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How to Measure Content Marketing in 3 Steps

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Digital marketing leaders must demonstrate the value of content marketing programs, but many don't know where to begin. Follow these steps to measure your content marketing strategy and to establish its value to your business.



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Overview

Key Findings

- Content marketing is outpacing marketers' ability to measure its effectiveness. Digital marketing leaders need a more rigorous approach when defining key success metrics for campaigns to measure the value that content marketing brings to the business.
- Content is consumed throughout the customer journey, but marketers struggle to measure and optimize their content assets across channels and campaigns to support customer decision making in the journey.
- Inundated by potential metrics — or lacking awareness of how to leverage existing data — marketers fail to outline specific measurement plans that complement their content strategy.

Recommendations

Follow these three steps to measure content marketing's value:

- Map content to your customer journey. This helps you understand the content you have, where it performs best and how to focus your future content on efforts that support customer and business needs.
- Identify the response you want from prospects and customers to determine what metrics are needed to prove the value of your content marketing.
- Communicate the business value of your content marketing efforts by using key performance indicators (KPIs) that align with your organization's strategic business goals.

Introduction

Content influences every stage of the customer journey, so measuring content marketing is crucial. Yet, only 42% of B2C and 41% of B2B marketers have a documented content strategy, according to a Content Marketing Institute survey. Lacking a clear strategy, marketers forgo measuring the business value that content drives and instead focus on operational and tactical metrics.

“Content marketing” is: The process and practice of creating, curating and cultivating text, video, images, graphics, eBooks, white papers and other content assets that are distributed through paid, owned and earned media. These assets are used to tell stories that help brands build and nurture relationships with customers, prospects and other audiences to drive awareness, generate demand, influence preference and build loyalty.

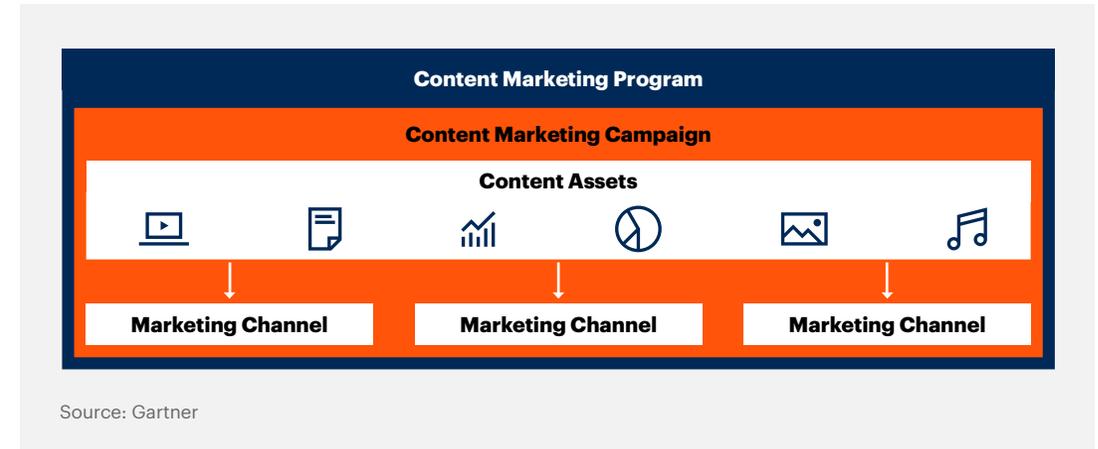
Content marketing programs used to focus primarily on marketing’s search engine optimization practices, which often employed a quantity-over-quality approach to improve a company’s visibility in search engine results. However, content marketing programs have evolved into a multichannel experience as consumers move fluidly across channels expecting high-quality, relevant content at every touchpoint. Today these more evolved content marketing programs need a clear plan to effectively reach consumers at every point of their customer journey.

That content marketing plan should consider whether content is used as an asset, in a campaign or as part of an entire marketing program. The plan also should include metrics that can gauge how content performs. It's important to use the following precise terminology when discussing how to measure content marketing (see Figure 1):

- Content assets: Webinars, blog posts, videos and other assets used in one or more channels.
- Content marketing campaigns: Discrete, objective-based marketing activities where content serves a specific purpose
- Content marketing programs: All the content marketing activities within your enterprise

This research demonstrates how to map out a content marketing plan based on your customer journey and defines ways to measure how your content is serving your marketing strategy and the business.

