

IS YOUR  
CONTENT  
MARKETING  
ACHIEVING  
RESULTS?

*Southerly*

— “ Despite the fact that almost three quarters (74 per cent) of companies say content marketing increases the quality of marketing leads, some people are still yet to be totally convinced of its value .”

At Southerly, we understand the importance of good content; we've been in this business for a while, and we've seen the benefits on any number of occasions.

However, we also know it can be difficult to convince management to put time, money and effort into an endeavour that can be hard to analyse, and doesn't always yield significant results immediately.

On the face of it, the ROI of content marketing might not seem like something that can be easily measured, which can make it difficult

to track campaign effectiveness. However, ROI can be calculated, and in this guide, we'll show you how you do it, why it makes a difference, and how this knowledge can inform future marketing decisions.

Content marketing has the capacity to be incredibly powerful, but to see the best results, a consistent and long-term approach is required. In this guide, we'll let you know what metrics you should track, how often it needs to be done, and what to do with your results.

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# Why we need to measure return on investment (ROI) in content marketing.

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Does your campaign work? Are your messages resonating with the right audience? Are you encouraging people to change their behaviour? Is your marketing affecting sales? These questions that can be answered through appropriate and accurate measurement.

As well as tracking performance, ongoing measurement can also allow you to be flexible and make changes as campaigns progress. If a campaign isn't working – for whatever reason that might be – then you will be able to update and amend sooner, rather than later. This will

limit financial losses, and will help you learn the best methods quickly.

All organisations, no matter the industry, need to understand what they are getting for their investment. In the past, the expectation of proving ROI has been reserved for teams with specific monetary targets. However, as the communications and marketing profession becomes more sophisticated, we are now expected to adhere to the same standards as other industries.

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# Defining the terms.

The first thing you must do is outline what can be considered investment, and what can be regarded as a return. Without these definitions, you won't be able to accurately measure ROI, nor will you have the capacity to benchmark.

This is not, however, always straightforward. Content marketing costs can cover numerous things, such as:

- Management and staff salaries
- Time taken by employees (writers, designers, editors) to generate content
- Printing and distribution
- Use of content marketing software

Each business – and, for that matter, each individual campaign - has different objectives, and so it is important to review how best to measure returns for each project you undertake. Your campaign goals could include:

- Increasing conversion rates
- Growing your blog subscriber numbers
- Increasing awareness
- Increasing newsletter subscriptions

You may also want to include specifics – double the number of blog subscribers within two weeks, for example – but if you are just plucking these ambitions out of the air, they could end up skewing how you assess results.

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# Setting objectives.

Objectives state exactly what it is that you are trying to achieve. It's vital that you get your objectives right, because they will ultimately determine how successful your campaign is. If the wrong objectives are set out, it will be difficult to comprehensively assess whether success has been attained.

## **Specific**

Make sure you clearly identify what you're aiming to achieve, and write a clear statement outlining your goals.

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## **Measurable**

Once you've set your objectives, work out how best to use particular measurements to monitor progress.

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## **Achievable**

Don't set objectives that are likely to be unobtainable. It's fine to be ambitious and challenging, but if they are wildly impractical, it will be incredibly difficult to achieve success.

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## **Realistic**

Focus on the actual outcomes you'd like to see, rather than the means of getting there.

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## **Timely**

Have particular deadlines in mind, and ensure your objectives match these timeframes.

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# Marathon, not a sprint.

Regardless of your marketing aims, there is technology available that can help you pinpoint the performance of specific pieces of online content. However, it's vital you keep in mind that content often takes time to make an impression. We often state that content marketing is a marathon, not a sprint; it is only by producing quality work consistently that substantial benefits will be seen.

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# Website metrics.

This will depend largely on your campaign's particular objectives, but the following metrics are especially good when trying to assess online performance:

## Total website visits

A good indication of a website's popularity is the total number of visits to the site or specific page.

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## Downloads

If you have created something that consumers can download, it is worth tracking not only how many times the product is downloaded, but also at what time of the day is most popular, what day of the week, and how they came to find the download page.

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## Unique visits (to a website or a specific page)

The number of different people that visit a website or page. This will reveal how many individuals you have been able to reach with your content.

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## Click-throughs

This describes how many people came to visit a page/website after clicking a link or advertisement. This metric will help you understand what is performing well in terms of enticing people.

## Browsing time

The longer people stay on your website, the more likely it is that they're engaged and find your content valuable.

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## Bounce rate

This refers to the number of visitors that leave a website after only viewing one page. Generally speaking, the lower the bounce rate, the better.

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These can all help to reveal how engaged your audience is, whether the content you are producing is regarded as useful, and whether or not visitors are encouraged to remain on the site once they've viewed the page they initially came to see.

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# Social media metrics.

You can also gain valuable information from your social media accounts, though they're generally less quantifiable because it's difficult to directly attribute cash value to them. However, if you do want to track social media output – and we suggest you do – then these are some of the metrics to keep an eye on:

## Retweets

When a Twitter user reposts another account's tweet

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## Shares

This refers to Facebook, in most cases. This is when a user shares a page, post, image or update from another individual or company.

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## Likes

Quite simply, if someone likes a post, they will click the 'Like' button. This can amplify a social post by making it appear on other timelines, but is not considered to be as effective as sharing or retweeting.

## Comments

When somebody comments on a post, it means that it has grabbed their attention. A comment will usually reflect someone's emotional response to the content you have produced, but – and this is especially common on Facebook – could be a means of 'tagging' a friend, and subsequently spreading the message.

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## Interactions

An interaction is regarded as any time an individual clicks on a post, or engages with it in any way. This is good way to track the number of people that are exposed to your posts.

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# Web analytics tools.

With so many content marketing metrics to track, you must ensure you choose a platform that's suited to your business' needs. There are numerous tools available - Woopra and Mixpanel, for example – but Google Analytics is the platform of choice for most marketers. Not only is it completely free, but it's relatively simple to use, and gives users access to a wealth of information. However, regardless of the solution you end up settling on, these are the key elements you should be looking to assess:

## **Content drilldowns**

Making it crystal clear which of your pieces of content are generating the most interest and sales opportunities.

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## **Traffic sources**

Allowing you to identify the sites, platforms or other sources that are sending traffic to your pages.

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## **Conversion funnel**

Helping you plot the various paths your visitors are taking to reach your website.

## **Conversion reports**

Letting you track which actions on your website are generating income to your business.

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## **Social media metrics**

Giving you an indication as to how your brand is being received across your social channels.

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# Using the data.

Once you've accumulated all this data, it's vital you understand how best to process, assess and utilise it. By following a clearly defined set of practices, you can glean every piece of vital information with regard to your marketing efforts. To be as efficient and effective as possible, try to do the following:

## **Be consistent**

Figure out how often you should be compiling reports, and stick to that timeframe. Content marketing is a marathon, not a sprint, so it might take some time for your work to make an impact, but it's still worth tracking progress quarterly, at the least.

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## **Automate**

Where possible, automate results. This will enable all findings to be seen in a simple format, and will minimise the risk of encountering any human error.

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## **Present everything clearly**

Workflow and analytics tools can measure results efficiently, but if you're using a presentation solution like PowerPoint, make sure your templates are standardised, and be certain they present the information in the most concise and helpful way possible.

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# One last thing.

To achieve success, you need to understand what your results mean. It really is that simple. You can only tell if things are going well, or if changes are required, if you track performance, and then take steps to make your processes more efficient.

By following a few simple steps, and by committing to analysing, reporting and interpreting performance on a regular basis, you'll be well placed to make your business flourish. And, at the end of that day, that's what every business owner wants to achieve.