# 7 Steps to Creating and Executing an Editorial Calendar

ORACLE
MARKETING CLOUD



# Content Marketing is Hot Right Now

Content marketing is white hot—content marketing agencies are popping up, people are getting promoted to the Chief Content Officer role, and an entirely new industry within the marketing space has developed. It's all based on the premise that creating highly engaging, highly relevant content to meet the needs of your current customers and prospects can help move people through the buying process and ultimately drive new business at a cost-affordable scale.

But with the new objectives and tasks of running a content marketing program come new challenges for a marketing department:

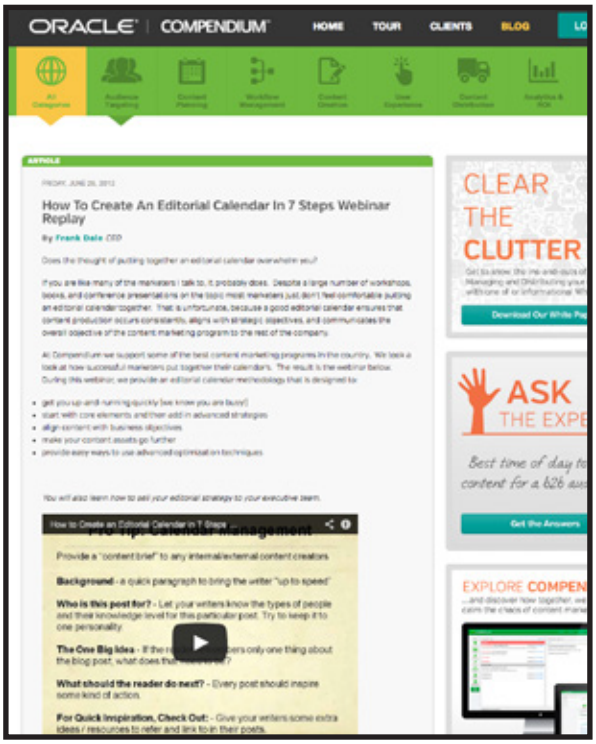
- How can I possibly create all this new content?
- What's a good way to manage deadlines—and the entire content creation process?
- How do I make sure that I'm staying focused with my content?
- Could I get a little help here creating all this content?

While these challenges may be new, they are here to stay for any marketing department that is seriously investing in content marketing for their company. One of the best ways to begin to tackle these challenges is to develop an editorial calendar. This is a calendar run by the owner of a content marketing program that helps manage the content creation process for all forms of content (blog posts or articles, social media promotions, infographics, video, and more) and gives a deadline for completion to ensure a smooth and steady flow of content.

# Why Develop an Editorial Calendar?

An editorial calendar will become a critical component to your content marketing program for many reasons. Here are just a few of them:

- **Focus your efforts on your goals.**
  Creating content without goals results in aimless content creation that doesn't lead your prospects any closer to where you want them to end up.
- **Ensure that your content gets written.**
  How often do you say "I'll get around to writing that blog post—tomorrow"? Unfortunately, too many of us are in that boat, but having an editorial calendar with clearly defined deadlines ensures that content ends up written—and not just thought about.
- **Align with other business areas.**
  A fragmented marketing department leads to inconsistent messaging to clients and prospects, content silos within your marketing team, and an overall confusion about your brand. Editorial calendars, when shared with a team, can enhance your organization's understanding of the message by making sure that everyone knows exactly what is being said and done.




Using an editorial calendar leads to consistent execution of content. Do you ever feel like your content creation comes in spurts? This can lead to drowning your prospects and customers with content certain weeks, while leaving them dry of content other weeks. However, if you have a consistent flow of content, you will subtly set an expectation in the mind of your prospects of when new content will be available, which increases the likelihood of repeat traffic. Editorial calendars can help solve that problem by creating a consistent flow of content from week to week.

By now you may be saying, "I really see the value that an editorial calendar can provide to my content marketing efforts, but how do I start?" Have no fear; the remainder of this guide is devoted to helping you understand the basics of creating and running an editorial calendar, as well as some intermediate and advanced calendaring tactics to use when you start to get the hang of the basics.



