
40 clever ways to build your business case for content
Sticky Content
Part of the Press Association

‘Senior management make the biggest dent in the quality of digital content.’

Content professionals from around the world told us that in our last annual survey*. It seems **the more senior the stakeholder, the harder it is** to get usable, customer-facing content signed off.

And it’s not just approval processes blocking our content strategies. Getting genuine **board level buy-in** for content initiatives or **senior support for content governance** were the two biggest pain points raised in our Content Strategy training courses** this year.

But a sea change is occurring. Content has grown very competitive, especially online. No longer a fluffy, creative nice-to-have; it’s now a hardcore, measurable, brand-differentiating, market share-grabbing, money-making asset.

But of course, *you* already know all that. This little book is designed to **help you win the hearts and minds** of those meddlesome senior managers who don’t, and build your business case for content.

*State of Digital Copywriting 2013. Download from www.stickycontent.com/survey **Training courses for Econsultancy and Usability Week


Figure it out...

1 Find out exactly what your content costs

Most senior managers simply want to know: **how will content make or save us money?** They want a proven return on investment (ROI). It's a frequent misconception that content doesn't cost much to produce. Start by being transparent and realistic about the cost of getting content created.

Calculating the 'I' of your ROI can be difficult with content. If you've outsourced an infographic, it's easy to see what the agency charged you. But are you capturing the cost of internal hours spent briefing, giving feedback and project managing?



This calculation gets trickier still with something like an internally-sourced blog. Time spent on idea generation, research, writing, editing, getting approval – possibly from Compliance – publishing via the CMS and monitoring and responding to comments all needs to be assigned a £ value. But once done, **it adds great credibility to your business case**.

Ask us about improving the ROI of your content: emailus@stickycontent.com

2 Measure for measure

'Measuring the effectiveness of content' was voted the most difficult aspect of content production in our market survey. Results showed a market stuck with the same old metrics: page views and unique visits, conversions, open rates, social shares and clickthroughs.

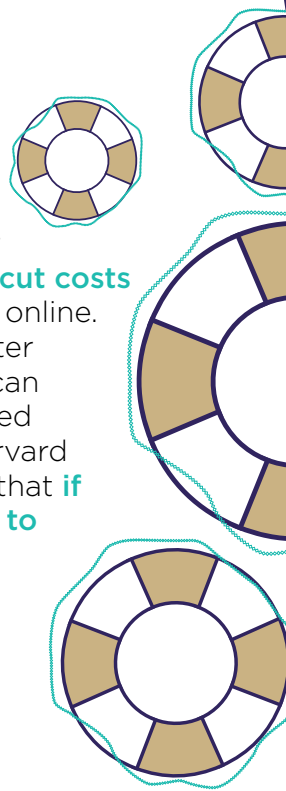
Since then, **we have seen ever more creative ways of assigning value to content**. Cross-referencing content consumption with valuable customer behaviours over time, for example. Or understanding how dwell times correlate to targeted sharing and sign-ups.

So in your battle to show how content affects the bottom line, start by beefing up your content scoring and assessment activities.

3 Saving graces

Don't forget that returns in the form of cost savings to your company are as valid as any other.

We've seen a recent rise in customer service **copy projects designed to cut costs** by persuading people to self-help online. Improving help content so it's faster to find and easier to understand can have quantifiable benefits in reduced helpline use and email queries. A Harvard Business School survey* also shows that **if you lower the effort a customer has to make to get help, 83 per cent will increase their spend** with you.



*Harvard Business School customer service survey 2010

Pop the right question

The content market is currently obsessed with *engagement*.
And most buzzwords eventually make their way to the boardroom.

4

So ensure you **educate people in what true love really looks like**. A is easy. Even a comment can be superficial (or negative). Prospects who kneejerk-share stuff they've barely read, without adding commentary, are not necessarily that into you.

