HOW SMART IS YOUR CONTENT?

Make your website content outperform the competition and engage and convert your visitors.

BRIGHTEDGE

Contents

Why should you read this eBook?

There's a lot of content out there vying for your attention -- why invest with this one? Actually, content overload is the reason why we decided to write this eBook in the first place. And it's not that we wanted to add our contribution to the load; we wanted to show you a smarter way to approach content ideation and development.

Every business is aware of the potential power of content marketing, but in the rush to create content many of us have lost our way. Only 50% of B2B content ever reaches an audience and the B2C picture is bleaker still with only 20% reaching an audience.

None of this diminishes the potency of content marketing as a means of driving revenue. In fact, it just creates opportunities for smart marketers to stand out from the crowd. **The more noise there is, the more important the signal becomes.**

Our aims within this eBook are simple:

- Reveal the current state of the content marketing industry, backed up by BrightEdge proprietary research.

- Discuss the challenges marketers are facing as they battle for customers' attention and aim to quantify the ROI of their content.

- Propose a new, smarter way of approaching content that uses technology to drive an intuitive, profitable content process, from research through to production and promotion.
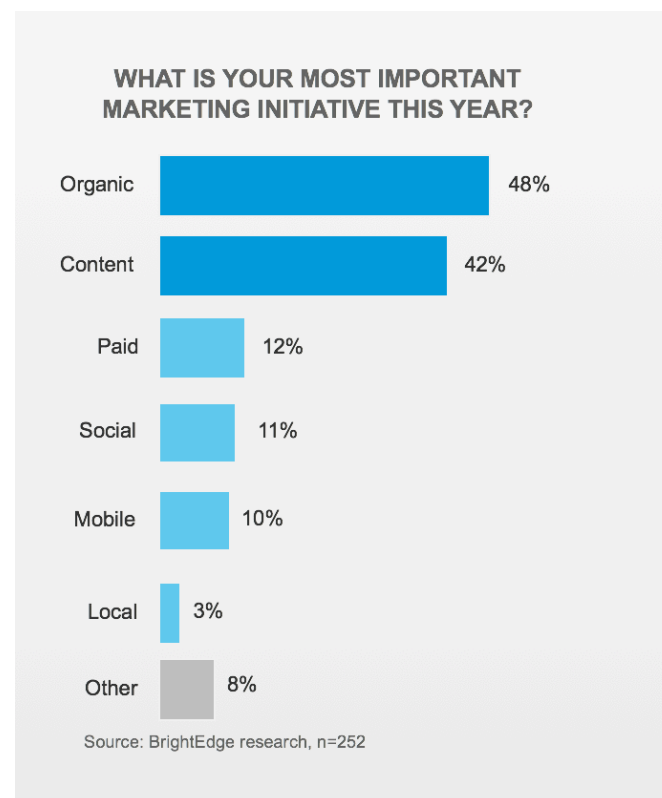
Content marketing reigns supreme

Content marketing and SEO are top two marketing initiatives for 2017

In a recent survey, we asked over 250 marketers to rank their priorities for 2017. Overwhelmingly, Organic and Content Marketing were identified as the top two initiatives.

An increasing number of marketers are realizing the importance of having their brands and content show up in the moments that matter to their target audiences.

Organic and Content Marketing have converged in response to a complex ecosystem where customers pass through multiple demand states each day. **Only a content strategy that maps against these moments and is optimized for search can achieve its full potential.**

Paid media channels remain essential, but they are ultimately means of promoting content. The cornerstone of modern digital marketing is the combination of Organic and Content as our survey results attest.

WHAT IS YOUR MOST IMPORTANT MARKETING INITIATIVE THIS YEAR?

Initiative	Percentage
Organic	48%
Content	42%
Paid	12%
Social	11%
Mobile	10%
Local	3%
Other	8%

Source: BrightEdge research, n=252

Most marketers unhappy with content performance

The reality, however, is that most marketers believe that the content they're creating is not reaching their target audiences. In a separate research that we conducted, only 50% of B2B marketers and 20% of B2C marketers believed that their content engaged their readers.

This points to a huge area of under-achievement for the content marketing industry. As one of the most important marketing initiatives for this year and beyond, improvements must be made for the industry to live up to its promise.

The survey results also highlight the continuing perception that content marketing is not generating sufficient ROI. This is not surprising, given the pessimistic assessment of B2B and B2C content engagement rates.