Figure 1. Terminology for Measuring Content Marketing



Analysis

Step 1: Map Content to Your Customer Journey

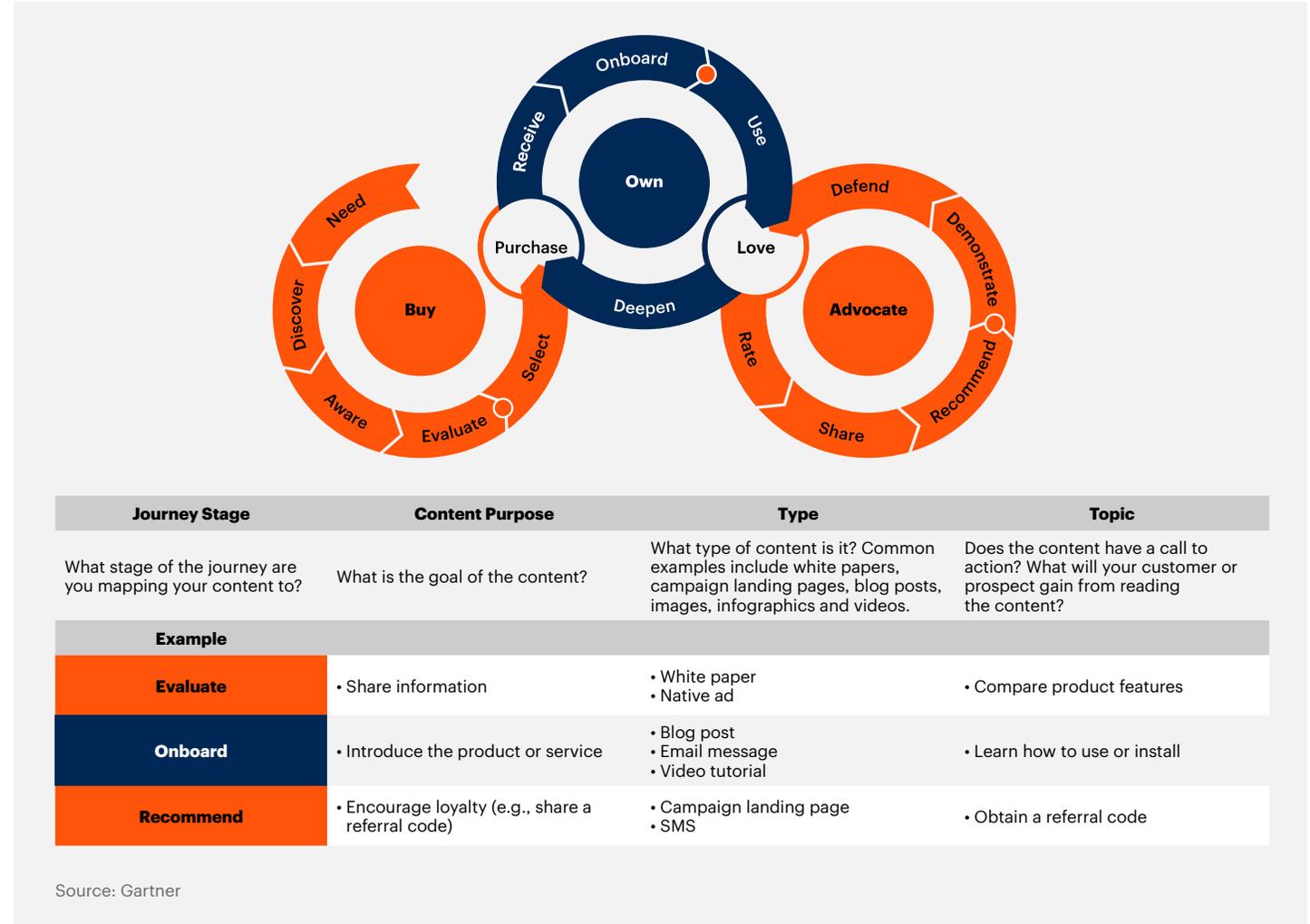
Content assets are the building blocks of your content campaigns and programs. As your customers move through the buy, own and advocate stages of their journey with your products, they interact with individual content assets that together make up their overall experience. Before you measure the effectiveness of this content, you'll need the following:

Customer journey map: A blueprint to understand how prospects or customers consume your content during their relationship with your brand (see Use Gartner's Buy/Own/Advocate Framework to Map Customer Journeys and Deliver Better Customer Experiences)

Content audit: An inventory of content your prospects and customers use at each stage of their journey (see How to Scope, Plan and Execute a Content Audit)

Start this exercise with a clearly identified target consumer. Identify how consumers use your content assets as they consider a purchase, experience your product and advocate for your product (see Figure 2). Continue this content mapping exercise for each discrete target.