But posting something thoughtful on your wall, for example, or curating other relevant information and adding/explaining those links to potential readers: these things are time-consuming. And **when your content is so good your target audience is prepared to give time and proper attention in return**, that's a really good sign.

To report upwards how engaged an audience really is, make sure your **engagement scorecard** ranks activity according to the time and effort taken to like, share or comment.

Ask us about creating engaging social content:
emailus@stickycontent.com




Shout about it...

5 We're the talk of the town

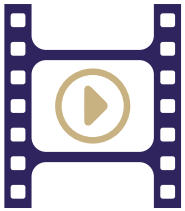
Good, shareable content can really get you seen. And for senior management, that might mean being able to stand among industry peers and enjoy their evident jealousy. Take a tip from one of our clients and circulate a weekly **'boast post'** to keep everyone up to speed on your latest content successes.

6 Formats feed efficiency

Efficient editorial processes save companies money. Our #1 tip for getting quality content out of contributors faster is to **provide strict editorial formats**. It's how all newspapers hit their deadlines. You can build in usability, SEO, ideal word counts... the lot. Frankly, the FD should be persuading you to develop formats!

Ask us about editorial formats:
emailus@stickycontent.com

7 Get 'em on the record



Testimonials make great ammunition. Ask your favourite customers to **go on the record** explaining how your content helped them. If you can capture them on video, all the better...

8 Embrace inventory

Use your content inventory to build up insights into your existing content that might **shock people into change** by showing them where it's not serving business needs. Then circulate these to the most influential people internally.

For example, **who are your company's most valuable customers?** Or most desirable audience? And what percentage of your current content is mapped to their specific needs?

Often we inadvertently end up **creating content either for ourselves or for political purposes**, leaving our audiences short-changed. Cross-referencing your content inventory with user personas can show where you have gaps to fill.

Ask us about content audits and inventories:
emailus@stickycontent.com

9 Trial by combat

If you're struggling to get buy-in for your plans, throw some Game of Thrones-style swagger at it and demand a split test.

Facebook's Sarah Cancilla often tells the tale of how she won people round to the importance of content strategy by **identifying small, unloved areas of the platform where copy improvements could be made**.

One of Sarah's earliest endeavours at Facebook increased mobile trials of the platform by 56 per cent. Imagine how hearts and minds were swayed when a little strategy swung over 6 million Facebook followers into action!

10

Those who can, teach

'The one exclusive sign of thorough **knowledge is the power to teach**,' said Aristotle. Have you harnessed your own power to teach your colleagues what you know about content?

At Sticky, we see sharing knowledge as the single most effective way to build a culture for content in an organisation. Lately, we've seen a significant rise in demand for workshops and stakeholder engagement sessions. Here are some ideas for sessions you could run:

