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The 2022 Content Blueprint

Our step-by-step guide to kick-start your content marketing. We cover: trends for 2022, the importance of planning, how, and how to ensure impact.

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"Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth," so goes the famous quote from former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson. The boxer-turned-boxer made the comment in advance of his infamous fight with Evander Holyfield.

Now, we all know how that fight ended - with Tyson biting a chunk out of Holyfield's ear. It was nigh on impossible for Holyfield to have predicted that outcome in advance of the fight is preparing for it was not an option.

But that does not mean planning is obsolete. There is value in being prepared.

Current heavyweight champion Tyson Fury quotes his namesake, Muhammad Ali, when discussing his preparation for a fight. Ali would have a game plan. Everybody will say what they think they are going to," he said. "What Mike Tyson said is 100% true. Everybody has a plan until they gets punched in their face."

Rigorous planning may not account for all eventualities, but it takes care of the day to day so you can focus on how to address any unexpected curveballs that crop up along the way. So when that side swipe comes out of nowhere, you are able to respond quickly and efficiently - which is Fury's clean-meant knocking Wilder out cold after being floored twice himself.

If strategic planning works for the heavyweight champion of the world, why shouldn't it work for your content marketing?

1. Trends for 2022

Going up: Intelligent storytelling

Ask any expert and they'll tell you that storytelling is as relevant in B2B as everywhere else. It's about building a narrative that engages with your audience on a personal level. That might not be the end goal of your campaign, but it's about how you lay the groundwork for that end.

Brands are increasingly realising the power storytelling offers them to build emotional connections with their customers. In fact, 54% of brands say they will focus on creating more emotional marketing according to the Carmen Lora, State of Creativity Report (2021).

"It doesn't matter, I think if you are in marketing or if you're in editorial, the heart of storytelling is that emotional connection that you want to make with your audience."
Kirsty Walker, VP Marketing UKI at Sage

"Storytelling is about using the language that engages audiences on their own terms."
Bryan Gilvin, Editor in Chief at Computer Weekly

Going up: Creative risk taking

Give a these CMOs want to take more risks with their marketing post Covid, according to latest B2B Marketing Solved report. Indeed, 46% of brands and 53% of agencies say that developing brave/edgier marketing ideas is one of the key areas in which they need to upskill their workforce (State of Creativity Report, Carmen Lora, 2021).

Despite the apparent appetite for risk-taking, marketers still have to balance this with an ever-increasing need to demonstrate ROI. The pandemic has only accentuated the pressure on marketers to prove the value of their campaigns.

However, ROI and creativity need not be diametrically opposed. Some 87% of brand leaders say that creativity is extremely valuable in driving competitive advantage (Lora State of Creativity Report). So while tangible outcomes may still be the order of the day, it is commercially savvy for brands to break away from the traditional B2B campaign tropes in order to differentiate their content, design and campaign strategy.

Here is an example of one brand that embraced this opportunity:

Platforma Sage #Beast2021
An interesting trend has been the use of new platforms to the B2B space. Take Sage's Beast V campaign on TikTok, which engaged with 31M+ in language they would understand, using stories they would understand, on a platform that's ripe for storytelling on B2C levels.

31M+ were invited to create TikTok videos that demonstrated how they had thrived during the pandemic. Top prize for the winner was a trip to the Beast headquarters. The campaign ran across channels Sage typically uses: TikTok for a day, Linkedin for a week. TopView placement as there was the first video platform sale when they opened the app.

The campaign achieved staggering coverage. One million videos were created, equating to 6.5bn views in total.

Going up: Customer centricity

Marketers often sit at the apex of many different business stakeholders. As a result, their customers can sometimes get sidelined by the wants and needs of the business.

This year (2022) one third (33%) of B2B marketers thought it likely that their organisation would invest in getting closer to customers (either in 2021, 22% Annual B2B Content Marketing, CMI). In 2022, we expect this to be realised through personas, customer listening and market research.

Invest in these areas to bring direction to your business. Build an understanding of your audience through regular research then translate these insights into a compelling brand narrative — both verbal and visual.

Do

Engage agencies that understand your audience. 42% of B2B marketers are working partners who understand their needs to empathise with their audience is a top challenge when outsourcing B2B content marketing help (Q8. Annual B2B Content Marketing, CMI).

Going up: Brand value

Showing the impact of long-term creative work is the biggest challenge for brands and agencies (State of Creativity Report, Carmen Lora, 2021). Yet, there is a compelling correlation in data between the needs of short-term objectives such as lead generation and longer-term transformational growth.

Organisations that had invested in brand came out stronger post Covid. We expect to see more emphasis on brand building amongst the top for brands as a result.

Going up: Skills gaps

Since the boom in content marketing began, many marketing departments have reported severe skills gaps. Two in five marketers cited strategic as their biggest capability in our in our recent B2B Marketing Solved survey (B2B marketers.

Hence why the phrase "content shock" was coined. It's because a key factor in investment management companies' decision-making. A defined ESG strategy could be the differentiating factor between you and the competition receiving investment.

In fact, the number of retail and institutional investors that apply ESG principles to at least a quarter of their portfolios jumped from 48 percent in 2021 to 75 percent in 2025 according to BlackRock's "The ESG Global Survey 2021" 2021. That's a significant incentive to create your own ESG strategy.

Platitudes won't cut it anymore. Businesses must own their ESG narrative.

