

Content Trends Report

Vol. 4: The State of Content



Summary

Content is a buzzword. Netflix, Hulu Plus, BuzzFeed, Facebook, your phone: users are consuming content all the time, everywhere. You need to make it, but how can you be sure you're making content that keeps you ahead of the game (and your competition) in 2017 and 2018, instead of just afloat in 2016?

Evolving PR

Communications used to be simple: put out a press release and push something through PR Newswire, and you could be on your way to success. Not so in the modern age. As digital communications continues to grow while print media dies, communications has become a broad, multi-channel affair.

PR's shift from traditional channels to multi-channel has led to the true growth of content. Almost immediately, brands' most successful strategies keep two things in mind:

1. **Maintain a consistency of branding across all media.** This can mean the look and feel of collateral, but also includes the tone of voice and even vocabulary.

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2. **When using multiple channels, tailor the content so that it is “native” to that channel.** Both Facebook and YouTube have video messaging, but what works for one does not necessarily work for the other (and vice versa).

A robust content strategy in 2016 and beyond requires a team of subject matter experts working in concert. Having content producers and channel managers working on messaging and KPIs, while seeking out opportunities for additional content, is the only way to thrive.

Content in SEO

We can see the content trend everywhere, but search engine optimization (SEO) may be the most readily apparent place to see it.

For a long time, “content is king” has been an SEO phrase of choice. But what does that tangibly mean? Let’s take a look at the Google Answer Box. When you search for terms like “how to tie a tie,” you get answers to your very specific questions directly in the search results, rather than having to click through to a website. In some cases, this means your content appears immediately, even if you’re not using any of the keywords in the query.

It’s part of a broader push towards useable online content, rather than just content that is stuffed with keywords. This is such a paradigm shift that even [the coveted number one spot in search results doesn’t have the value it once did](#).

Let’s take a look at an example:

The screenshot shows a Google search for "What is SEO". The search bar contains the text "What is SEO" and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar, there are tabs for "All", "Videos", "News", "Maps", "Images", "More", and "Search tools". The search results show "About 108,000,000 results (1.13 seconds)".

The first result is an Answer Box for "Search engine optimization". It contains the following text: "Search engine optimization is a methodology of strategies, techniques and tactics used to increase the amount of visitors to a website by obtaining a high-ranking placement in the search results page of a search engine (SERP) – including Google, Bing, Yahoo and other search engines." To the right of this text is a word cloud containing terms like "SERP", "Search engine", "strategy", "keyword", "link-building", "white-hat", "analysis", "SEO engine", "content", "website", "traffic", "investment", "optimize", "organic", and "ranking".

Below the Answer Box is a link to "What is Search Engine Optimization (SEO)? Webopedia Definition" with the URL "www.webopedia.com/TERM/S/SEO.html".

Below that is a link to "What Is SEO / Search Engine Optimization? - Search Engine Land" with the URL "searchengineland.com/guide/what-is-seo".

Below that is a link to "What is SEO? Here's A Simple Plain English Answer, SEO in a Nutshell" with the URL "https://www.redevolution.com/what-is-seo".



This screenshot is from a search query we conducted here at Delucchi Plus. Right at the top of the results is the answer to our question. But this is Google's Answer Box – *not* the number 1 spot. The listing that the Answer Box is sourcing does not appear in the results until the 5th spot (not pictured).

It doesn't stop there, though. Ever heard of Rank Brain? Google's main differentiator during their launch in the dark days of 1999 was that it heavily factored external linking into its algorithm. External linking was, at the time, the best way to gauge how valuable users found the content on any given website. But it led to link farms, link sellers and a host of other bad consequences. The algorithm has evolved over the years, but external linking is *still* a very strong factor in ranking.

Now here's the rub: 99% of the pages on the web *don't* have any external links. But what happens if one of those pages has the most useable content?

This is where Google's Rank Brain steps in. Rank Brain is meant to bridge that gap by understanding (as close as it can to a human) the usefulness of that deep content. It's only in its infancy right now, and (fascinatingly) Google's own engineers don't even understand how it works. However, it's safe to assume that as it becomes more and more sophisticated, Rank Brain will become more and more of an influential ranking factor.

The point here is that ranking is not something sites can game through link farms or keyword stuffing. Instead, sites must genuinely *earn* it by having relevant, useful content.

Content in Social

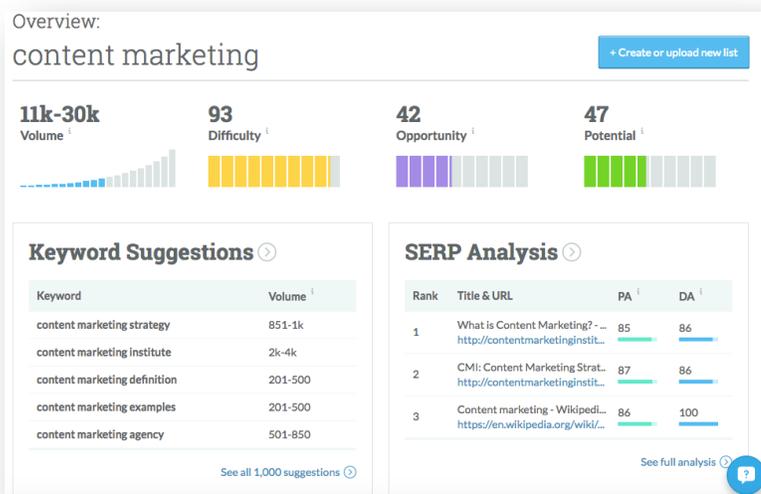
SEO is all well and good, but that's only one avenue for how your content gets in front of users. Social channels are the bread and butter for how businesses do their messaging and how users spend their time on the web. It's the perfect place for your branded content.