Figure 2. Map Content to the Customer Journey

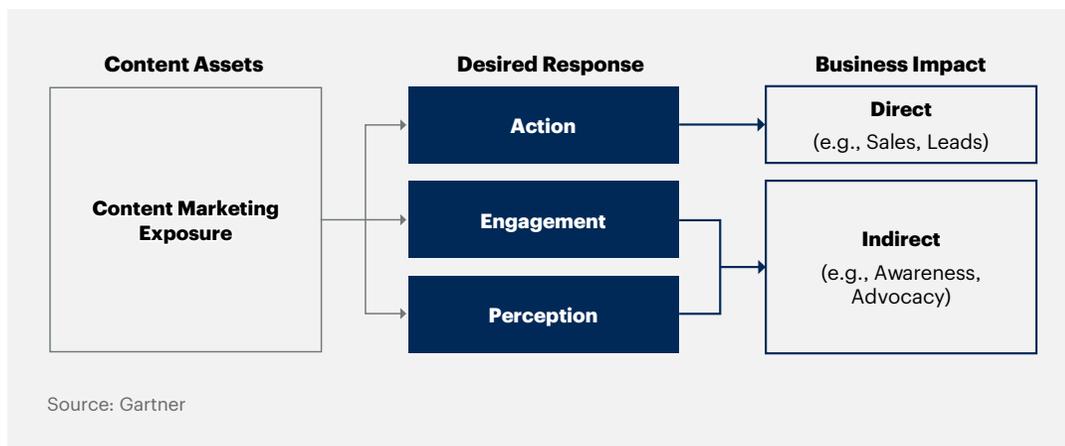


If you're in the beginning stages of creating your content marketing program, consider a framework for narrative design that focuses on micronarrative messaging (see *Micronarrative Messaging: Creating and Connecting Narratives to Customer Experience*). As you develop an understanding of how your personas move through the customer journey, you can identify where your content is well-positioned to deliver value to both your customers and the business.

Step 2: Identify the Response You Want From Customers and Prospects

Your measurement approach will be different depending on whether its primary goal is revenue generation or influencing awareness and changes in perception (see *Focus Your Content Strategy on Content Objectives to Establish Business Impact and KPIs*).

Figure 3. Potential Responses to Content Marketing



Each time someone sees your content throughout the customer journey, you've created an opportunity for that person to respond. For instance, technology buyers view a LinkedIn ad for a white paper from a company they were researching and engage to further evaluate the product. Another example is a 66-year-old woman who reads a blog post about a health insurance company's Medicare options, and then selects an option.

Customers can respond to a content marketing exposure in several ways (see Figure 3):

- **Action:** Measurable actions in response to content marketing that can be tied directly to business outcomes (e.g., completing a lead form on a campaign landing page and purchasing a product from a blog post's call to action [CTA])
- **Engagement:** Measurable actions in response to content marketing that indicate interest but can't be tied directly to business outcomes (e.g., video views, social shares and scroll depth)
- **Perception:** Responses to content marketing that may influence the likelihood of future actions or engagements and can be measured indirectly, often through a survey or social listening (e.g., changes in awareness, consideration and perception)

Content marketing is part science and part emotion, which affects how you operationalize and measure it. Projecting a consistent brand narrative across channels, managing multiple stories and measuring their effectiveness will help you identify stories that resonate with your target audience. Identifying your highest performing brand stories also will enable you to deliver the story in the right asset type for each channel to support amplification and shareability.

Content also fuels your multichannel marketing campaigns, so measuring it follows a familiar framework. For thorough instructions on how to demonstrate the economic value of driving engagement and changes in perception with content marketing, see [How to Measure a Digital Marketing Campaign](#).

