

© CLICKCONSULT® *presents...*
the science behind

C  **CONTENT** 
M  **MARKETING**

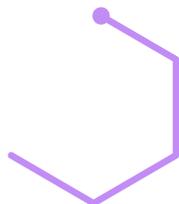
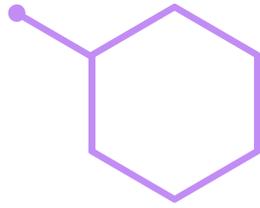
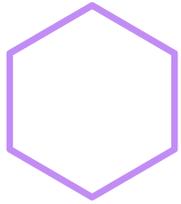
Introduction

Content marketing is commonly considered to be a primarily creative endeavour – oversimplified to the extent that the *Field of Dreams* maxim of ‘build it and they will come’ is perpetuated with the idea that if content is good enough that it will find its own audience. Though staggeringly unlikely, it does happen occasionally and such accidental virality in content marketing is enough to perpetuate the myth. However, while there are a few such instances (mostly non-branded memes and videos), branded content marketing succeeds for a very different reason.

That reason is the scientific method:

1. Ask a question
2. Do background research
3. Construct a hypothesis
4. Test your hypothesis by doing an experiment
5. Analyse your data and draw a conclusion
6. Communicate your results

It is only by employing such rigorous methodology and standards that success can become the rule rather than the exception.



The scientific method

The scientific method is the long standing academic format for all testing. For a hypothesis to become a theory (in the scientific sense), it must be rigorously researched, tested, analysed and retested to remove all doubt as to the conclusions drawn.

It may seem odd to apply such a structure to what, as stated previously, is often considered to be a creative practice, yet for the design of a successful content marketing strategy, impact on social media and brand awareness cannot be left to chance. For any strategy to be truly successful, it must be replicable – and for this, there are few things better equipped than the, itself tried and tested, scientific method.

The following sections will detail which stages of the overall marketing process (many of which you may already be aware of) fit with which each level of the process chart and how they can fit together to produce a content marketing strategy on which you can rely for results. An adapted flow chart specific to content marketing can be found on the final page.



Ask a question

The questions any brand looking to implement a content marketing strategy needs to ask are going to be:

1. 'What should the content marketing strategy seek to achieve?'

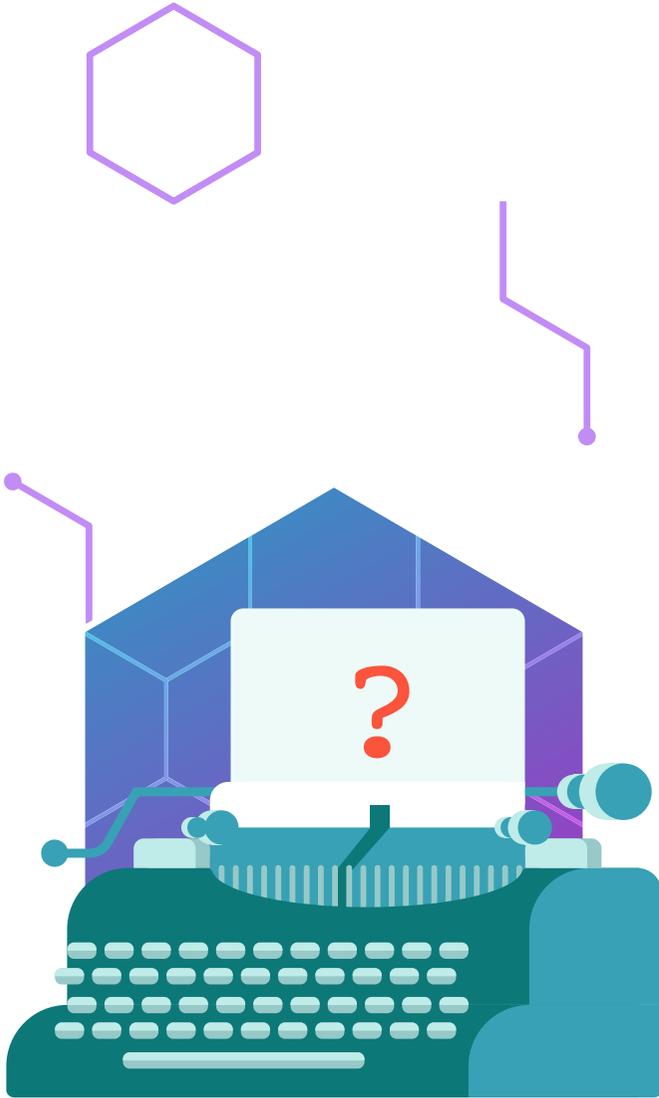
Important, as this question will impact not only the variety of content but also its subsequent dissemination – the content and promotional channels for a target of increased visibility, for example, will be different to those used when looking to increase organic traffic or leads.