Furthermore, content measurement has long been a challenge, but it is not an insurmountable one. With the right strategy and right tools, content marketing can produce fantastic results for any brand.

Producing content with conviction, driven by data and focused on the business areas that generate ROI, will significantly improve these engagement rates. Getting there requires the right blend of people and technology.

50% of **B2B** brands produce content that engages their target audiences

**20%** of **B2C** brands produce content that engages their target audiences

Source: BrightEdge research
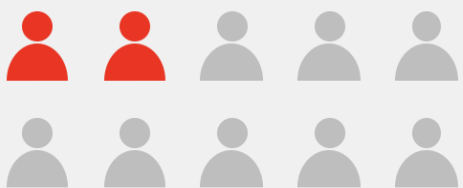
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Content marketing budgets slashed

Poor returns from content investments have convinced some companies like UBS to scale back their content commitments in favor of other digital marketing initiatives.

The conclusion drawn by senior marketers at UBS was that they were spending too much on content creation and too little on content promotion via paid social channels.
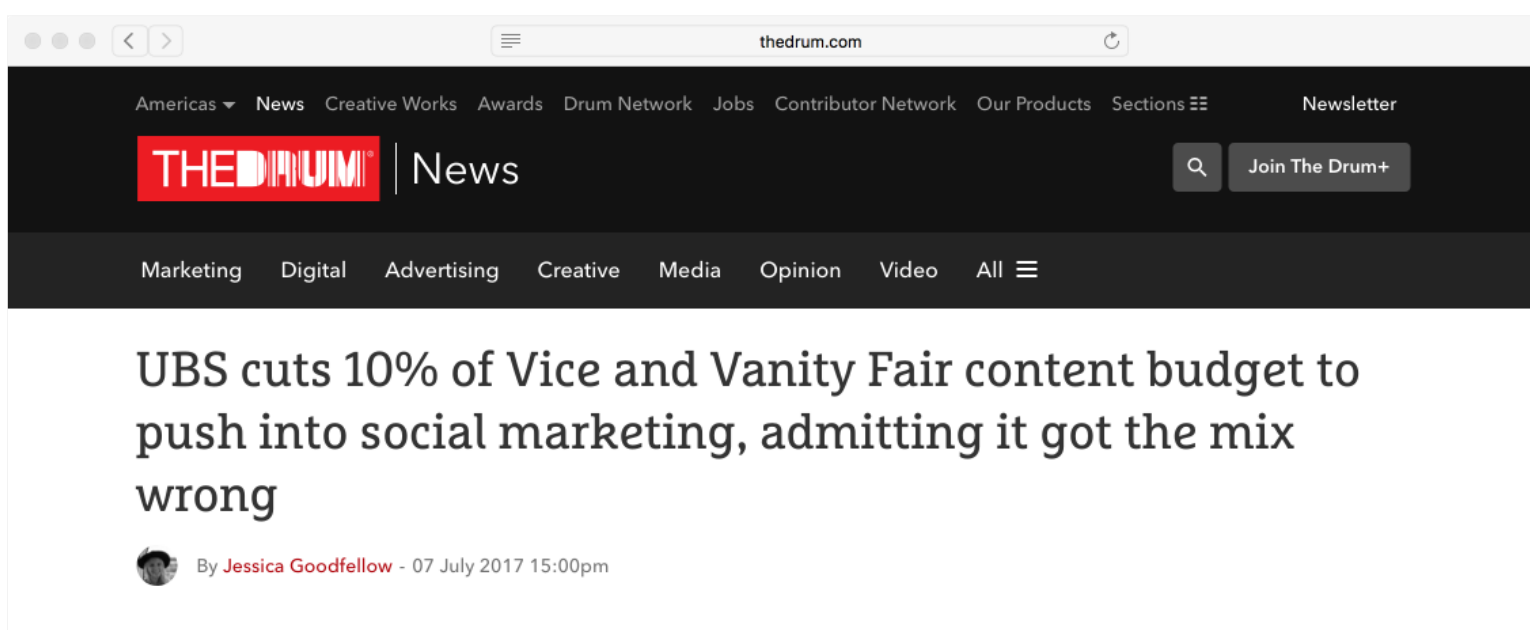
While we understand the desire to optimize budget allocation and marketing mix, we do not believe that simply decreasing content output is a recipe for digital success. Brands must realize that their audiences are craving content.