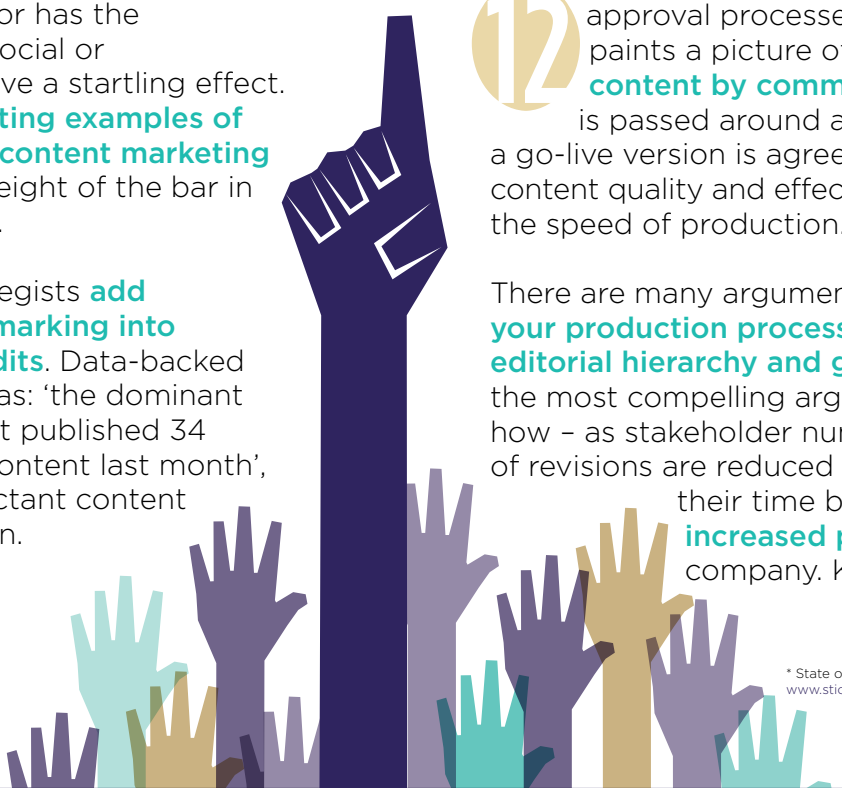



Get competitive...

11 Use their competitive streak

A formal report showing how a key competitor has the edge in, say, social or email, can have a startling effect. **Keep circulating examples of competitive content marketing** to show the height of the bar in your market sector.

Many content strategists **add competitor benchmarking into annual content audits**. Data-backed observations such as: 'the dominant brand in our market published 34 original pieces of content last month', may galvanise reluctant content investors into action.



12 Streamline sign-off

Lots of us struggle with complex internal approval processes. Our survey* paints a picture of companies doing **content by committee**, where work is passed around and around until a go-live version is agreed. This can dilute content quality and effectiveness, and impacts the speed of production.

There are many arguments for **streamlining your production process** and **introducing editorial hierarchy and governance**. Often the most compelling argument is to show how – as stakeholder numbers and rounds of revisions are reduced – people will get their time back. And that means **increased productivity** for the company. Ker-ching!

* State of Digital Content survey. Download for free from www.stickycontent.com/survey

13

Every second counts

Improved content about your products or services should correlate to a **drop in queries about them**. Make sure you've got the baseline measurements in place to monitor this from the get-go.

A recent Sticky project saw us knock **30 seconds off the average post-booking courtesy call**, as customers appeared better informed. That 30 seconds represented an annual five-figure cost-saving for that client globally.

Ask us about copy optimisation and measurement:
emailus@stickycontent.com



14

What's the cost of doing nothing?

Here's a metric that's often overlooked: **doing nothing won't always cost you nothing**. Can you demonstrate how a lack of intelligent content on the web, in social media or in mobile-friendly formats, will increasingly benefit your competitors?

It takes time to build up a strong set of content assets that can be picked up by search engines, grow your social profile and recruit followers. It's a long game. **Explain how much harder it is to catch up** if you're a late entrant to content marketing.

15 Work on your 1-2-1s

Content initiatives get vetoed when their value hasn't been clearly communicated to the right people. Wherever possible, **seek individual sessions with senior stakeholders**.

If they're not up on digital trends, they're hardly likely to halt a workshop to ask, 'Sorry, what is programmatic advertising?' You'll need private sessions to identify and fill knowledge gaps, or risk their disengagement.

Equally, there may be budgetary issues or board-level power plays you know nothing about. To get heavyweight content advocates on side, **make time to understand their priorities**, and show how your content plans can support them.

16 Go evergreen

A significant content cost that often gets overlooked is maintenance. **How much is it costing you to keep your content current**, correct, compliant and not embarrassingly out-of-date?

Clever editors know how to structure and create content for minimum maintenance. Show the C-suite how keeping that 80 per cent or more of your content evergreen will impact the bottom line.

Perennially useful **evergreen content also generates significant link equity** – the gift that keeps on giving. Show how you'll keep your golden oldies alive with a smart linking strategy designed to deepen users' experiences.



17

Let them eat cake...