If you're struggling to identify what to measure, then look at the CTAs in your content assets. Each CTA should be measurable, whether it's directing customers to complete a purchase, sharing a social post or spending time on your site reading a blog. Identify the response you're eliciting from your customers at each step of your journey by connecting your content assets to an outcome. If your CTAs are not clear, then refine them to drive a desired response and measure the outcome.

Measuring Action

Most marketers love measuring action. It's more straightforward than other responses because it measures whether content drives a purchase or generates a lead. An action metric has two parts: actions taken and business outcome. A business outcome is something you define, typically a conversion activity such as a sale, appointment booking or lead-form completion.

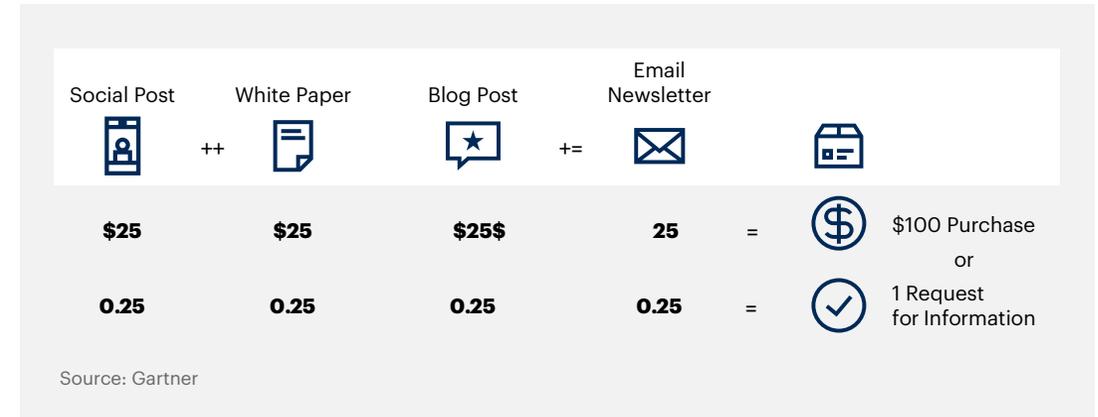
For example, Martin opens an email from his favorite pet supply store (the first action taken) that offers him a discount on dog food. He then clicks through a link in the email to land on the check-out page (the second action taken). Later, he buys dog food using his discount code (a sale — the business outcome), which is a good thing since his Bernese Mountain Dog eats a lot of dog food.

However, measuring content's direct impact on the business can be imprecise. Martin might view videos about product features, read reviews, ask people for recommendations on social media and read brand posts on Facebook — all before he receives the email that drives the conversion. Because action metrics often correspond to a purchase, lead form submission or registration, it's easy to attribute the value of each conversion to the content consumed before it. But measuring content marketing doesn't always happen at the level of individual assets, like blog posts or emails. In many cases, you may measure the effectiveness of an entire program or campaign through attribution analysis (see Step 3).

In some cases, you may want to distribute the value of a single conversion across multiple content assets or visits. When doing so, use a participation metric to divide credit proportionally (see Figure 4). This method provides more detailed digital media measurement. This method assumes marketing campaigns have an impact outside the last click. For instance, allocate a \$100 dog food purchase to four different content assets consumed, providing each with \$25. When you're driving nonmonetary value like leads, allocate proportional credit to each asset (25% or 0.25 cents to each). After amassing data over time, calculate the average of these participation metrics to determine the value of each asset.

Explore using rule-based attribution methods, like the dog food example, alongside the rule-based attribution analysis framework (see [When and How to Use Rule-Based Marketing Attribution Analysis](#)). Doing so helps you allocate conversion credit to campaigns, ads and marketing actions throughout the customer's decision-making journey.

Figure 4. Assigning the Value of an Action to Content Assets



Measuring Engagement

Engagement is an action without a direct tie to a business outcome. For content marketing, engagement reflects time people devote to consuming or endorsing your assets. Measure engagement when your content's desired action by a user is not an immediate and measurable purchase or conversion.

Some examples include:

- **Scroll depth:** How far down the page does someone read your blog post?
- **Video completion percentage:** How much of a video does your audience typically watch?
- **Click-through rate (from social posts, email newsletters, and so forth):** Do people complete an action after consuming your content?
- **Social shares and comments:** Will people endorse your content by sharing it in social networks? Will they engage in the conversation?