STEP 1

# Define Your Strategic Objectives

You can't possibly begin to create an editorial calendar without knowing your strategic objectives. Without them, you will end up aimlessly creating content that may or may not be useful to your customers and prospects. You may need to bring in the CMO or other people within your marketing department to discuss what these objectives should be, but it is critical that you know exactly what you are hoping to achieve with your content.

One thing to address here is the issue of having multiple customer segments. Many companies today serve more than just one customer segment, and therefore fall short in meeting the content needs of each segment. At the beginning of developing an editorial calendar, you should only target one of those customer segments. This approach will ensure that you meet the needs of that segment and aren't overwhelmed by trying to meet the needs of multiple customer segments.

## Pro Tip

When creating your editorial calendar, be sure to keep your goals physically in front of you while you plan. That way there is less of a chance you will deviate from those goals.

This strategy may seem limiting initially, but it's important to get some quick wins and positive momentum going with your editorial calendar. Dave Ramsey, a personal finance guru, always advocates that when you are paying down multiple debts you should pay down the smallest debt first rather than the debt with the highest interest. While counterintuitive in nature, his reasoning is that paying off the smallest debt first gives you a psychological boost from the gratification of paying off that debt. You then have the motivation to tackle bigger debts and ultimately pay off all of your debts faster.

Starting with one customer segment instead of multiple segments follows the exact same logic. By starting small you will get a quicker win, reduce the complexity of starting your calendar, and build more confidence and momentum for your editorial calendar.



STEP 2

# Make Sure to Focus on Your Customers When Planning

Great marketing begins by clarifying who the customer is, how they think, and what motivates them. When starting to plan and create content, you have to focus on what your customers and prospects would say and how they would think. This may seem like a no-brainer, but it's amazing how easy it is to lose focus on this and start using shorthand company lingo that your end audience doesn't understand. The easiest way to prevent this from happening is to develop customer personas. If you'd like to learn more about customer personas you can check out **this guide** to creating personas, but, at a high level, a customer persona is a detailed description of a fictional person who would buy your product or service. Personas go well beyond demographic information, and should help you understand how your customers and prospects think, what they value, and how they make decisions. Some additional things to consider when developing your personas from a content marketing perspective are:

- **What types of content does your persona find useful?** For some types of people Q&A guides and eBooks may resonate best, while for others screencasts and videos are better formats. Knowing this will help you understand the best format to take when creating content.
- **Do you understand how your personas consume information?** Do they prefer to read content online or do they want a physical copy? Knowing this will affect not only how you design your content, but also your delivery mechanism for that content.

You may be thinking right about now that you really need to create personas for your company, and if so you should definitely check out **the guide to creating personas** for your content marketing strategy. But, if you don't have time for that, here is one quick tip you can take away—go talk to current customers. Start with 10 customers and ask them questions that will lead you to understand the preferences talked about above. You may think 10 is a small number, but it will be enough to get you on the right path to developing a persona and, if you have more time, then by all means talk to more people.

Now that some of the more high-level strategies about creating an editorial calendar have been discussed, let's get tactical.

## Pro Tip

Look at the top 10 sales and service questions you receive. These will help you begin to understand what types of information your customers and prospects find valuable. Don't forget to include those 10 questions in your content plan.

STEP 3

# Identify Anchors in Your Editorial Calendar



Anchors are the events, time periods, launch dates, and other time periods that are well known throughout your company and marketing team as big deal time periods. Examples for your company could include:

- **New product launch dates**
- **Start and end dates of a buying season**
- **Major industry or company events**

Got these events figured out in your head? Good—now put them on your calendar. Having anchors identified and placed on your calendar can help you better plan for those events well in advance and avoid running short on resources for them. You may need to have lots of content built up for those time periods, so knowing them and planning for them in advance can help you build out the content earlier than you would have otherwise.



STEP 4

# Begin Developing a Publishing Schedule

Now that objectives and personas are identified, and the anchors are placed on your calendar, you can begin to develop a regular publishing schedule. You may be wondering what the best mix of blog posts, eBooks, videos, and other content is for your publishing schedule. When you are first starting to develop your editorial calendar, it is best to keep it simple and grow from there.