What their audiences are not craving, however, is the same content they have seen time and again. Quality content, at scale, will still deliver fantastic results for both awareness and conversions. Quantity does not have to be a prohibiting factor if the content can pinpoint and respond to genuine consumer demands.

Content congestion is the problem

Before authoring a new content piece, we need to accept the fact that there's already a ton of content out there and much of it is never found by its intended target audience.

Customers are savvy; they have multiple brands trying to attract them, and their attention spans are decreasing.

The last thing customers need or want is another half-baked piece of content that has no tangible purpose. **Content marketing has rightly drawn a lot of attention, but it requires a subtle combination of planning and creativity to cut through.**

If we continue to publish content just because we think we should, we will only contribute to the congestion.

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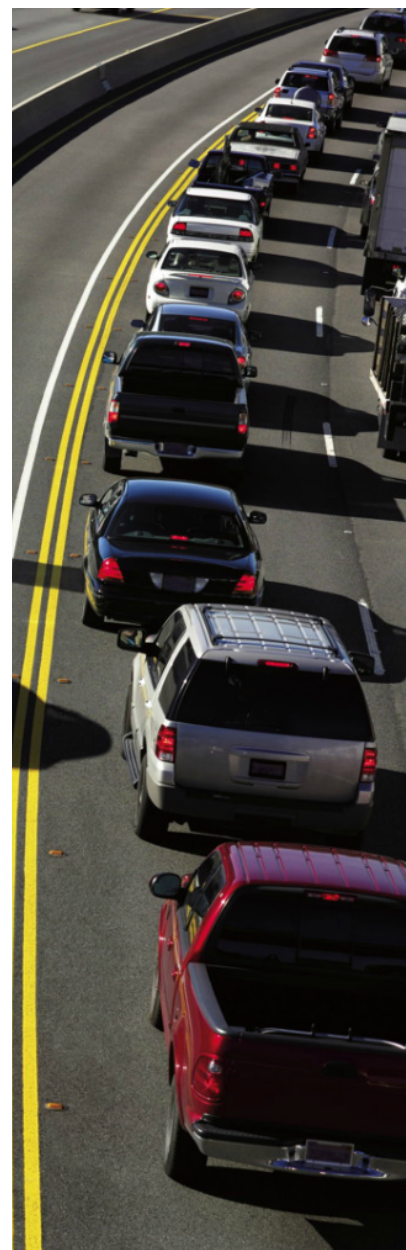
Smart Content is the solution

There is another way. The answer is to bypass the congestion with a new type of content that ranks fast, engages the reader, and drives conversions & performance.

At BrightEdge, we call this new paradigm Smart Content.

Smart Content takes an outside-in approach to research, starting with an objective view of the demand landscape. What are customers and prospects searching for?

From here, it assesses the quality and quantity of the current supply of answers to those questions by your competition.

Smart Content is born at this intersection of supply and demand. It ensures that there is a profitable and realistic market for an idea, then utilizes innovative technology to aid the creation of SEO-friendly, mobile-optimized content that consumers love to read and share.

In short, Smart Content:

- Targets demand
- Empowers the marketer
- Delights the reader
- Delivers results

The convergence of SEO and content marketing makes Smart Content possible

Organic Search is a key website traffic channel of many brands. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) enables brands to strengthen their content presence on search engine results pages. While SEO and Content Marketing teams have co-existed for years, the two functions remained separate and even siloed for years.

But the tide is turning. In a recent BrightEdge survey of over 240 marketers, 97% said that SEO and Content Marketing were becoming more integrated, even to the point of fully converging into a single function in some organizations.

Content Marketing takes an inside-out approach to topic ideation. SEO complements it with an outside-in view of the supply and demand of ideas.

