[6 Free Blog Post Templates](#)

## 2. EBooks

If you haven't already noticed, you're currently reading an EBook. Ebooks are lead-generation tools that website visitors download after submitting a lead form with their contact information. They're typically longer, more in-depth, and published less frequently than blog posts, which are written to attract visitors to a website.

But ebooks aren't only effective for the top of the funnel.

As Nora Leary, Growth Director at Ironpaper, Inc., notes, "Ebooks serve different purposes at varying stages in the buyer's journey."

She stated,

"Awareness-level ebooks help educate the prospect about a certain pain point and are an excellent lead capture tool. The content should remain introductory and informational."

Leary added, "Ebooks can convert leads in the funnel by offering them useful tools as prospects consider their needs more in-depth. An ebook here might dive deeper into a particular problem and solution options and include templates or calculators. Ebooks further down the funnel should become more personalized and offer more sales content. Comparison guides or an ebook of case studies are beneficial for prospects at this stage."

Ebooks are the next step in the [inbound marketing process](#). After reading a blog post, such as this one, visitors might want more information.

This is where [calls-to-action](#) (CTAs) come into play, directing people to a landing page where they can submit their contact information and download an ebook to learn more valuable information for their business. In turn, the business producing the ebook has a new lead for the sales team to contact.



Featured Tool:  
[18 Free Ebook Templates](#)


### 3. Case Studies

A case study allows you to tell a customer story and build credibility in the process.

A case study is perhaps your most versatile type of content marketing because it can take many different forms – some of which are on this list.

That's right, case studies can take the form of a blog post, ebook, podcast, or even an infographic.

The goal is to demonstrate how your product/service helped real-life companies succeed. Before choosing a customer for a case study, you should determine which business area you're trying to drive value.



Featured Tool:  
[3 Free Case Study Templates](#)

## 4. Templates

**Templates** are effective content marketing examples to try because they generate leads while offering tremendous value to your audience.

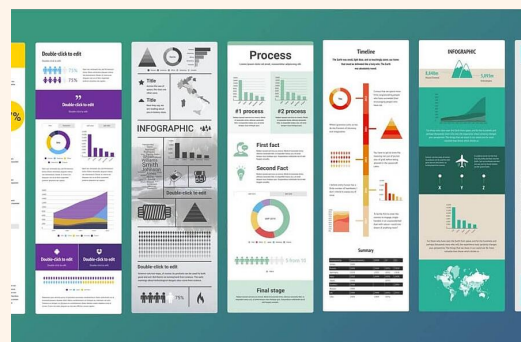
When you provide your audience with template tools you are helping them save time and helping them be better equipped to succeed, making them more likely to engage with your content in the future.

## 5. Infographics

Infographics can organize and visualize data in a more compelling way than words alone.

These are great content formats to use if you're trying to share a lot of data in a way that is clear and easy to understand.

If you're ready to get started, HubSpot offers free templates for [creating beautiful infographics](#) in less than an hour.



Featured Tool:  
[15 Free Infographic Templates](#)

## 6. Videos

Videos are a highly engaging content medium and are shareable across social media platforms and websites alike.

Videos require a bigger investment of time and resources than written content, but as visual content continues to offer big ROI, it's a medium worth exploring.



**The Ultimate Video Marketing Starter Pack**

Videos, resources, and tips on how to get your video marketing strategy off the ground.

HubSpot | videoask  
by Typetform

Featured Tool:  
[Free Video Marketing Starter Pack + Templates](#)

## 7. Podcasts

Starting a podcast will help audiences find your brand if they don't have time or interest in reading content every day.

The number of podcast listeners is growing — in 2021, there was a 10% year-over-year increase in U.S. podcast listeners.

If you have interesting people to interview or conversations to host, consider podcasting as another content format to experiment with.



**How to Start a Podcast**  
A guide to getting a podcast for your business planned, launched, and listened to.

HubSpot

Featured Tool:  
[How to Start a Podcast](#)

## 8. Social Media

Once you've been regularly publishing content on your own site for a while, start thinking about a social media strategy to distribute your content on social media.

In addition to sharing your content, you can also repurpose it into new formats and create original content specifically for each platform.

Posting on social media is pivotal to amplifying your brand's reach and delivering your content to your customers where you know they spend their time. Popular social networks include:

- [Facebook](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Pinterest](#)
- [Snapchat](#)
- [YouTube](#)
- [TikTok](#)

When launching a business account on any of the social networks above, adjust your content to fit the platform.

On Instagram, for example, users want aesthetically pleasing visuals. With feeds, IGTV, and Stories, you have a lot of room to play with. TikTok, on the other hand, appeals to a younger demographic that wants trendy, funny, and creative [short-form](#) videos.

Do some market research to discover which platforms your buyers are on, and mold your content to their expectations.

It takes time, organization, and creativity to grow a successful content marketing strategy. From building the foundation of your content marketing plan to adding tools to better manage your content, setting up your strategy doesn't have to be complicated. Use this guide to help you create a content strategy that will drive customer engagement better than before.



# About Inbound 281



## A Growth Agency

Inbound 281 is a full-service, growth-focused digital marketing agency. We help businesses grow by improving their marketing to increase sales, revenue and profits.

We help owners, marketers and sales managers who are looking for new ideas to help sales hit their targets. Often times they are frustrated that, after all the time, efforts and money they have invested, they're still not getting the results they were expecting.

Our sights are set on lead acquisition, lead conversion, and conversion rate optimization.

We specialize in multi-channel digital marketing, including content marketing, web design and development, SEO, pay per click, and social media.

## *Ready for a Conversation?*

What's your dream result? Let's get the digital marketing conversation started!

Looking for new customer acquisition, lead generation, client engagement or a competitive advantage? We're ready to learn more about your goals so we can help you build a Marketing Road Map to help you achieve your goals.

[Schedule a Conversation](#)

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