Here is a suggested schedule for people just getting started (see **Appendix 1** for an example):

- One to two blog posts (or articles) a week
- One to three social pushes of each piece of content (if the software you use makes it easy to publish to your social media pages directly)
- One white paper, guide, or trend report every quarter
- One eBook a year
- One e-mail newsletter a month (primarily composed of blog posts or articles)

One important thing to note is that while this might be a good beginner's publishing schedule, it depends entirely on what your persona prefers for content consumption. If there are certain parts of this schedule that don't jive well with what your persona likes, then switch it out with a friendlier content format. The goal is not to follow this schedule to a T, but to get you thinking about the amount of content to create when you are first starting.

## Pro Tip

You may be sweating right now at the thought of creating something as big as an eBook. Relax—some of the best eBooks are just repurposing of blog posts, so start by creating a series of blog posts over a month or two. When you are done with the series, make the minor edits you need to flow from one post to the next in a user-friendly design and you will have your next eBook.

## Pro Tip

Initially, plan only the first three months of content. If you do more, there is a chance you will become overwhelmed with the amount of content to produce. At the beginning of the third month, review your publishing schedule strategy and make adjustments for the next three months.

Here are intermediate and advanced publishing schedules for when you become more efficient with your content creation process. Starting with one of these two might be overwhelming, so if you are new start small, but if you've become more seasoned with editorial calendars then give one of these two templates a try.

# Intermediate Schedule

(See **Appendix 2** for example):

- Three to five blog posts or articles a week
- One white paper, guide, or trend report every quarter
- One eBook a year
- One e-mail newsletter a month (composed of blog posts or articles)
- One case study or "behind the scenes" piece every quarter
- One short video per quarter
- One infographic every six months

# Advanced Schedule

(See **Appendix 3** for example):

- Five to seven blog posts or articles a week
- One white paper, guide, or trend report every quarter
- Two eBooks a year
- One e-mail newsletter a month (composed of blog posts or articles)
- One case study or "behind the scenes" piece every quarter
- One short video per month
- One infographic every six months
- One interactive piece of content a month
- One topic-specific e-mail newsletter a month



STEP 5

# Map Out Your Content Sources

Now you have a great template, personas, and strategic objectives, and you may be having a slight heart attack at the prospect of creating all this content on your own. Relax—who said you have to create everything on your own? Not only would it be unreasonable to expect you to create every piece of content that comes through your program, but you'd also likely be missing out on some great sources of knowledge and content. There are several sources of content that you could pull from, but here are some high-level sources that you should consider:

- **Internal sources.** This is probably the first place that people think to go when looking for help in creating content. Your company is full of people with unique perspectives on different topics that are more than qualified to write on certain subjects. Set them free and give them the ability to write. Just be sure to guide them through what to discuss and how to discuss it (if you aren't sure on how to guide them, use a creative brief which is explained later).
- **External sources.** You may have some additional funds set aside to aid in creating content. If you do, and don't have enough resources in-house, it is a good idea to hire freelance writers (best when your product or service isn't overly technical), agencies, or other partners to help you create some of your content.
- **Customer advocates.** This may not work for every company (B2C companies or brands that sell an experiential product/service tend to have better luck with this), but sourcing content from your customers may be a great way to get quality content for cheap (after all, who is better at speaking the language of your customers and prospects than your customers?).
- **Repurposed marketing material.** You may find that the best way to fill the content gap you have coming up next week is by repurposing an old blog post, video, or guide that speaks to the exact content need. Don't forget about these sources since they already exist, and you can tell if it was an effective piece of content via analytics.

## Pro Tip

When doing your content mapping, don't always think your executives and marketing team will be the best source. Frontline employees that speak with customers on a daily basis will know just as much, if not more, about the person you are targeting.



STEP 6

# Manage Your Editorial Calendar

Congratulations! If you have been working along while reading this, then you have successfully planned out three months of content and sources. That is an awesome achievement that a majority of marketers cannot claim to have accomplished. Now that you have your editorial calendar set up, your focus should shift from creating it to managing it. Whether you are doing this on a piece of paper, in a spreadsheet, or with a software application, consider using three different labels to track content from planning to completion:

- **Assigned.** This label is for content that has been assigned to a person but not yet started.
- **Work in progress (WIP).** This label should be used for content that is currently being produced but is not yet finished.
- **Complete.** This label is for content that has been reviewed and completed.