You probably already know that you can post your pictures and videos to Facebook, but Facebook (arguably more than any other brand) has been pushing emerging content as new avenues. For examples, take a look at [its new 360 videos](#), or [its investment in virtual reality](#).

Facebook is doing everything it can to let businesses provide users with engaging content. Who wants to read a bland status update when they can [take a trip through an alien landscape](#)? Yes, [a lot of money is in it for Facebook](#), but the company's push for diverse, engaging media is probably the biggest sign of the times.



Here's a quick example from the new [MOZ Keyword Explorer](#):



This tool includes suggestions for new keywords (such as IE or content topics). And MOZ isn't the only tool. There are plenty of others available for your company to leverage these insights – and many that you probably already have (looking at you, Google Analytics).

3. What's working for your competition?

An often overlooked no-brainer is to start with your competition. After all, your competitors are (obviously) trying to accomplish the same goals as you, so why not pop over to their website and have a browse? Do they have any content that you find useful? Then, consider their social channels. What posts are getting the most engagement? Finally, is there anything that they're *not* doing (video, infographics, etc.)? These are all great places to look for content opportunities.

4. Never make content without a goal.

What's your endgame for your content? If it lives on your website, what actions do you want the user to take while they're interacting with it? Don't just make content for the sake of making content.

For example:

- **Don't:** "We need more social messaging! Post something cute to Facebook!"
 - Social messaging is important, but if there's no goal to post for Mothers Day or Arbor Day or a Hug-a-Cat Day, don't do it. Does the content you're posting speak to your audience? If it does, does it speak to your brand? Finally, how does this particular piece of content support your brand to your target audience?



- **Do:** “We’re not leveraging social channels to address this subset of our audience at the top of the funnel. What kinds of educational pieces of content can we make snackable and post to these channels?”
 - This is a much more targeted approach. It shows an understanding of the audience and helps them take a journey through conversion. This approach also demonstrates that content should be native to the channel on which it’s being utilized.

Ultimately, a robust, multi-channel content strategy is very difficult. Here is a list of free tools and resources to help you identify your audience, their interests and any content opportunities that you might be leaving on the table:

Tool	How to Use It
Facebook Audience Insights	Facebook audience insights amazing for gleaning information about your audience that might not be readily apparent. If you have an email list, you can upload it directly into the Facebook advertising platform. As long as it's at least 1,000 users large, your audience will populate and provide you with deep behavioral and interest information. This information will be most useful for telling you what kind of content subject matter your audience resonates with. As a bonus, this information can be applied directly to any paid marketing targeting that you're doing on social or other channels.
Quantcast Measure Pixel	Quantcast has a tag that you can place on your site - very similar to Google Analytics - that will give you incredibly detailed information about the demographics of your website, specifically interesting are the insights into average household income and political leanings. The most useful, though, is the report that shows you the other websites that your users most frequent. This is the most direct insight into very specific content other than your own that your audience is interacting with online.
Google Analytics	You should already be using Google Analytics. If it's not on your website already, get it on there ASAP. Once it's on there, take a look at your top performing pages. What about your top performing landing pages? What about your landing pages when you filter by organic search traffic? This content is what your audience is literally asking for (in that they're the answers to the intent of search queries). Is there any way for you to supplement this content by creating additional pages to supplement it? This is the low-hanging-fruit of content opportunity identification.
SEMRush	SEMRush provides you with stellar competitive intelligence in the search space. If you're looking to inform your content, it will show you (similar to the method we discussed for Google Analytics) which of your content is ranking most readily in the search results. Additionally, it ALSO shows you who your competition is. Make a list of the search terms that are garnering organic search impressions for your site, and make a list of your competitors. Now, go look at your content and their content and see how you can supplement it or improve it.

Now That You've Made it, Use it

You've put in all the work of identifying your audience and producing content that is useful to them. So what else can you do? Sadly, content marketing can be a slow burn, a far cry from the fast-paced, immediate results form of advertising that can be seen in paid search. Given that, should you just constantly churn out new content and hope for the best?

Obviously, no. Many of the more engaging, useful pieces of content that you can create have inherently higher levels of investment. No one would probably argue that a two-minute how-to video is more engaging than a four-paragraph blog post, but it's



obviously much more of an investment producing the video. How can you maximize its value?

We've briefly touched on this already, but don't be afraid to repurpose your content. Video is the simplest example, since it's so versatile: you can take screenshots and turn them into social posts, you can edit it down into smaller segments and make YouTube or Facebook ads and you can type up summaries or recaps as blog posts.

Think outside of the box (or at least beyond the video). Do you have a particularly well-performing piece of past content that you can revisit from a new perspective? Blog posts or **[cough]** trends reports **[cough]** are excellent long-form pieces of content, but can the content medium of these be changed or updated? Listicles are good, but they can also be found everywhere. What about an infographic?

Finally, think about what your audience is doing when they see this content. What type of device are they on, and what channel? You can take one piece of content and adapt it accordingly for any of these use-cases.

Conclusion

Content marketing is incredibly difficult, but here to stay. You can either fight it and fall into obscurity, or tackle the challenge head-on and grow your channels and thus your business. A plethora of data and resources is available to help guide your content strategy, production and management, but that can require a room full of expert knowledge and experience to drive results.

Ultimately, the goal of these trends reports is to arm our clients, colleagues and partners with the latest thinking in the digital space. We hope that you learned some valuable insight in this space from this report, and that your content strategy will be strengthened because of it. At Delucchi Plus, content is our passion – and we're excited to share that passion with you and your brand!

If you find yourself with questions, or in need of additional insight, please [contact us](#) to learn how our Strategy + Insights team can help your team and business grow.