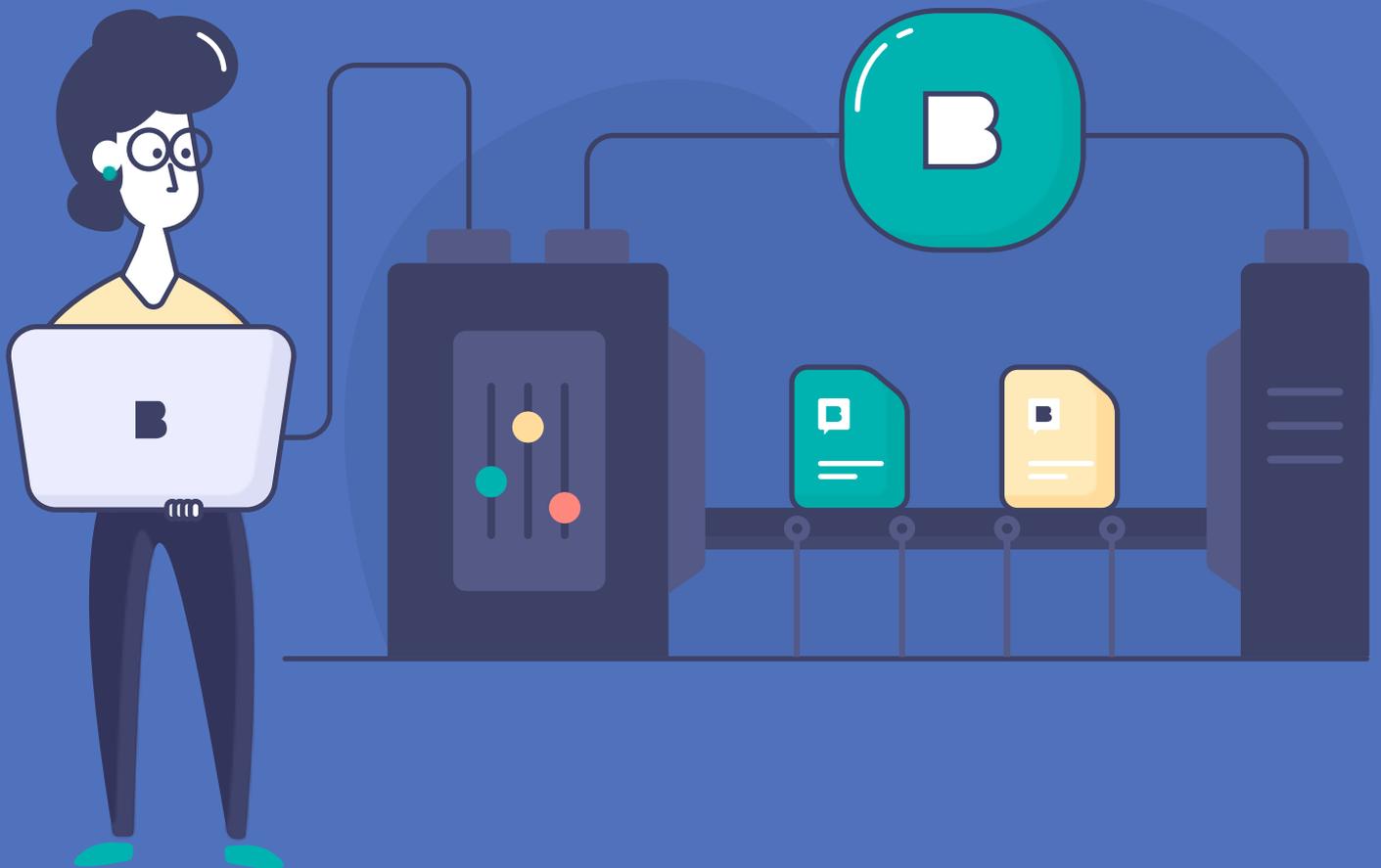


Automating and optimizing content creation: “content lifecycle” and “intelligent content” as strategies



The central role of content in marketing usually results in tremendous amounts of effort and resources spent to maintain a quality production flow. Many companies take a shot in automating content creation and end up with uninspired copy-pasted material, devoid of any personality.