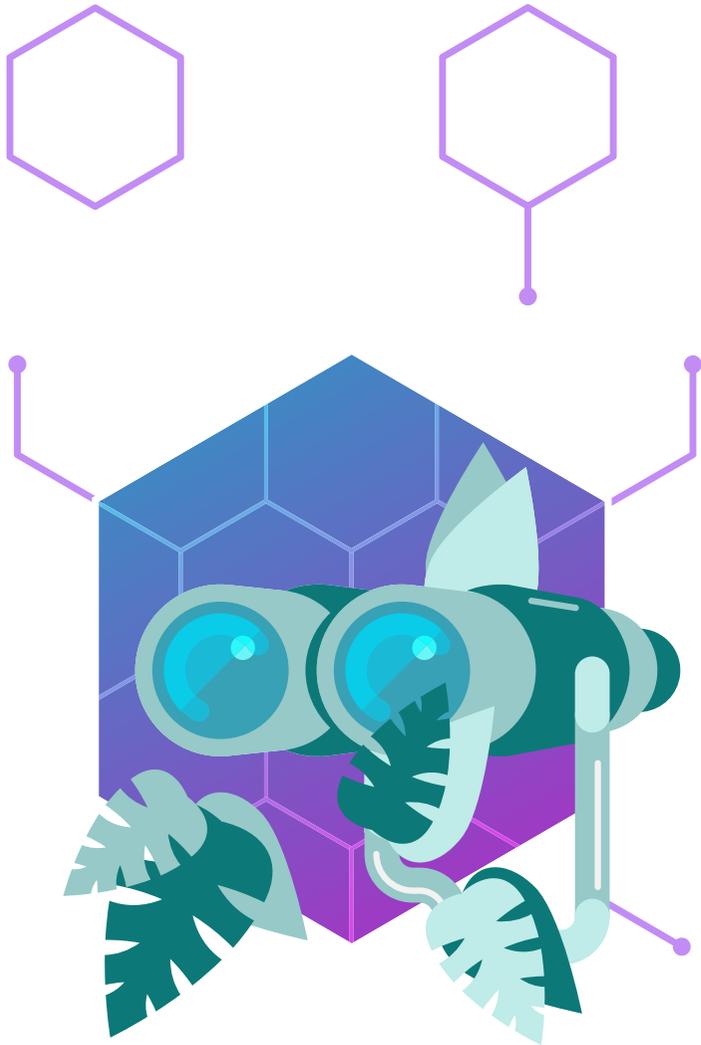
2. 'What content do our consumers want to see?'

Regardless of the quality of the content produced, if it is inappropriately or too narrowly targeted, consumers will not see it – and those that do are unlikely to be swayed by irrelevant content. In the age of search marketing, personalisation is key. Understanding your audience, therefore, must be of paramount importance to any content marketing strategy.

3. 'What content can be produced that will meet both needs?'

It's here that the magic of content marketing can happen – the best campaigns will always meet both, while any that neglects one or the other will always fail.