Never underestimate the power of sugar-based snacks to up the energy in a content workshop. Or sandwiches. Or a bit of fizz. Lure unwilling stakeholders to a content-related meeting by **appealing to their basic instincts**. Once they're there, you can usually get them to listen – at least until the table is bare.







18



Bring in the brainiacs

When it comes to content best practice, your bosses ought to take your word for it. But when they won't, **sometimes it pays to pull a heavyweight academic report out of your back pocket**.

For example, when arguing for succinct, modular mobile prose, point to Dr R.I. Singh of the University of Alberta. He found that when people read complex information on an iPhone-sized screen, their comprehension levels drop to 48 per cent of their desktop scores.

Ask us about optimising mobile copy:
emailus@stickycontent.com

People are our biggest asset

Companies stand or fall on whether they can attract and retain talent. Your **content might be the first impression** a candidate gets of your corporate brand. Scare the C-suite with these stats:

16

Jobseekers use an average of 16 different sources when looking for a job

85%

85% use search engines; 83% look for company career sites

2 in 5

2 in 5 candidates say their perception of a company is negatively impacted if its site is not mobile-optimised

62%

62% will check you out on social media to get a sense of company culture and reputation

Pose a tough question to your board: **are our current content assets likely to impress potential employees?** Can you quantify the value of direct job applications from high-quality candidates? Or the economic loss to the company if weak content puts them off applying?

Source: CareerBuilder's 2013 Candidate Behaviour Study asked 5,518 candidates how they searched for jobs – www.careerbuildercommunications.com/candidatebehavior


Lead by examples...

20

Scary stats

Do a bit of research and you'll start to see what typical open rates and inbound leads are in your industry and how you stack up against them.



Dig out those scary statistics that'll get your voice heard. For example, according to HubSpot*, B2B and B2C **companies with 101-200 pages of content generate 2.5 times more leads** than those with 50 or fewer. And companies that blog 15+ times a month get five times more traffic than companies that don't blog.

21

3 is the magic number

Choice is very powerful and **nudge behaviour suggests we choose options relatively**. So present a choice of three content plans, ranging from budget to blingtastic. The medium plan is the one you really want signed off. The expensive plan will make it look cheaper by comparison.



*HubSpot's State of Inbound marketing 2014

22 Plans win prizes

You can build a hard business case even for seemingly 'soft' activities like editorial planning. **Always emphasise the value of old-school editorial rigour**.

It may be obvious to you, but it's well worth explaining how assigning clear responsibilities, sharing content workloads evenly across departments, anticipating busy periods and holiday downtime can all result in tangible efficiencies in content production.

23 Get on the case

Nothing sells better than a real-life success story. There are fantastic content case studies everywhere, just waiting to reinforce your **argument for increased content investment**. Agency websites are a great place to start. Try, ahem, **www.stickycontent.com/casestudies**



24 Look into the future

Get in your time machine. If your **senior managers like big ideas**, why not show them what the company could be producing five years down the line? Build up a really vivid picture of a content-producing machine that's creating high-quality content and getting kudos for it.

25

Mock it up. Lock it up

There might be a language barrier between you and senior management. You say 'copy optimisation', they think 'new photocopier'. So instead of using terms they might not understand, **mock up what you mean and show them**.

Repeatable formats, scannable pages and links telling the user where they're going are more usable. And when someone sees them on their page – thanks to your free trial of Photoshop, perhaps – **they're more likely to get what you're on about**.



26

Content for the cool kids



Part of the content strategist's role is to be an evangelist. If you do this, word will slowly work its way up the company food chain. **Start by actively spreading exciting gossip about the ground-breaking content shake-ups you're doing**, and watch the water-cooler do its work.

Find a place (intranet, email newsletter, noticeboard) **to share any metric which inspires better content**. Coca-Cola's Content 20:20 vision (which is explained on YouTube) invites employees to take some risks with content. This doesn't mean potential lawsuit-type risks of course. Just pushing the boundaries of your ideas.