Using different colors for each piece of content (red for assigned, yellow for WIP, green for complete) will help you easily see how much you have at each stage and if people are on track. You should also develop a reminder plan to make sure that content sources are on track and will be finished on time. The quickest way to do this is likely personal calendar reminders, but if you have software that will send reminder e-mails that is ideal. Also, be sure to keep estimates upfront on the time it will take to complete and the costs associated. This will help you in the future when you create similar types of content to get a better understanding of how far in advance you should assign it, and how much it will cost to produce.

## Pro Tip

Provide a content brief to the writer or content producer when assigning the content. A content brief includes: background to get the writer up to speed, who the post is for, the one big idea to get across, what the reader should do next (call to action), what extra resources are necessary to complete the assignment (if applicable), and a perfect world deadline. You can see an example of how this looks and try a creative brief template at the back of this guide.

## Pro Tip

Adding performance estimates for your content before you publish the content will help you understand whether or not your content meets the objectives. It's very easy to justify success for your content if you don't set clear estimates beforehand. However, by setting estimates upfront you will clearly know when content is a success or failure, and be able to learn and adjust your content to create more successes.



STEP 7

# Sell Your Editorial Calendar to Your Executive Team

Now that you've done all this, the last thing to do is get executive team buy in. Thankfully, because of the way you have created your editorial calendar up until now, this should be easy to do for the following reasons:

- The editorial calendar was built with strategic objectives in mind, which will resonate with executives.
- Your activity plan clearly aligns with the strategic objectives. Tracking and performance feedback is built in from day one so executives can be assured that this program will be optimized over time and will continue to improve.

The one thing to keep in mind when selling an editorial calendar to your executives is that not only do you need to sell the solution, but, more importantly, you need to sell the problem. This is important because executives will not invest time or money into plans and solutions that are not solving what they perceive to be problems. So, when you present this plan to them, be sure to paint them a picture of the problem, and how the editorial calendar can be the solution.





# There You Have It

Now you have a baseline understanding of why an editorial calendar is important. In seven steps, you have created and implemented a plan that will dramatically improve your content creation and planning process.

Three months from now, you may realize that you need to tweak your plan, and that's OK because you have put in place a feedback mechanism that will tell you areas that can be improved and how to improve them.

If you haven't started your calendar yet, what are you waiting for? Use one of the templates in the appendix or build your own.

- Appendix 1: ***Beginner Editorial Calendar Template***
- Appendix 2: ***Intermediate Editorial Calendar Template***
- Appendix 3: ***Advanced Editorial Calendar Template***
- Appendix 4: ***Sample Creative Brief***
- Appendix 5: ***Creative Brief Template***

*Appendix 1:*

# Beginner Editorial Calendar Template

## MONTH

| M | T | W | Th | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B Blog Post x1 | | B Blog Post x1 | |
| M | T | W | Th | F |
| | | B Blog Post x1 | | |
| M | T | W | Th | F |
| | B Blog Post x1 | | B Blog Post x1 | |
| M | T | W | Th | F |
| | | B Blog Post x1 | | N Email Newsletter x1 |

## YEAR

| J | F | M |
|---|---|---|
| | | W Whitepaper, Guide or Trend Report x1 |
| A | M | J |
| E eBook x1 | | W Whitepaper, Guide or Trend Report x1 |
| J | A | S |
| | | W Whitepaper, Guide or Trend Report x1 |
| O | N | D |
| | | W Whitepaper, Guide or Trend Report x1 |

*Appendix 2:*

# Intermediate Editorial Calendar Template

## MONTH

| M | T | W | Th | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| B Blog Post x1 | | B Blog Post x1 | | B Blog Post x1 |
| B Blog Post x1 | | B Blog Post x1 | | B Blog Post x1 |
| B Blog Post x1 | | B Blog Post x1 | N Email Newsletter x1 | B Blog Post x1 |
| B Blog Post x1 | | B Blog Post x1 | | B Blog Post x1 |