SEO offers insights about the supply and demand of ideas. Using SEO, brands uncover the questions that their target audiences are asking in their own (not the brands') language. Marketers also use SEO to assess how effectively their competitors address those questions with quality content.
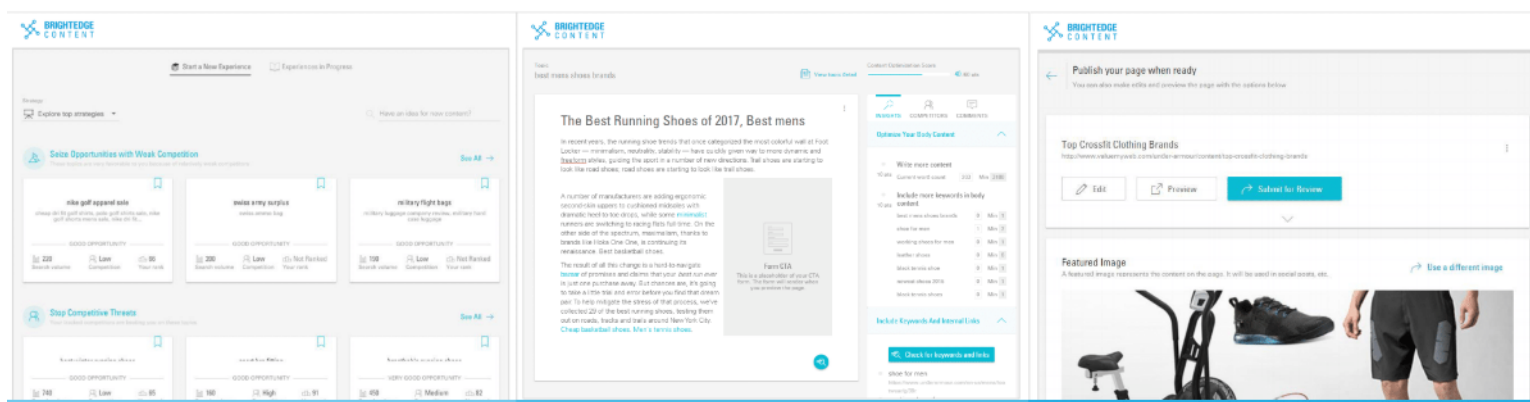
So while Content Marketing typically takes an inside-out approach to ideation ("I have a new product to sell, what content should I write for it?"), SEO completes the picture with an outside-in view ("What customer needs can I address by creating new content?"). SEO also ensures that the resulting copy effectively addresses the original intent of the audience.

By integrating SEO and Content Marketing into a unified process, brands can produce Smart Content that helps them connect and engage their target audiences.

Marketing success with Smart Content

To consistently produce new content that outperforms the competition and engages the right audiences, content writers and strategists need to adopt a reliable ideation, development, and activation process.

A systematic approach enables brands to produce Smart Content at a lower cost and faster rate to establish thought leadership and brand awareness around the topics that customers and prospects care about today.

DISCOVER PROFITABLE OPPORTUNITIES
Identify high-value topics to fuel content strategies and increase site traffic and conversions

DEVELOP PRE-OPTIMIZED CONTENT
Create engaging articles, glossaries, and blogs with effective CTAs, content recommendations, forms and imagery

PUBLISH AND AMPLIFY QUICKLY
Get new content on the site with a click of a button and amplify in social, voice search, and other marketing channels

To begin the process, marketers must identify profitable opportunities where they can focus on customer questions that the competition fails to address. Then they need to integrate SEO best practices into the writing process, so that they are able to produce pre-optimized content right from day one. Lastly, they need mechanisms to publish and amplify the content quickly, so that it can be found right away by search engine bots and by readers.

The following pages provide a detailed checklist for succeeding in each of these three areas.

Focus your content strategies

What new content should you develop? And, more importantly, what process should you follow to pick the best content topics? There are the new messages that you already wish to convey about your products, services, and thought leadership ideas. But Smart Content also looks at the supply and demand of ideas in the marketplace, clustering previously unexplored topics based on specific marketing objectives.

Grouping topics around objectives and orchestrating the publishing and amplification of related content can dramatically accelerate content and marketing performance. Here are a few content strategies that you could pursue when surveying the landscape for content topics:

1. **Stop competitive threats**. Your named competitors are publishing new content to increase mind- and wallet-share. Identify their content pieces that perform best in organic search and craft messages with unique perspectives that will get your content to overtake the competition and win back lost audiences.

2. **Appear in Quick Answer boxes**. Search engines often feature content snippets in Quick Answer boxes that effectively capture customers' attention. Use this strategy to identify topics that search engines address with Quick Answer boxes and develop better content that positions your brand more authoritatively.