Of course, generating and testing unusual content gets great attention internally. **So, could a little bit of risk net you some big rewards?**

27

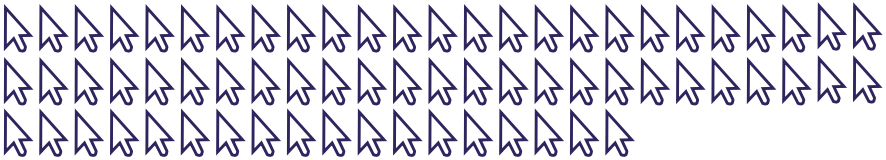
Prop up the bar chart

It's an unfortunate fact that you can make your point until you're blue in the face but **people will take you more seriously when you 'mathify' it**.

Compare someone saying, 'We've got far too much content on our website. No one's reading this stuff, we need to cut it right down" with this.

How many of our web pages were visited in the past 6 months?

68%
Not visited



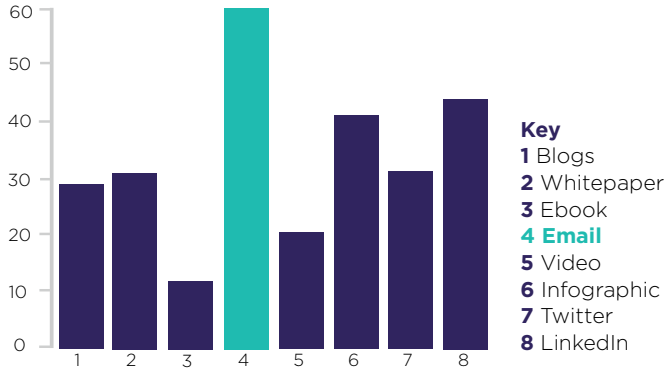
32%
Visited



28 Show, don't tell

Make sure budget-holders are clear on what kinds of content work for your company so that **investment is made in the right places**. Senior managers often latch on to trends and this leads to one kind of content being prioritised for me-too reasons. ('Let's do a mobile app!' 'Why aren't we on Pinterest?') Even a simple line chart can help focus minds on where to put budget, resource and support.

What content generated the leads for our closed/ won opportunities this year?



29 Top of the pops

Charts can also be used to **encourage competition among your contributors**. There's nothing like seeing a colleague's blog post top an internal chart for traffic scores to spur reluctant writers into action.

Says business author Tom Rath (whose book *Strengthsfinder 2.0* was ranked Amazon's #1 global best seller in business planning): 'Employees who report receiving recognition and praise within the last seven days **show increased productivity, get higher scores from customers and have better safety records**. They're just more engaged at work.'


On your marks...



30 Happy Heur

Not all the content pain points you want to raise with senior management will have statistical evidence. So **embrace heuristics**. Taken from the Greek Εὑρίσκω, meaning to find or discover, heuristics allow you to put numbers against the problems and trends you pick up during qualitative auditing.

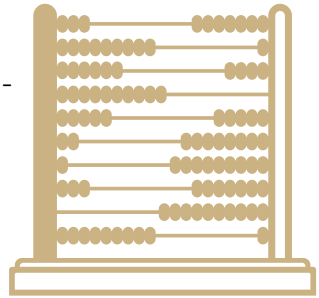
31 Heur's one we tried earlier...

Google 'content heuristics' and you'll be inundated with ideas. Most-loved at Sticky are:



32 Make it count

A robust marking scheme is crucial to the success of qualitative content auditing. It's common for content strategists to **agree qualitative markers and turn them into statements** such as 'This content is written in plain language' and then score each content element on a five-point scale.



emailus@stickycontent.com

33

Seriously, *you're* Guido Fawkes?

A great way to get a big organisation into content is to **seek out its content influencers**. Somewhere in that crowded canteen are people who blog, tweet, pin and post – but not necessarily about work. It's not uncommon to discover that a colleague who has never contributed to corporate content marketing has thousands of subscribers to their tropical fish breeding hobbyist site.