## YEAR

| J | F | M |
|---|---|---|
| C Case Study x1 | W Whitepaper, Guide or Trend Report x1 | V Short Video x1 |
| C Case Study x1 | W Whitepaper, Guide or Trend Report x1 | i Infographic x1<br>V Short Video x1 |
| C Case Study x1 | W Whitepaper, Guide or Trend Report x1 | V Short Video x1 |
| C Case Study x1<br>E eBook x1 | W Whitepaper, Guide or Trend Report x1 | i Infographic x1<br>V Short Video x1 |

| A | M | J |
|---|---|---|
| C Case Study x1 | W Whitepaper, Guide or Trend Report x1 | i Infographic x1<br>V Short Video x1 |

| J | A | S |
|---|---|---|
| C Case Study x1 | W Whitepaper, Guide or Trend Report x1 | V Short Video x1 |

| O | N | D |
|---|---|---|
| C Case Study x1<br>E eBook x1 | W Whitepaper, Guide or Trend Report x1 | i Infographic x1<br>V Short Video x1 |

*Appendix 3:*

# Advanced Editorial Calendar Template

## MONTH

| M | T | W | Th | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| B Blog Post x1 | B Blog Post x2 | B Blog Post x1 | B Blog Post x2 | B Blog Post x1 |
| M | T | W | Th | F |
| B Blog Post x1 | B Blog Post x2 | B Blog Post x1 | B Blog Post x2 | B Blog Post x1 |
| M | T | W | Th | F |
| B Blog Post x1 | B Blog Post x2 | B Blog Post x1 | B Blog Post x2<br>N Email Newsletter x1 | B Blog Post x1 |
| M | T | W | Th | F |
| B Blog Post x1 | B Blog Post x2 | B Blog Post x1 | B Blog Post x2 | B Blog Post x1 |

## YEAR

| J | F | M |
|---|---|---|
| C Case Study x1 | W Whitepaper, Guide or Trend Report x1 | V Short Video x1 |
| A | M | J |
| C Case Study x1<br>E eBook x1 | W Whitepaper, Guide or Trend Report x1 | i Infographic x1<br>V Short Video x1 |
| J | A | S |
| C Case Study x1 | W Whitepaper, Guide or Trend Report x1 | V Short Video x1 |
| O | N | D |
| C Case Study x1<br>E eBook x1 | W Whitepaper, Guide or Trend Report x1 | i Infographic x1<br>V Short Video x1 |

*Appendix 4:*

# Sample Creative Brief

## *Background:*

Create a blog post that talks about three tips to best manage a product support queue.

*Perfect World Deadline*

Aug 31

## *Who is the Post For?*

Bill is a 25-year-old product support specialist at a 100 to 500 employee software company. Bill majored in computer science as an undergraduate and since then has done a few online trainings to refine his skills to be the best he can at his job. Bill reports to a product support manager (Cindy) who monitors his performance and also helps him grow his professional skill set. Bill's day starts by coming in to the office around 8 a.m. and reviewing last night's submitted cases that were assigned to him. He figures out if any of them are high priority and tackles those first then works through the rest of the cases he has in his queue. Bill interacts throughout the day with account managers for clients to understand the cases better, as well as more technical resources if the case is above their knowledge level. He also attends a few meetings throughout the week with his team to learn new things about their product and team checkups. Most of Bill's obstacles to being more successful at his job revolve around a lack of communication, whether that be between Bill and account managers, the customer, or someone else. Not having everything communicated clearly can really hurt Bill's performance. In his spare time he reads general tech articles on sites like TechCrunch and Mashable as well as industry related articles...

## *One Big Idea:*

Creating time blocks is the key to successfully managing your support workload.

## *What the Reader Should Do Next:*

Click through to our "How to Successfully Manage the Day-to-Day of a Product Support Queue"

## *Extra Resources to Complete the Assignment:*

Guide: How to Successfully Manage the Day-to-Day of a Product Support Queue

## *Notes:*

Bill interacts with our company by looking to us for best practices on communicating with clients, building interoffice communication, and task management. They came to our company first to learn more about how to be better at their job, and value us as a resource in that regard. This person is looking for blog posts, how-to hints, and other tactical advice on how to do his job better and hopefully advance in his career to the next level.

*Appendix 5:*

# Creative Brief Template



***Background:***

*Perfect World Deadline*



***Who is the Post For?***



***One Big Idea:***



***What the Reader Should Do Next:***



***Extra Resources to Complete the Assignment:***

***Notes:***

30 31 1

6 7 8

13 14 15

20 21 22

7

**7 Steps to Creating and Executing on an Editorial Calendar**

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