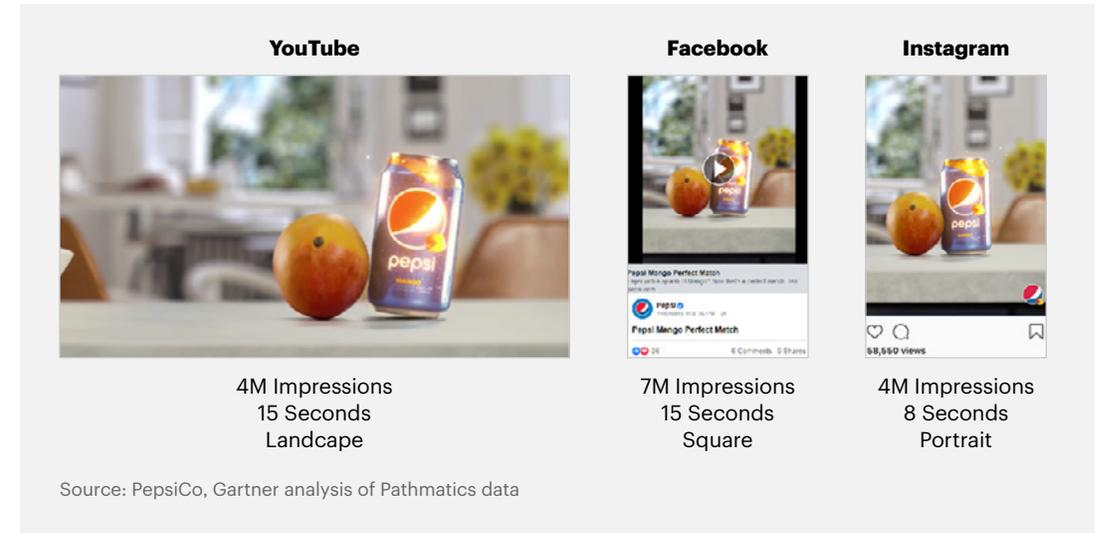
Much of content marketing focuses on measuring engagement, and for good reason. Engagement signals interest in a brand or product and can provide data for optimizing content for tactical and operational purposes. Measuring engagement evaluates whether your content is interesting, entertaining or useful. If your content isn't any of these, then it won't be effective. Look for this data in your platforms for web analytics, social media and content marketing.

Assigning Value to Engagement

Not all content engagement is equal. Reading a 30-page white paper on a complex topic requires more effort and time than watching a 15-second product video. Further complicating assigning value to engagement is the lack of a standard for comparing content engagement across platforms. Consumer content consumption patterns are shifting. A full 90% of customers say that videos help them make purchase decisions. It's a mix of emotion, utility and form factor that makes consumers more likely to watch or pay attention to an ad or other brand message. It's also what makes them impactful.

In addition, platforms have different ways to track engagement. Instead of creating net new ads for every use case and form factor, brands are reusing parts of a single video ad to meet these consumer needs across different platforms, devices and viewing habits. For example, PepsiCo extended the use of its original 15-second video ad on YouTube and reworked its aspect ratios to form a 15-second square video asset to fit Facebook and an 8-second portrait asset for Instagram (see Figure 5). For this example, you need to factor in both the duration of the video and the level of engagement based on desired response (e.g., view, 50%, or 100% completion). The engagement on YouTube might be more quality/higher engagement because the engagement was driven by active search, versus an eight-second Instagram ad in a feed that was based on broader target segments. Although the weight may vary, regardless of how customers interact with the video they are still given the information needed to move them along the buying journey.

Figure 5. Pepsi Adapts One Video Ad for Multiple Channels



To solve this issue, consider weighting engagement according to people's interests. Using your content map, identify stages in your customer journey where content engagement is your objective. List those assets and approximate the value of each action according to the time people spend with specific content types (see Table 1). If it takes more time to consume content, then give it a greater weight to account for how customers and prospects use their time. Be sure to account for the fact that a 30-minute webinar and a 15-second video on Facebook may both result in the same desired consumer response. Refer to your customer journey mapping and desired response as you complete this weighting exercise.

In the absence of a sophisticated causal study of your brand's users, this principle gives you a baseline to use to determine the value of engagement. See [How to Measure a Digital Marketing Campaign](#) for more information about how to weight engagement value.