3. **Capitalize on local demand**. Search engines often showcase physical stores prominently in Local 3-Packs. To have your content outrank the competition's, identify topics that are location-sensitive and develop content that helps customers easily find your brick-and-mortar presence.

Analyzing your published content, your competitors' content, and your customers' queries identifies unexplored content gaps and opportunities. This outside-in approach helps prioritize content pieces that can capture untapped audiences and drive awareness and interest from new customers who express a need for your solutions using terms and words that may be missing from your current content.

Target precise reader intent

Gone are the days that a single piece of content could cover a set of unrelated or loosely related topics and still rank high on search results for different search queries. Today, content should address specific intents. A cluster of related content items, each addressing a single primary intent, can offer authority on a given topic category.

Smart Content relies on intent-based frameworks, such as Google's Micro-Moments, to break broad topics into meaningful content items.

For instance, the topic of **flu shots** can be covered by a set of content items following the Micro-Moments framework:

INTENT	TOPIC	CONTENT TYPE
I want to know	Are flu shots safe for children?	Blog post
I want to go	Where can I get a flu shot?	Store locator
I want to do	How long does a flu shot last?	Video
I want to buy	How much does a flu shot cost?	Product detail

Here's another example for the broad topic of **gluten free pizza**:

Smart Content for different intents around **gluten free pizza**

"what is gluten free pizza made of"	"gluten free pizza near me"	"how to make gluten free pizza"	"gluten free pizza menu"
I-Want-To-Know Moments	I-Want-To-Go Moments	I-Want-To-Do Moments	I-Want-To-Buy Moments
Quick Answers	Local 3-Packs	Videos	Local 3-Packs, Ads

Identify profitable opportunities

Once you identify the primary questions, needs, and wants of your target audience, you should overlay the supply of content that currently ranks for these queries.

Profitable topics are those that connect to the value you provide, have a high level of demand – measured by monthly search volume – and that the competition is doing a poor job of addressing – competitive content is either missing or it has a low level of authority. Where these gaps exist, there are clear opportunities for content.

Once you've prioritized your topics, you need to identify all the semantically-related keywords for each topic; that is, you need to discover all the different permutations of queries that once addressed with quality content will satisfy the same underlying intent.

It's important to remember that customers and prospects often use entirely different words and terms to express the same underlying intent. **Discovering and incorporating the right keywords into your copy, increases the chance for search engines and humans to associate your content with different expressions of the same intent.**

Naturally, to conduct this type of analysis at scale, you need good technology to automate the research of content demand, supply, and opportunities, as well as all the related keywords to incorporate in every piece of content.

Uncover opportunities

Identify high-value topics to engage visitors with original, quality content

Tailor format to intent

Content is a vast field covering everything from a tweet to a whitepaper to a 3D video and a lot more in between. Pinpointing areas of opportunity is a great start, but it is essential to understand how to execute on these opportunities effectively.

Customer preferences can be impacted by the device they are using, the type of content they are hoping to read, or their search intent. All of this affects the optimal reading level, content length, and keyword density for a piece of content.

The key to remember is that not only should you adjust the type of content you create to address every customer intent, you should also tailor the format of that content to intent.

Some intents, such as getting to your nearby store, typically require short, easy read. Other intents, such as learning about a complex topic, would require longer and denser content.

Search engines are becoming better at identifying the types of content that will satisfy every need. It makes sense to examine the top ranking content for each intent and understand on average and in detail their format and structure.