Do background research

This is the stage at which we begin to answer some of our questions. Does the brand's site lack domain authority, requiring link building? Does it simply lack visibility due to a niche market or a particularly strong competitor? Is the brand looking to promote specific product lines? Some of these questions can obviously be answered immediately – a brand will know if it wants a specific product in front of an audience, increased hits for the site or overall organic visibility in SERPs. However, for investigating a link profile, tools such as Ahrefs and Searchmetrics can be consulted, while Google Analytics can be inspected for information on traffic, popularity of landing pages etc. (see our [Data-Driven SEO eBook](#)).

Consumer research can take many forms – be it retargeting cookies recording sites visited following that of your brand, market research surveys or any other, the aim here is really to produce a group of consumer profiles which accurately reflect your audience. In order for a content marketing strategy to be truly successful, it must cater to your audience's ancillary interests – sales content should be left with the sales team; content marketing is about appealing to your audience holistically, creating conversations and inspiring relationships with potential consumers.

Research must then be focused on asset creation and distribution. As stated previously, content marketing must tread a fine line between the requirements of the brand and the consumer – how does a provably unhealthy fizzy drink brand combine a brand visibility campaign with a customer interest in sports? Just ask Pepsi. A beer company with humour? See the Fosters sponsored *Mid Morning Matters*. Engineering and science fiction? General Electric's branded podcast *The Message*.

Construct a hypothesis

Here we need to slightly redefine the terminology – at this point we are looking to define the metrics for success, making predictions based on the data gathered from previous content efforts, traffic data, consumer personas, demographic data etcetera. At every point in an ongoing strategy, with each subsequent campaign, realistic targets and parameters must be set as to what will be viewed as a successful campaign. Though it is not impossible for an initial campaign to achieve world-wide virality, it is an unrealistic expectation.

Instead there need to be clearly defined aims – have the types of content you're looking to produce been used before? How much better did they do than other varieties, and can that be expected to be reproduced over the length of a campaign? How many backlinks does the site currently accrue per month and what increase in this would represent a good ROI? If the campaign is for a specific product or service, what increase in leads generated or in sales would represent a profitable campaign?

Content marketing is not something which is entered into as a 'one-off', it is a long term strategy and results should be expected to increase incrementally as a brand grows and as experience and expertise increases. Your initial expectations may not be met, and it is for this reason that the process chart returns to this step from even a successful campaign, as each one will feed back into the next.

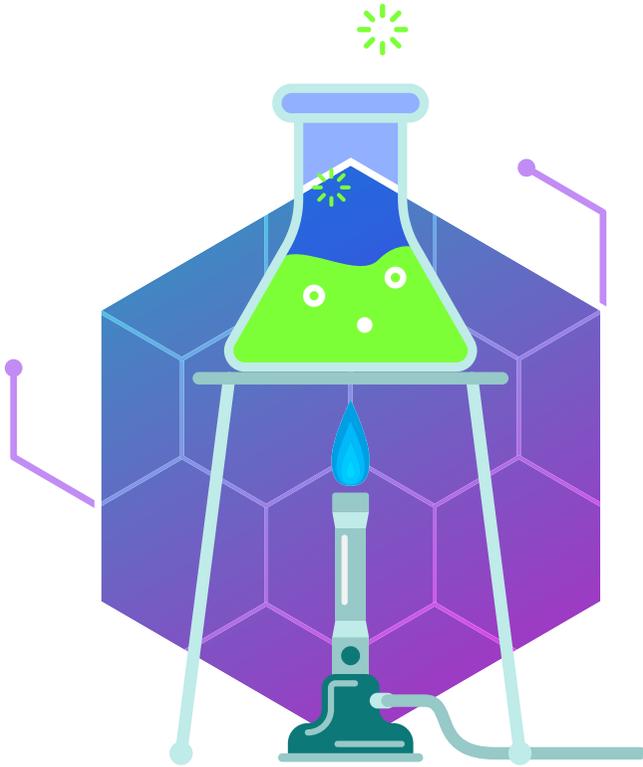


Test with an experiment

Though you might, in rare circumstances, hit on the right solution immediately, one of the core scientific practices which content marketing must draw from is 'experimentation'. Not only does experimentation limit the amount of budget which may be spent on an incorrect assumption or consumer persona, but it also vastly shortens the length of time between conception and improvement of an idea.