How can you automate the process without sacrificing quality? How can you take advantage of the recent advancements in AI in your marketing? In this chapter, we dive deep in these issues and talk about optimizing your content production.

If you look at content as a product, it makes sense to see it evolve through different stages. From its inception as an idea, to its creation, publication, and maintenance, content can go through different stages of its "lifecycle". Understanding the content lifecycle is an essential part of any endeavor that deals with content, be it a huge media corporation or an independent online shop.

What is "content lifecycle"?

Depending on who you may ask, content lifecycle can be many things. In the most fundamental way, it simply refers to all the different stages that a piece of content goes through before it either reaches its final form, or ideally is repurposed as new content. The stages of the lifecycle can be quite different based on the nature of the content itself and that's why if you look around, you'll find [many](#), [many](#), [many](#) different interpretations. However, all of them can be re-structured in a few key categories which explain the most important stages of the content lifecycle:

1. Strategy and planning

The initial phase usually starts by the team leaders defining a clear strategy and a roadmap, before any form of creation takes place. This is true for both completely new content, and also for repurposing older content. A clearly defined vision is content in its conceptual stage, where its possible character, properties, and effects are conceived.

At this point some key questions will be answered:

- Who/What is this content going to be made for?
- What is the ideal outcome of creating this content?
- What are the challenges surrounding the process?
- How does it connect to other pieces of content and the general plan overall?

Once the vision is there, the team will move on to create a plan for its creation and eventual future. Team members will be assigned to different tasks, typically a schedule will be put up, and a workflow will be created for better progress and communication between different members/teams.



2. Production and creation

After a clear workflow is settled, the content creators can get to work. In an ideal case, the creators would take the specific target audience into account while working, resulting in a piece of personalized content which is what everyone is striving for nowadays. The huge impact of content creation is evident in recent statistics¹ which show content creation is **3 times more efficient** than outbound marketing. Additionally 56% of businesses worldwide intend to spend more on content creation.

In cases where content has even a higher significance like eCommerce platforms or media companies, a bulk of the operation may be handled by AI through what is called “Intelligent Content”, which we will discuss later.

3. Management

In addition to the management team which oversees the process, content requires management technology. Management technology is necessary in efficiently handling content in all stages: it offers a platform to create, revise, publish, refine, and preserve content of any form.

Depending on your needs, you have a choice between the traditional (i.e. Wordpress) or the modern (think “[headless](#)” systems) approach. In short, the modern solution is suitable for cases where omnichannel publication (website, phone app, smart watch, etc), intelligent content, speed, and most importantly for the content lifecycle content repurposing, have higher degrees of importance.

4. Publication and maintenance

When content is created, it is published through the content management system (CMS, the management technology mentioned above) for the public. This is the first time in the content’s lifecycle where it is finally observed by its target audience. If something is wrong, the content can still be edited through the CMS to fix the problem. At this point the marketing team is done with the bulk of the operation and can enjoy watching their creation find its place through time.

5. Preservation and repurposing

Older content must be regularly updated and maintained so it stays relevant to its viewers. Although sometimes they are completely wiped out after serving their purpose, the more common options are either to archive them for later use, updating them after proper research to fit the new goal, or recycle them (or parts of them) as brand new content. Repurposing a piece of content means getting the most possible outcome of your investment both in terms of time and resources.

Repurposing can be as simple as adding new tags to a picture or keywords to a text, or more substantial like creating a completely new piece of content by combining and changing older ones.

Whether you implement traditional or intelligent content, repurposing is vital in keeping your audience engaged, and more so in offering them a personalized experience.

How important is an optimized content lifecycle?

Lifecycle is simply a natural and inherent part of any content and it exists whether there is any active input from the creators or not. What any enterprise dealing with content should do, is to firstly understand it thoroughly, and then optimize it so it serves their specific needs in the best way possible.