By replicating the format (not the messages) of high ranking content, you increase the likelihood of that your new content piece will satisfy its underlying need.
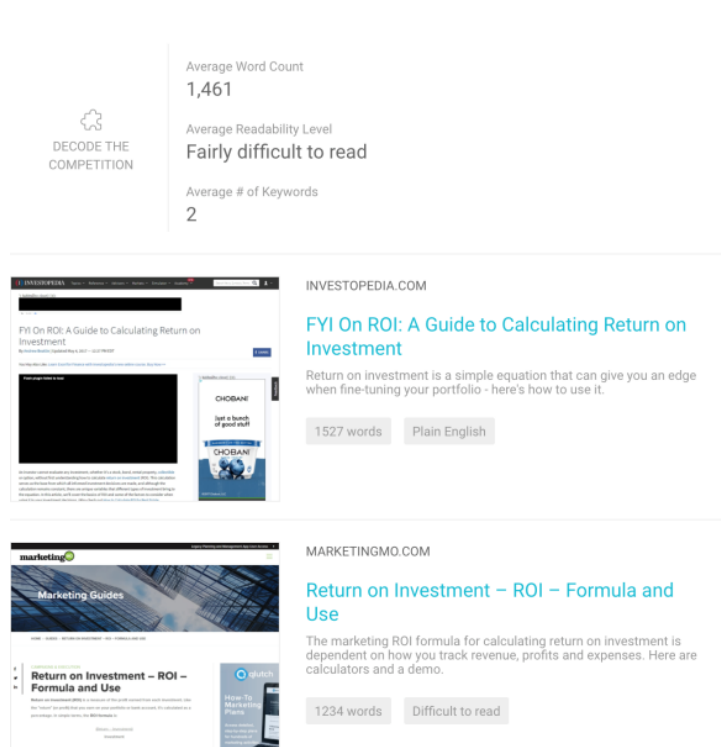
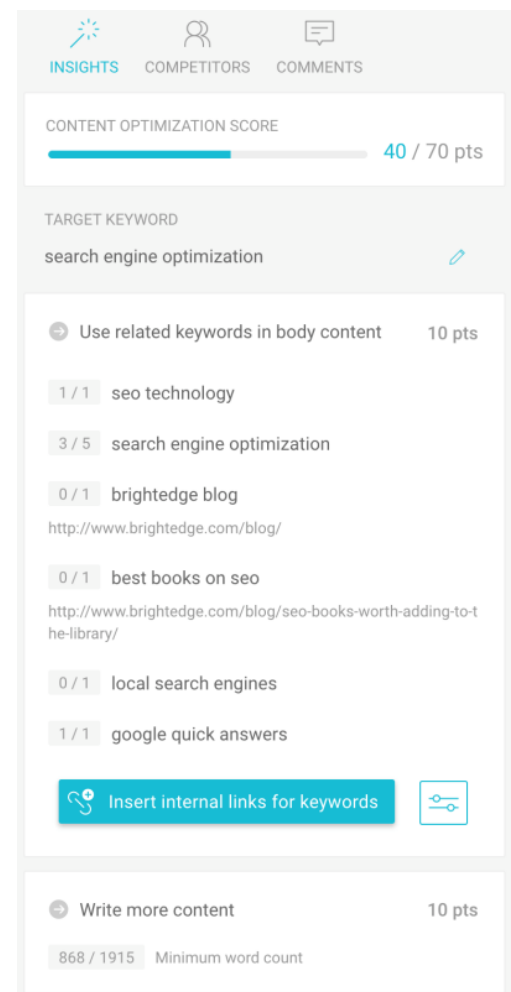# Develop pre-optimized content

Optimizing content for search and mobile can be a time-consuming task. It requires research, technical expertise, and a deep understanding of the search landscape. Moreover, it is not always clear whose responsibility this is, or how to fit optimization into the content creation work flow.

To produce high-performing content at scale, marketer must be empowered to focus on what they do best – ideating and writing content – and leave the technical optimization efforts to technology. When content is pre-optimized, it eliminates the need for SEO pros to spend valuable time working on content after it's published. Content is found more quickly by search engine bots and humans, driving performance right from the start.

Look for technology solutions that provide marketer with real-time SEO recommendations and guidelines as content is generated. For example, make it easy for marketer to identify all the semantically related keywords that they should include in every content item. Enable marketer to compare their content to the format of top ranking content items in terms of length, complexity, and density.

Automate as much as possible any SEO and user experience best practice, such as the creation of an Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) version of the content and its linking to the canonical page, the use of schema and social tags, and offering relevant content recommendations to keep readers engaged.

INSIGHTS   COMPETITORS   COMMENTS

CONTENT OPTIMIZATION SCORE   40 / 70 pts

TARGET KEYWORD

search engine optimization

Use related keywords in body content   10 pts

1 / 1   seo technology

3 / 5   search engine optimization

0 / 1   brightedge blog
http://www.brightedge.com/blog/

0 / 1   best books on seo
http://www.brightedge.com/blog/seo-books-worth-adding-to-the-library/

0 / 1   local search engines

1 / 1   google quick answers

Insert internal links for keywords

Write more content   10 pts

868 / 1915   Minimum word count

Activate internal linking

Search engines are constantly crawling the web to identify and index new pages. We can speed up this process by building our new content into the structure of our websites.