Table 1: Example Engagement Weights

| | 0.1x | 0.5x | 1.0x |
|---------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Webinar | Joins webinar | Completes webinar | Stays through Q&A, asks questions |
| Video View | Start | 50% complete | 100% complete |
| Blog Post | Accesses blog post | 50% scroll depth | 100% scroll depth |
| Facebook Post | Impression | Like | Share |

Measuring Perception

Marketers use perception metrics to measure the impact of aggregate exposure to content. It's unlikely that you'd use perception metrics to evaluate each content asset. In most cases, you'll measure perception at the level of larger campaigns or the entire content marketing program. The message, media coverage and frequency of exposure all account for changes in perception.

Typically, perception metrics focus on prospects engaged with the earlier stages of your customer journey, evaluating how people perceive your brand or product while they're getting started in the process. Studies also should include existing customers for insight into the owner and advocate phases of the customer journey. Marketers measure perception using indirect methods such as surveys, branded searches and social mentions.

Surveys measure the brand lift resulting from campaigns, particularly those that launch new products or have a strong brand message. They're offered by providers such as Nielsen and Comscore. In addition, many media providers, such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, offer surveys within their platforms.

Readily available digital metrics can provide a baseline to approximate changes in perception. For instance, content marketers can correlate campaigns or programs with changes in brand search volume. In addition, many brands use social analytics platforms to look at sentiment, text and semantic analysis to see whether content marketing causes changes in perception. These analyses require expert handling and are prone to capturing irrelevant signals. Custom brand perception research and data scientists can help apply lessons from the raw data and better understand shifts in perception.

Step 3: Communicate Business Value in the Form of KPIs That Align to Your Organization's Strategic Business Goals

Clients often tell us that it's a challenge demonstrating the business value that content marketing adds to the organization — but it doesn't have to be. Begin by rolling up the metrics you identified in Step 2 at either the campaign or program level.

Your organization will have one content marketing program that runs multiple campaigns. Within each campaign, use multiple content assets throughout many marketing channels. Look to the hierarchy below when deciding what's best for your organization. If you measure everything by campaign now, then continue to do that with content measurement. Establishing and working from your own baseline is the most effective way to measure success. If you're looking to show the value your program drives over six to 12 months, then roll your metrics up to the program level. This is the opportunity for your team to define the program and metrics that will determine your success. Understand what you can measure, your team's capacity for measurement (or ability to work with a data analyst) and the metrics that may be important for internal partners, including channels and brand. Planning for this now ensures you collect data that supports the right analysis to measure success (see *How Do I Measure ...: Content ROI?*).

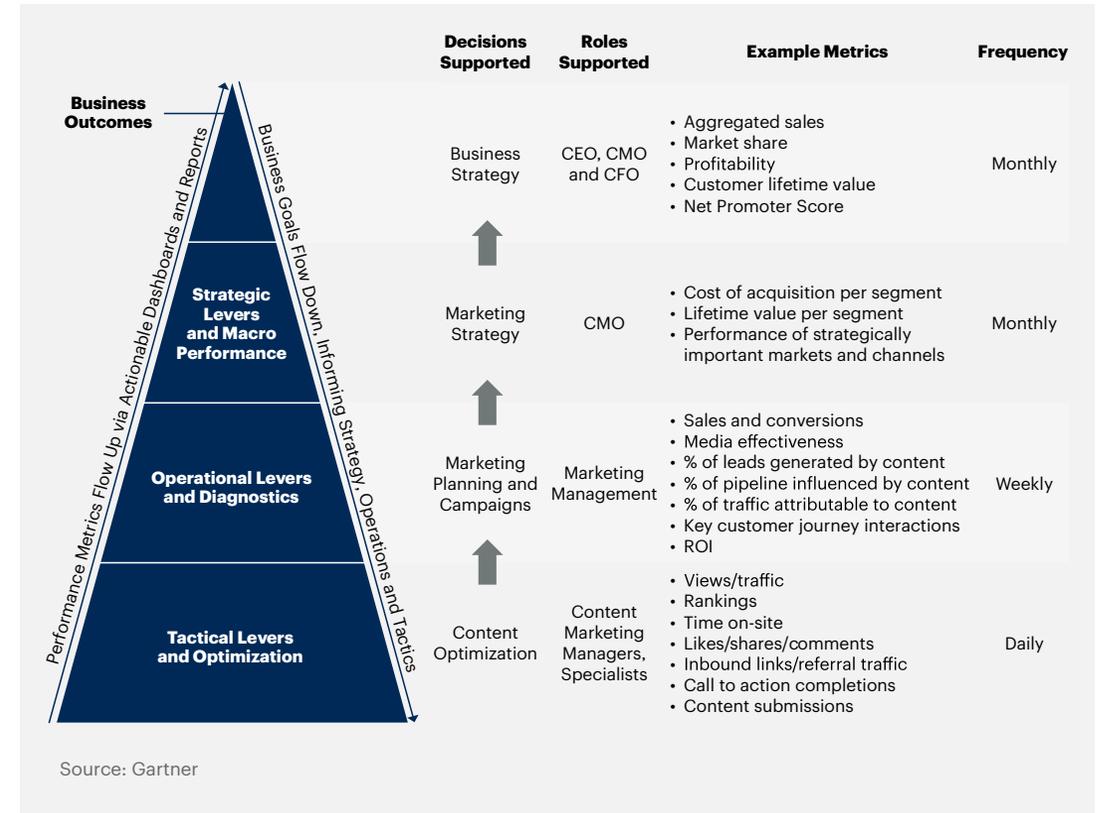
Now you're ready to develop your approach to content measurement and manage key stakeholder expectations. At this point, start to align metrics with your stakeholders. Use metrics that show the direct and indirect impact of content on critical business goals (see Figure 6).

