

A Content Strategy Template You Can Build On

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Picture it. A room full of executives from a company you never thought you could land as a client. They're so engaged in what they are saying that they're leaning forward in their chairs. The CEO looks poised to ask a question but you can tell she doesn't want to interrupt your flow.

This is the moment content strategists dream of.

But if you're like me, it's easy to get caught up in how new the field is and wonder, "Am I even doing this right?" There are lots of posts to help you, such as [How to Build a Content Marketing Strategy](#) and [Content Strategy: You're Doing it Wrong](#). There are also [comprehensive guides](#) to creating content strategies. There's even an [epic list of content strategy resources](#). And there are books (my favorite is Kristina Halvorson and Melissa Rach's *Content Strategy for the Web*).

Still, sometimes you just want to peek over someone else's shoulder at a concrete example to see if there's anything you can learn. This can be especially true if you're working in-house and don't have anyone to bounce ideas off of.

So, I built a template:

Content Strategy Template

How you build your strategy will depend a lot upon what your client has asked for, the information you learn about the challenges they are facing, the industry you're working within, and the amount of time you are able to devote to the strategy.

This template has all the elements you'll need to start researching and writing a content strategy. It's also structured to help you tell a story with that strategy.

As a strategist, you'll find sections you want to omit and sections you want to expand. That's excellent. Because each strategy is unique to the situation, take what you can use and then make the template your own. Also, you won't see a lot of charts and tables in the examples; that's because we're working with a hypothetical client. Remember that data can help you sell your points, so don't forget to illustrate your strategy and include actual statistics when appropriate.

This template is broken down into the following sections:

- **Introduction.** This section gives you an idea of what kind of research you'll be doing to figure out where the content strategy starts.
- **Prologue.** Getting started with a core strategy.
- **Chapter 1: Onsite Content.** Applying your core strategy to this channel.
- **Chapter 2: Blog.** What you need to know to include a blog in your strategy.
- **Chapter 3: Offsite Content.** How your core strategy affects offsite channels.
- **Chapter 4: Governance.** Creating the rules and docs that will help your strategy succeed.
- **Chapter 5: Workflow.** Make sure you have all the right players in all the right positions to efficiently implement your strategy.
- **Epilogue.** Where to start putting that strategy into action and how to measure success.

What a content strategy should look like

Content strategies take many forms, from a 50-page word document to an hour-long PowerPoint presentation. That means this template is not meant to be gospel. Instead, it introduces you to the many moving parts that make up a content strategy and gives you an example of how I, based on the years I spent consulting on content strategies for everything from stock photography to software as a service, would write it up.

Peek over my shoulder to get your next strategy started, or just to get a glimpse of how someone else approaches a strategy. Build on this template and make it your own. You'll find that the template is written from an agency perspective (with lots of references to "the client") but it works equally well if you are in-house and are writing for that one, all-important client—your boss.

What goes into a content strategy

The content strategy template walks you through researching and writing up the three key elements of a content strategy: what content looks like now, what it should look like, and the ecosystem in which content is created.

Content today

A strategy should provide an assessment of the client's current content, as well as insight into their competitors' content. That assessment may include any or all of the following:

- Personas
- Stakeholder interviews
- Content inventory
- Content audit
- Gap analysis
- Competitive analysis

Content in the future

Then you want to show your client where the content should take them and how they can use various channels to get there. Some of [many places content resides](#) are:

Onsite content

- Homepage
- Landing pages
- Category pages
- Product descriptions
- Blog
- Error pages
- Etc.

Offsite content

- Emails
- Social media
- Brochures
- Packaging
- Invoices
- Voicemail messages

- Etc.

Governance (aka the content ecosystem)

Finally, you want to think about the environment in which the content gets created—the governance of content. This includes:

- Brand, voice, and style guidelines
- Workflow analysis
- Best practices for writing on the web
- SEO tips
- Editorial calendar

See the template for more in-depth descriptions of all of these elements as well as some of my favorite tools to get them done.

Again, take these pieces and use them to create your own template. Each strategy you do will require its own tweaks, but this will give you the leg up to put your own stamp on this emerging field.

The storytelling of content strategy

My brand of content strategy, and you'll see this reflected a little in the template, is that a content strategy is a story. For a deeper understanding of this, check out the Mozinar I gave a few weeks ago, [The Storytelling of Content Strategy](#).

Basically, I advocate for taking the elements of fiction and using them to get a fresh perspective on a brand's journey toward a goal.

Here's how the five elements of a story are also the basis of a content strategy:



Stories	Content Strategy
The heroes	Your brand/customers
The ground situation	Your current landscape
The central desire	Your business goals
Antagonists	Your competitors
The plot	Your strategy



1. Brands and customers are heroes

A content strategy can either be about a brand's journey to land a customer (useful when a brand is new or has lost its way), or a content strategy can be about a customer's journey and how the brand can help. See the webinar for an example of each.

2. Your current landscape is your ground situation

You can't start a strategy until you know where your hero is coming from. Most of the initial research you do—from [stakeholder interviews](#) to [content inventories and audits](#)—is to understand the starting point of your strategy. This is where the journey begins. You will be measuring all future success against the understanding you build of this landscape.

3. Goals articulate your central desire

You can't plot a strategy if you don't know what direction the brand wants to grow. Goals should come from the brand itself, but you might find that the brand needs a little coaching. It's helpful if you distinguish overall business goals from content goals. They are related, but there are some goals (e.g. reducing employee turnover) that content plays a much smaller role in achieving. Setting specific goals for your content strategy also lets you get more granular about some goals in which content is the star player (e.g. increasing email open rate).

4. Competitors are antagonists

Even if you're going to write the most TAGFEE content strategy ever, you still need to figure out where your competitors are and how you can learn from their example. And it's important to remember that because of the way search engines work, your business competitors might be different than your SERP competitors. Ideally a content strategy will address both.

5. Plot is strategy

At this point in the story, you know who the players are, what's working and what's not, and have some ideas about how to move forward to achieve those goals.

When I write up a strategy, I think about them as though I were plotting a novel. Each tactic or channel is a way to move the brand closer to those goals. What obstacles might they encounter? Who are they competing with in the space? How can they master this tactic or channel? And how can content help them achieve their goals and ride happily off into the sunset?

Making a content strategy your own

Now it's time to [download that template](#) and see what story your content strategy is trying to tell. Once you're confident in the strategy you're presenting, you'll have the complete attention of every executive in that conference room. And, with any luck, they'll refer you to their friends.

[Download the template](#)

I want to learn from you, too. Is there anything you'd include in the template that I haven't covered? Do you have any strategies for success in presenting content strategies or any lessons learned? Please share your ideas and stories in the comments.

About Isla_McKetta — As a Content Crafter with Moz, Isla uses her MFA in creative writing to write words and organize them in a way that resonates with an audience. She co-authored [Clear Out the Static in Your Attic: A Writer's Guide for Turning Artifacts into Art.](#)