One of the most effective ways to achieve this is through the addition of internal links to new and existing content. This alerts search engines and site visitors to the new content, which can bring a significant amount of traffic to the page.

Adding internal links is therefore of huge benefit, but it can be challenging to keep on top of this process. Websites are living organisms that are constantly changing, making the manual maintenance of internal links an almost impossible task. marketer cannot remember all the relevant pages that should be linked to and from for every new content piece.

Look for technology solutions that can identify relevant opportunities to inject internal links automatically during content creation, as well as display dynamic content recommendations when search engine bots and readers access the site. Automation should enhance both new new and existing website content to eliminate the need for manual updates,

By adding in-body links and content recommendations automatically, marketer are freed to focus on writing, while getting their content found, indexed, and accessed much faster. Content recommendations are especially important to engage visitors who are not ready to convert. By keeping customers reading, you decrease abandonment rate and lead them proactively to your conversion points.

Publish new content faster

Often, the impediment of content performance is having a long and arduous publishing process. Even in situations where marketer can easily publish new copy, they often have to contend with formatting, imagery, canonicalization, and AMP issues.

To publish great content at scale, marketer should be removed from the process of migrating content from their workspaces to its final publication location.

Look for technology solutions that abstract away content migration and hosting steps. marketer and editors should be able to draft, review, edit, approve, and publish new content with a few quick mouse clicks.

Social amplification is an important element to have ideally within the publication process, so that marketer can promote their work in social media channels as soon as their content is available online.
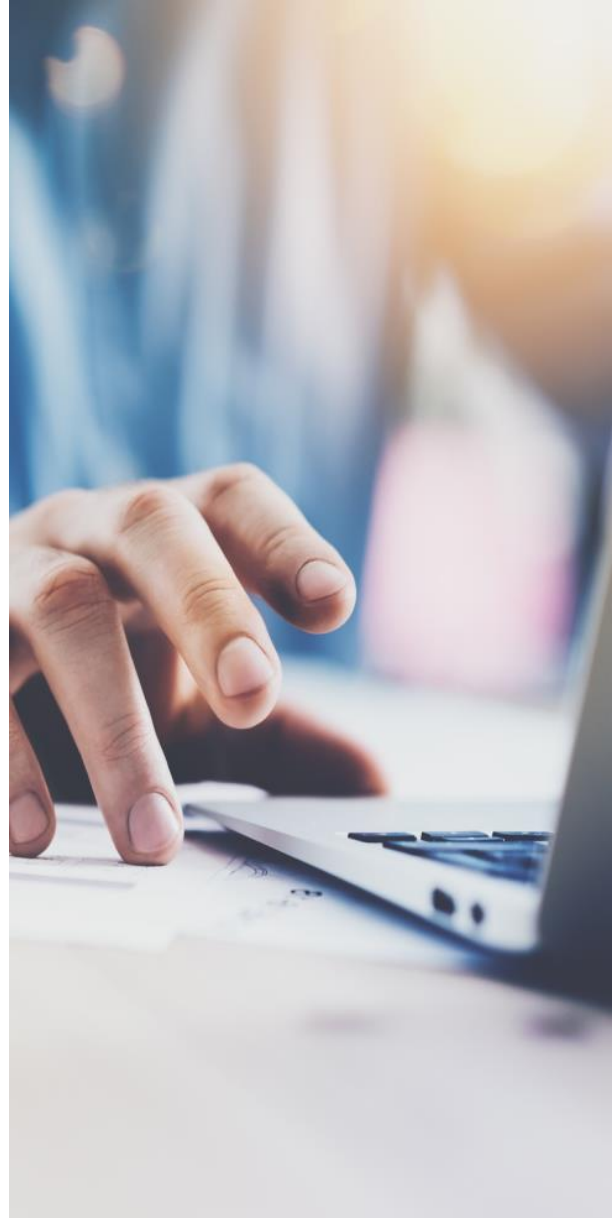
Capture demand through voice searches

Voice search is already in the process of revolutionizing the SEO industry. Consumers are increasingly comfortable using their AI-powered digital assistants, which has led to a range of new search trends. When patterns in demand change, marketers need to change their strategies too.

Voice searches are often longer and more detailed, providing a great opportunity for marketers to engage with potential customers via their responses to these queries.