These people are gold dust. Whoever they are, whatever they do, they have **ideas, skills and knowledge** to share. Find them, get them on side and persuade them to act as internal content advocates.

Ask us about our digital copywriting courses to support your content influencers: emailus@stickycontent.com

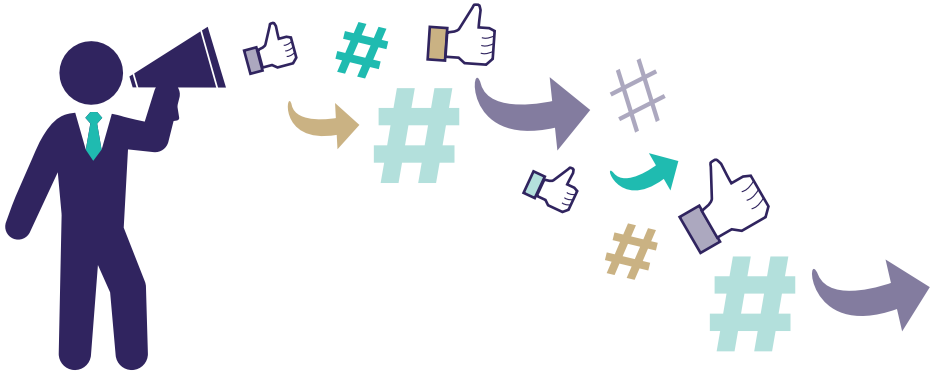


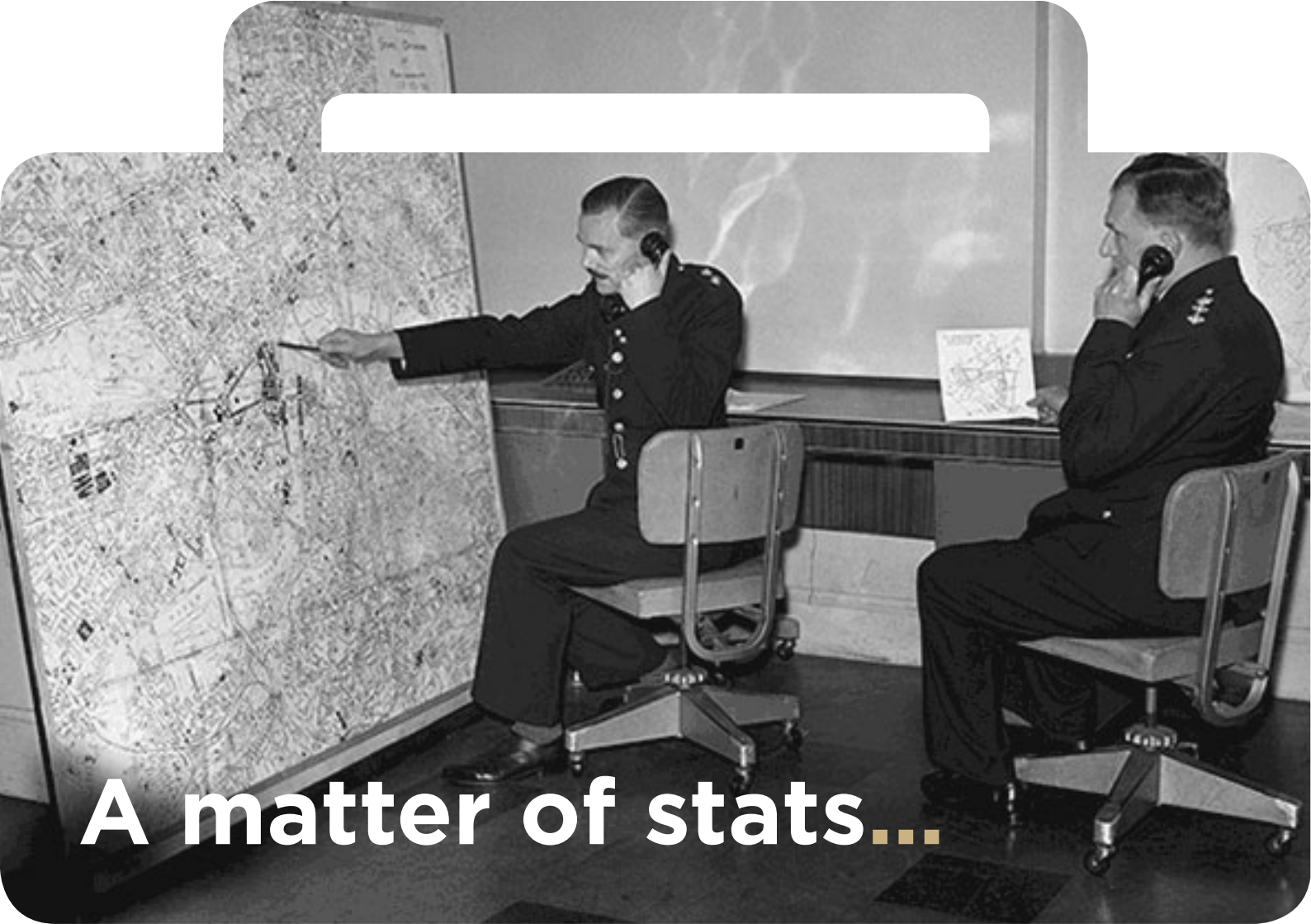
34

Can’t create? Retweet

There will always be people reluctant to get involved with content marketing either due to a lack of confidence (‘I’m not creative’) or because they anticipate it’ll be a big chore (‘I’m too busy for this’).

At Sticky, we believe **the best content strategies are inclusive** and inspire people organisation-wide to participate. It may be unrealistic to expect everyone to create content, but they can certainly **contribute ideas and amplify content** through forwarding, following, sharing and commenting. And the more colleagues you get on board, of course, the more your business case is amplified.




A matter of stats...

How much do you bench?

Statistics about content creation and content types can **serve as useful benchmarks** to show progress. Here are some we've seen clients and trainees use to argue for investment:

Our customers are on mobile yet **less than 25 per cent of our content is currently optimised for handheld devices**. We're aiming for 70 per cent by year-end.

Our 3 key competitors produce, on average, 4 new video assets per month. **Currently less than 5 per cent of our content is video**. We intend to raise this to 20 per cent by Q2.

78 per cent of our content creation was outsourced last year. This year we want to see a 50:50 in-house/out-house split as we become more self-sufficient.

Less than half our content has a call to action. From now on, a unique CTA will be mandatory on all assets, enabling us to track ROI.

Our product pages take **5 or more rounds of amendments to achieve sign off**. We intend to cut that down to 2.

emailus@stickycontent.com

Re-use

36

Boards exist to maximise profits and minimise waste. **Content is wasted when it's only used once**. Explain how, by banning the creation of concepts for single-use, and embracing content reuse, reskinning and adaptive formats, you'll be getting the most from every £ of content investment.

Recycle

37

So there's something the senior managers hark back to from yesteryear? Maybe it's a customer magazine or an obsolete inbox user guide. Whatever it is, **dust it down, 'digitalise' it and let it live again online**. Double points for politics AND parsimony.