Your team should connect content marketing metrics with strategic metrics that matter most to you and the executive team (see Use Gartner’s Hierarchy of Marketing Metrics to Link Execution to Goals).

Marketers, data analysts and core business stakeholders identify metrics by:

- Defining metrics that reflect strategic goals.** Metrics at the top two hierarchy levels reflect the organization’s business goals. Defining these goals drives the actionable measures for your tactical marketing campaigns. For example, if the business goal is to increase profits, then a core strategic measure might be to increase customer lifetime value (LTV) among key customer segments. In the case of content marketing, a mature team will test and monitor the performance of various content types, content timing and distribution channels among those segments. The team will use granular metrics that show how each piece of content contributes (or doesn’t) to larger goals. Results take shape by way of granular metrics that flow up through the marketing dashboard.
- Assessing (realistically) whether you’ve got the data for the measurement.** Before declaring content marketing’s ability to impact a business goal, perform a bottom-up appraisal of the data points supporting it. Consider the LTV example above. To calculate this metric, you need data on a monthly basis about the volume, value and frequency of purchases among the high-value customer segments that you’re targeting. If you’re a consumer-packaged goods brand selling through offline retailers, is this data available in that time frame? If so, how reliable is it? Empower your team to establish and verify metrics that have business impact.

Figure 6. Map Content Marketing Metrics to Business Outcomes

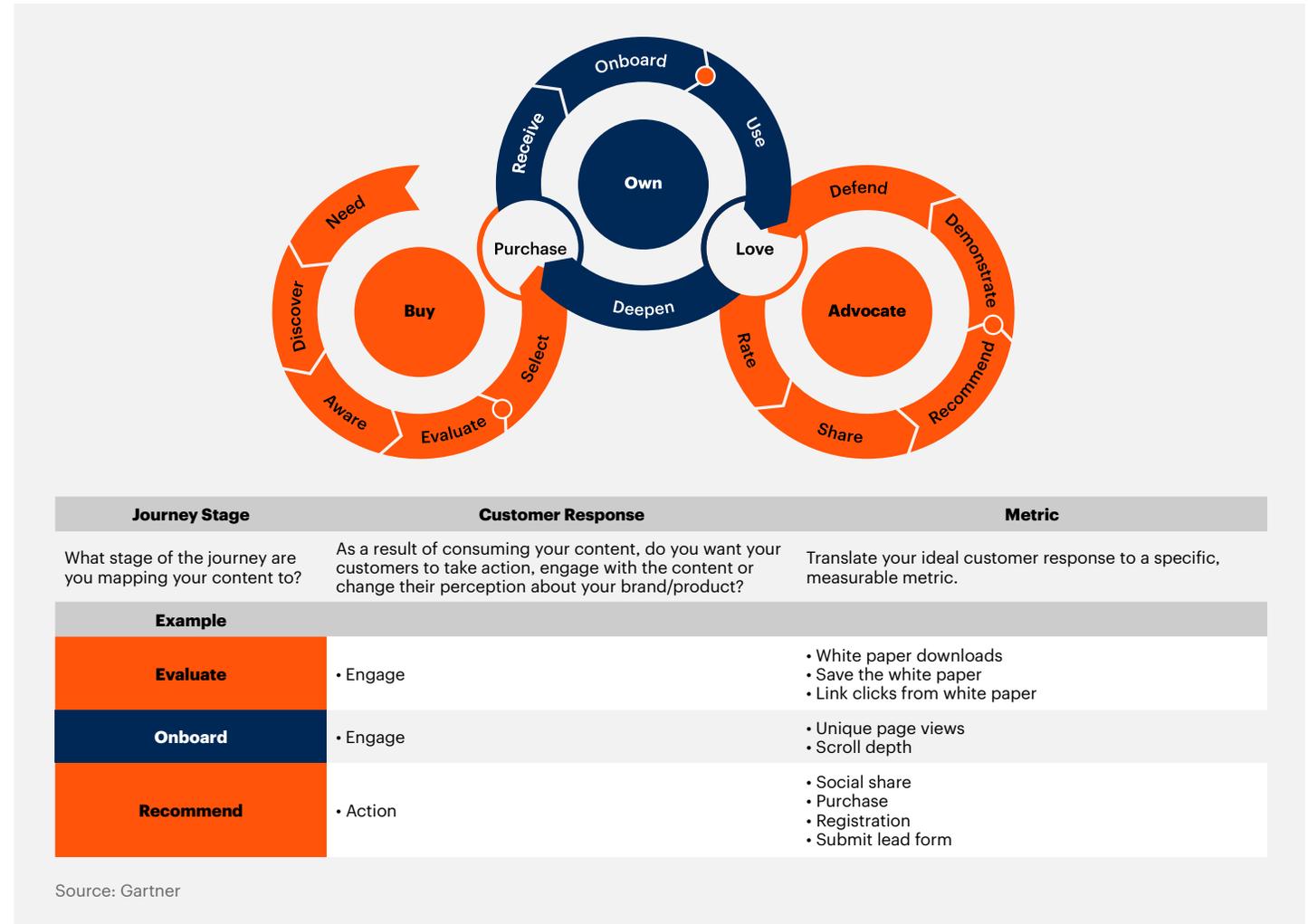