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In a 2020 survey of 249 businesses, 74% of respondents reported that they view content as a "core business strategy", yet only 23% said that their organization is either "extremely" (1%) or "very successful" (22%) in strategically managing their content.

Perhaps most importantly, **an optimized content lifecycle can act as the perfect foundation for implementing "Intelligent Content"**

Intelligent content: A strategy

Intelligent content is used to describe multi-purposed, adaptable, and streamlined content which has a profoundly different approach from its traditional counterpart. As a general rule, it includes moving away from tedious micro-managing that requires individual human input, into a data-driven and automated form of content creation that takes advantage of the recent advancements in artificial intelligence and machine learning, while incorporating individualized human perspective.

Intelligent content is not only a type of content, but the term is often used to

describe the whole strategy that leads to the creation of a specific kind of structured content. The strategy relies on creating modular bits of content that can be used in different contexts, and can be modified easily if needed.

If you look at content the same way as basically any other product, you will notice that in many ways content is still in its "artisanal" stage. Each product is made specifically for a single case from the bottom up by an individual, and the process requires manual input in every stage. While this approach has its merits, in many cases it simply doesn't pay off.

Just imagine if we made cars one by one, each a product of a single person. You can already see the problems:

- Huge drain on the resources
- Inevitable inconsistencies in products
- Standards and quality control are harder to implement
- Big scale changes require immense effort
- Communications can be confusing when dealing with many creators
- In great number of outputs, uninspired copying is inevitable

So how would you go around these problems when dealing with content? Some believe that the answer is in making your content "intelligent".

Intelligent content is made to be worked on by humans and machines at the same time. Any content can be considered intelligent or smart if it meets these criteria:

1. Data-driven structure: Content must be supported with metadata so it can be processed by machines. Most of us already do this to our personal content by "tagging" our photos or documents. On a bigger scale, content which is supported by metadata can be easily archived, structured, and searched. This allows the machines (and people) to quickly access and retrieve any content when necessary.

2. Modular: Instead of creating full-fledged and finished single pieces of content every time, smaller blocks of content are created which can be stacked on top of each other to form different finished products. These blocks can be used outside of their original context and be applied to many different situations.

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3. Flexible: Because of their highly structured nature (points 1 and 2), they can be easily accessed and edited later to adapt to their new contexts. Imagine the blocks of intelligent content as made of playdough instead of rigid plastic: not only you can stack them however you want, but you can also smooth out the edges and form each block individually to a different shape.

So in short, **intelligent content is highly structured** in a way that is both beneficial to humans and machines. It treats content as flexible smaller blocks tagged with metadata that can be reconfigured and reused in many different appropriate places with ease.





What are the benefits of intelligent content?

Intelligent content can potentially affect many different aspects of a project. If implemented at the right place (take a look at the next section to see if it applies to your case) it can dramatically reduce the burden on your resources, increase the overall quality, and help you in offering a more personalized content. Some of the key benefits of intelligent content are:

- **Omnichannel publication:** The structured nature of intelligent content in addition to its flexibility, allows for a simultaneous publication of content in multiple formats on different channels.
- **Optimized search:** The metadata embedded in the content makes it very simple to look for even the smallest fragments in different contexts based on your needs.
- **Resource saving:** Since the bulk of the operation is carried out by AI, the need for human input is considerably reduced and content creators can instead focus on creating original material to be used by the AI. Subsequently, costs will reduce as the need for handcrafting every single element will disappear.
- **Quality assurance and consistency:** Since repetitive tasks are done by the AI, and the same quality applies to every bit of content, there is a guaranteed consistency of tone

and standards that is almost impossible when done by individuals, especially when dealing with greater amounts of content in multiple formats.

- **Personalization:** Without exception, intelligent content can deliver the preferred content of specific target audiences in a specific time frame, be it immediately or scheduled (with the help of its optimized search).
- **Format independence:** You can have your content be adapted to any format that you would need at the time, and repurpose it in a different format later. This is optimal when you want to publish your content in multiple channels, or take parts from multiple content sources and publish the result as new content in a new format!
- **Uninterrupted communication:** Uncluttered workflow of the content team makes communications within the team and also with other teams considerably smoother.