Therefore, it is best to begin with small and short term campaigns – potentially with A/B variations – to steepen the learning curve and allow insights that can be drawn from early experimentation to much more quickly inform later efforts and strategies.

In this regard, dependent on aims, it could be the case that a brand chooses to use two or more different varieties of media, content type or tone and trial variations for short term campaigns – so that it can be established which variety gains most traction. It is important at this stage that expectations are calibrated for each of the iterations (based on historical performance, or competitor research) against which success can be measured accurately.



Is the process working?

Again, it's important to somewhat redefine the term here, while the scientific method's process chart here refers to the method of experimentation, with regards to content marketing its place is taken by the initial strategy assessment. At this step in the scientific execution of content marketing, the assets produced can be measured against the targets assigned.

IF YES

If the answer is yes with all variations of content, then the challenge is to determine which of them performed best – which represents the best ROI may not, for example, be the one that has most exceeded the targets set once the budgetary requirements of design time and content production are weighted. It is important to assess the results as impartially as possible – though your favourite idea may have performed well, did it perform as well as others?

IF NO

As with science, failure is never the end result of strategic content marketing, instead failure represents important information gained and analysis will show whether the predictive model, the consumer personas, distribution or overall strategy implementation has led to the delayed success of the strategy.





Analyse data, draw conclusions

The process for success is the same as in the event of the inverse – it cannot be taken for granted that success will come again, but instead each successive campaign must be dissected and evaluated as part of a constant cycle of trial and improvement. Once data is collected it can then be decided whether the campaigns run can be tweaked and improved (and, at least in the early stages of a brand’s content marketing journey, almost all will be), and whether there are any more variations in style, content, tone etcetera that can be trialled with a view to ensuring that all the facts are in before commitment is made to a longer term strategy.

For this reason, most early endeavours will follow the process chart back to the hypothesis stage a few times before progressing. Even if a variety of marketing asset is a runaway success first time and the decision is made to commit to a longer campaign, the experience gained and the data gathered should still be cycled into the next phase of campaign construction to ensure that the success is replicable in future and not short-lived. Knowing what makes for a success is as important as knowing why something failed.

Communicate results

A vital part of any truly scientific process, communication is no less important in content marketing – though the audience is different. Once all of the data is in, it is vital to communicate the results to all departments involved in the planning, design and implementation of the content strategy. There will be things that all of the departments can learn from the various experiments and variations of the content produced.

Did particular styles of design or tones of voice perform better than others? Which promotional channels were best suited to each variety? Which produced the best gains versus cost to produce? All of this information and the results across the many more metrics you may wish to measure must be communicated to the relevant people in the relevant departments to allow them to contribute to improvements in the next strategy. The best results are always going to be achieved when there is buy in from all departments concerned – and autonomy in the gradual improvement of their areas of strategy is a fantastic way to achieve this.





The science behind content marketing

As can be seen from the reworked chart, with a few minor adjustments the scientific method can contribute easily to a comprehensive, data-driven plan for developing a content marketing strategy. By ensuring a constant cycle of trial and improvement is incorporated into this creative area of search marketing, the chance element can be removed and the uncertainty that often accompanies the launch of a new campaign gradually allayed by experience.

By ensuring that your brand asks the right questions, sets the right targets, experiments, measures results and seeks to modify resultant campaigns according to findings, it is possible to gradually build both experience of content marketing and campaigns with increasingly better performance over time.

There should be nothing left to chance when it comes to your brand, and content marketing need not be the hit and hope strategy that many perceive it to be. By following the scientific (content marketing) method, you can ensure that data and creativity work together to deliver the results brands want and deserve.

Get in touch with us today

Let Click Consult help you to put the science into your content marketing strategy. We're experts in search. Simple. Call us today on

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“Click have really stepped up to the plate when it comes to performance marketing, their tenacity and desire to help us as a company improve is second to none. They're always offering up the best in cost per lead performance, which is seeing our ROI on digital marketing grow exponentially as our relationship goes on. Brilliant project planners, superb project delivery and results to boot, what more could you ask for?”

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