2. Plan the plan

Engagement

Be brutal
Before embarking on a plan for 2022, it is crucial that you comprehensively evaluate 2021. Which initiatives drove engagement, and which flopped? Which activities are 'must have' versus the 'nice to have'? Crucially, this assessment must be objective and brutal. If the CEO's blog bombed, it's going in the bin.

Relevance

Did claims stay on?
Did people actually need/want/listen to this content?
How many people read and discussed this content?

Return

Did this activity say something new, or was it old hat?
Did this initiative really educate the audience?

Did this initiative help sales teams?
Was internal feedback positive?

Reshape the facts

Be business-minded
The age-old challenge with content is that its returns are neither immediate nor directly traceable. This can make it a soft target when it comes to budgetary planning, so it's essential that all investment is accompanied by a comprehensive business case.

Reduce stakeholders

The spreadsheet jungle
The age-old challenge of a content strategy is that it spans across departments. This can make it a soft target when it comes to budgetary planning, so it's essential that all investment is accompanied by a comprehensive business case.

Set review parameters

Plan for approval
Particularly if content is new for your organisation, or if spend is increasing significantly, gaining approval can be a tough challenge. Prepare for this by streamlining the process.

Tip: Think strategically & set the feedback framework

Tip: Consolidate effort

Make sure that your activities are measured against the most relevant metrics. Ensure that the metrics you are measuring are relevant to the initiative and that they are in line with your overall business goals. Be firm.

Write down what you learned in approval, the more likely you are to get approval next time. Document what worked and what was a waste of time and effort.

Don't cover all your bases, be ruthless. Focus on what is most important and most relevant to your audience. Be firm.

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3. Build the framework

Set the KPIs
With an efficient approval process in place, now is the time to develop honest KPIs with which to measure performance. How will you know that your content strategy has paid off? Whilst the objectives for content are usually strategic (e.g. reputation the brand), the majority of measurement remains tactical (e.g. how many leads did we get and what's the cost-per-lead calculation).

What was the impact on profitability (rather than short-term volume)?
How did customer impact on short-term loyalty and satisfaction?
How did content impact on non-commercial audiences (e.g. analysts, press, employees)?

In addition to macro-level indicators of success, it's vital to have open channels of communication with sales teams. They have a clear view of how prospects are reacting to content, so listen and learn.

Construct the calendar
Before building out the structure of the editorial calendar you must understand what you're capable of. Do your resources and scale of initiatives can your team handle? What role can external agencies play?

Delivering a coherent, consistent and engaging content campaign is seriously hard work. Hence when you are sketching out your capabilities be highly self-critical.

4. Build the narrative

The most common mistake when it comes to content planning is the structure of campaign planning. All too often the focus is on 'how' and 'what' will be produced rather than emphasising what your audience wants. The point of content marketing is to engage and excite your audience, so asking "what does my audience need?" is a question.

Split your audience into commercial (sales prospects / existing clients) and non-commercial categories (employees, analysts etc), and then further refine them according to:

- Organisation size
- Job title
- Objectives

Then ask yourself:

- What does this individual want from content?
- What is this individual's key challenge at work?
- What other content are we competing against?
- Consolidate this analysis and build into a simple matrix.

Case study
Developing a content strategy for a leading IT consultancy

Job title	Sales Director	CEO	Industry journalist
Organisation type & size	Mid-market software resellers	SME data science firm	Trade press publications
Audience's objective	Hit sales targets	Attract investment	Break news stories
Audience's key challenge	Retaining high-volume sales staff	Investors don't understand the technology	A lack of independent analysis
What content are we competing with?	Consultancies offering engagement	National newspapers (FT, Sunday Times)	Consultancies offering lay-ofs

Theme
The age-old challenge with content is that its returns are neither immediate nor directly traceable. This can make it a soft target when it comes to budgetary planning, so it's essential that all investment is accompanied by a comprehensive business case.

Sub-themes	Talent in tech	Understanding innovations	Tech trends
Overarching theme	Technology 2022		

Format
You have now established who your audience is, what challenges they are facing and what content themes can help address them. Now - and only now - can you begin deciding on formats.

Format	A content hub exploring employee experiences and emerging trends in the technology workplace	A series of 2-page whitepapers breaking down the latest tech innovations	A flagship proprietary research report delivered through industry insight
Frequency	Monthly	Quarterly	Annual, day-two

How-to activities
Now pick activities on an editorial calendar and review to ensure that there is a balance across the campaign and audience.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Annual	✎											
Quarterly		✎			✎			✎			✎	
Monthly	✎	✎	✎	✎	✎	✎	✎	✎	✎	✎	✎	✎

5. Make it stick

Write it down
Verbally agree plans aren't worth the paper they're not written on. Documenting your strategy helps guide consistency, plan resources and provides a point of reference for those 'mid-year sobriety'.

Focus on premium production
Content is much more likely to 'stick' (both internally and externally) if it is of exceptional high quality. Use the best writers, the best designers, the best videographers and push the boundaries of infographics, see beautiful photography.

Be brave
One of the many benefits of a properly honed plan is the confidence it gives you in delivery. Of course you must monitor performance and approach the year with flexibility, but have conviction and stay the course.

Get in touch to learn more about Content Marketing

telephone 020 3877 3800
email contact@alan-agency.com

alan-agency.com

alan.