Mature content marketers tag every piece of content for measurement by mapping them to personas and stages along the customer journey (see Improve Efficiency and Digital Marketing Data Governance With Tag Management). Content is then amplified through earned, owned and paid channels for maximum reach and efficiency. It's essential to monitor how customers interact with content, using those insights to make strategic and tactical adjustments. Daily metrics guide operational tweaks. Weekly and monthly reviews support changes in editorial and promotion strategies.

The final step in measuring content marketing is to map your metrics and desired user response back to your content map, as shown in Figure 7.

Content measurement remains an inexact science. Unlike more clear-cut marketing measurement of tactics such as direct-response marketing, content marketing impact takes longer to assess. Many content marketing platforms now have the capability to attribute the fractional impact of assets or content types across your customer's journey. Use these capabilities with the guidelines above, and the advice of expert data and analytics partners, to gain the best insight about content marketing performance and contribution to business outcomes.

Figure 7. Example Content Metrics Mapped to the Customer Journey



Actionable, objective insight

Explore these additional complimentary resources for marketing leaders:

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
|  <p>Benchmarking Social Marketing Benchmarks 2021</p> <p>Benchmark your social marketing performance and optimize your strategy to improve brand awareness and conversion.</p> <p>Download Report</p> |  <p>Insight Content Marketing Strategy and Programs</p> <p>Build a sustainable content supply chain aligned with your business goals.</p> <p>Learn More</p> |  <p>Research Customer Journey Maps That Deliver Results</p> <p>Create actionable, accurate customer journey maps and get more out of your CX strategy.</p> <p>Download Guide</p> |  <p>Intelligence Report How Top Brands Are Excelling at Video Advertising</p> <p>Build a video advertising strategy that resonates with consumers and can be reused across ad formats.</p> <p>Download Research</p> |
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