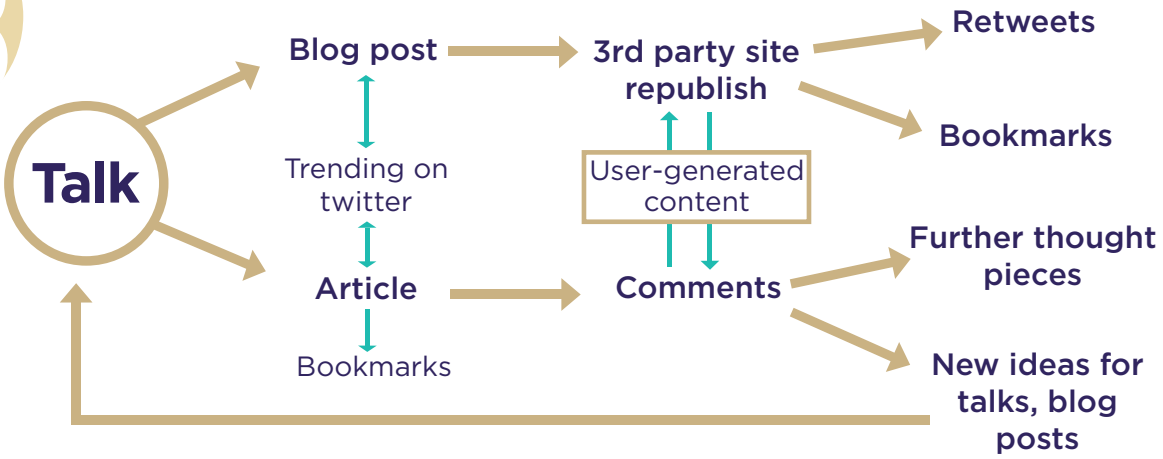


Ask us for advice on making your content go further: emailus@stickycontent.com

38

Multi-use

A great way to win support from a CEO is to show how their recent keynote speech or shareholders presentation could be sliced and diced to **seed a whole content stream** of its own.




Be generous...

39

Correlate to accumulate

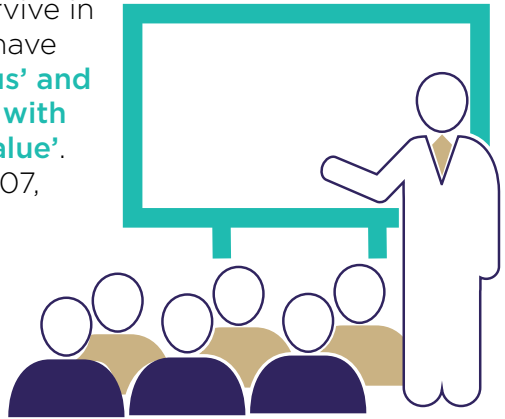
The value of best-practice content isn't always obvious – a frustration for content strategists everywhere. **Do everything you can to gather evidence** on how your work positively impacts the bottom line.

How is your average Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) linked to digital behaviours, for instance? **Can you join some dots between CLV and content consumption?** Is there anecdotal evidence of your sales team using content to prolong contact with prospects? And how about customer service? Are they using your content in calls, emails or forums?

40

What he said

Inspire the C-suite with the wise words of their peers. Jim Stengel (former CMO at Procter & Gamble) warned that for brands to survive in the digital age, they have **to become 'generous' and shower customers with 'information of value'**. He said this in 2007, but it's even more true now, and we've been successfully telling his fellow CMOs ever since...



Ask us about content audits and inventories: emailus@stickycontent.com

About us

Sticky Content helps the world's biggest brands to plan, create and deliver content that gets results. We do this by offering a range of strategic services. We also write and edit digital content, and can train your team to be more effective content producers.

Who are we?

We are content strategists and consultants, digital copywriters and trained journalists. We were founded in 1997 by our chairman Catherine Toole – you may have seen her speaking at an event or delivering training. In October 2013 we became part of the Press Association, the UK's national news agency.

What makes us different?

Our clients tell us they like our pragmatic approach and the value we add through strategic thinking. We pride ourselves on delivering quality content and service – with measurable results.

We are clever with content.

Contact us

Call us: +44 (0)20 7963 7070
Email us:
emailus@stickycontent.com
Follow us: @stickycontent

South
Sticky Content Ltd
Press Association
292 Vauxhall Bridge Road
London
SW1V 1AE

North
Sticky Content Ltd
Press Association
Bridgegate
Howden
East Yorkshire
DN14 7AE

www.stickycontent.com



www.stickycontent.com
emailus@stickycontent.com