Traditional Content vs. Intelligent Content

Traditional Content

Intelligent Content

Each item must be handcrafted

Streamlined production

Inevitable inconsistencies due to production methods

Consistent and unified form and substance in all channels

Requires considerable resources

Cost saving due to automation

Manual transformation of content to different channels

Automated and immediate transformation and publication of content in multiple channels

Inevitable copy-pasted content where volume is high

Flexible and reconfigurable content blocks allowing customized reusability

Personalization requires extensive individual research

Personalized and targeted content through structured data

Who is it for?

Every project or company which is on the heavier side of content creation will definitely benefit from making the jump to intelligent content. Perhaps first and foremost are the eCommerce companies where not only a huge amount of content is created constantly and is meant to be published in multiple channels, but personalizing the content also has the utmost importance.



Just like any other strategy, you should see if intelligent content fits your needs, expectations, and general plans.

Different kinds of media companies (both creation and distribution) whose product is essentially content are already moving towards an intelligent approach, and so are companies which need to access and retrieve content on a regular basis such as financial firms.

The question that should be answered is how important the issue of content creation is to the company or the project. If content plays a central role, or if publication in multiple platforms is a priority, it makes sense to switch to the approach which prioritizes content quality and omnichannel delivery.

How does it relate to content marketing?

Offering a personalized experience through content is what companies strive for. The current emphasis on storytelling and brand identity are obvious indicators of this new approach.

Likewise as access to the internet on multiple devices is becoming more common than ever, the need for simultaneous publication of content in different platforms is turning from a novelty to a necessity.

Intelligent content can be implemented to facilitate both of these needs. Through precise and consistent structuring of data, coupled with an automated publication process, it can deliver highly personalized content to specific target groups. Its independence from format and modular nature encourages omnichannel publication with considerably less effort compared to the traditional approach.

Making the move to intelligent content

If you believe that intelligent content is the way forward for you, then you should start by redefining your content strategy. There are many ways to do so, but a couple of central issues are shared between them:

- **Organization:** A new strategy requires adjustments in your current vision. These adjustments include contextual issues such as defining new goals and changing priorities, but also include administrative changes in your marketing and content team. As your team would be relieved of many time consuming tasks, their talents should be reoriented towards more creative avenues.

- **Technology:** Intelligent content is not a technology on its own, but a strategy. In order to be able to implement the new strategy, you probably have to change to the appropriate technology when it comes to your content management system. The consensus is that a headless CMS is the way to go, due to its compatibility with modular content and omnichannel publication, plus its independence from presentational formats. This is why it makes sense to optimize the content lifecycle and implement intelligent content at the same time.
- **(re-)Structure:** After making the appropriate changes in your organization and technology, the content itself must be structured intelligently, supplemented with metadata. Additionally, your team’s structure may also change depending on your new content roadmap.

The result will be an efficiently streamlined content creation process, which not only prioritizes personalization and omnichannel publication, but does so while being considerably more convenient.



Some headless systems like [Storyblok](#) offer completely free trials, where you can get some hands-on experience and see if it is the right choice for your business.



Key Takeaway

The importance of content in eCommerce marketing is not a secret to anyone, yet many companies still struggle with proper content strategies. Usually the problem is in maintaining original quality content production in the long-term. Many businesses fall into the trap of un-inspired copy-pasted material.

By understanding the content lifecycle, and implementing intelligent content as a central strategy, you can automate a considerable portion of the content production task and reuse older content in a proper way. These strategies complement each other perfectly and are relatively easy to put into place. Once in order, they can drastically reduce the workload on your content creators, allowing them to spend their time on more creative tasks, while the mundane and repetitive parts of the job are taken care of by AI.



Endnotes

1. Review42, Content Marketing Statistics, Facts & Predictions in 2020. Nov. 2020, <https://review42.com/content-marketing-statistics/>

2. Content Marketing Institute, Content Management and Strategy: A Disruptive Change We Need. May 2020, <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2020/05/content-strategy-research/>