Search engines are getting smarter too, as advances in natural language processing allow them to understand the intent behind the query and match this to the right content every time.

Marketers should look for solutions that enable them as part of the publishing process of regular content to push their content into digital assistants, such as Amazon Alexa and Google Home so that new, optimized content can immediately be found in voice search.

One approach for increasing the likelihood that new content will be served in voice searches is to optimize the content for appearance in Google Quick Answers. Authoritative content that is chosen for Quick Answers will likely get picked to serve voice search queries as well.

Amplify content to capture intent on social media

As we saw earlier, it's vital to augment messages that the brand wants to convey with the voice of the customer that represents the search intent that Smart Content can address.

The same voice of the customer that Smart Content uses to shape page titles, headers, and body content must be used when amplifying content in social media.

In other words, customer intent must be collected, addressed (via content creation), and then played back to the target audience with smart amplification.

Look for technology solutions that make it easy to incorporate social media amplification into the content creation process. The actual keywords that customers use to express intent must be incorporated into the actual Twitter and Facebook posts that promote the content.

More specifically, social media posts should pull page titles, meta descriptions, and page links from the Smart Content itself.

This process significantly reduces the amount of manual work and cross-team collaboration required to publish optimized social media posts. It also guarantees that every piece of content will be published on a relevant platform for your target audience.

Integrate AMP analytics

As more traffic is generated via AMP pages, it's important to attribute appropriate credit to AMP for website traffic, conversions, and revenue. Given the limitations that AMP imposes, it's critical to ensure that AMP pages are appropriately tagged with web analytics to capture page visits and events.

Brands must also ensure that they correctly unify AMP and non-AMP traffic in their analytics reporting. They must have a 360-degree view of content performance regardless of the format or delivery mechanism of the content.

Some marketers may want to sum up AMP and non-AMP traffic for a particular content piece, while others may want to dive into the details of each. It's important to enable both data aggregation as well as slicing and dicing across AMP and non-AMP items.

AMP should be viewed as a tactic to improve user experience and content discovery. It is hard to say whether AMP is here to stay or just an intermediate step in a bigger effort to make digital content load and engage customers quickly.

Because of that, it's important to pick a content performance solution that future-proofs user experience tactics. Look for one that automates AMP creation for today, but one that can also shift course and batch-correct your content as it evolves and updates.

Attribute conversions to content performance

Typically, customers must have multiple interactions with the brand or site across different channels and touch points before a conversion takes place. Products and services with long consideration cycles tend to involve more interactions across more touch points.

In order to determine how to best allocate the marketing budget across channels, campaigns, and initiatives, it's critical to examine the relative contribution that each touch point makes in driving the customer towards a conversion.

When marketers implement attribution reporting, content marketing is at times short-changed for two interrelated reasons:

1. Customers interact with content typically early in the consideration cycle. On many occasions, content is the first touch point that connects the prospect with the brand; and

2. Many marketers still implement last-touch attribution model that ignores all touch points prior to the last one.

To appropriately attribute conversion credit to content investments, marketers must look for technology solutions that make it easy a) to report on content performance, and b) to apply different attribution models that better account for the critical role that content plays in the consideration cycle.

Keep content optimized

Many marketers consider content one-and-done; publish content and move on to the next topic.

To increase content ROI over time, marketers must be able to tune content items at scale. Some manual updating will always be necessary, but Smart Content needs a technology solution to keep content tuned automatically in the background.

There are several types of auto-tuning practices to consider:

- Automatic changes to schema and social media tags. As these standards evolve, it's important to go back to published content and add or update tags.

- Content recommendations, which we discussed earlier, to keep non-converting visitors clicking and reading, should be regularly updated as marketers create new content that may be more relevant to the underlying content.

- Content items that are retired from the site should not be linked to from any other page. It's common for marketers to remove a website page only to neglect to edit – or altogether remove – site links pointing to this page.

As keeping content optimized is critical for marketing success, it's important to supplement automated updates with periodic website audits to capture and address website errors and issues that were not handled correctly via the automated update.

Accelerate
page load

Mobile is gaining momentum. In our 2017 mobile study, we found that 57% of all online traffic was occurring on smartphone and tablet devices. Consumers and business buyers have been selecting mobile as their platform of choice.

Given the importance of mobile as a marketing touch point, it's critical to ensure that website pages render well on small form factor devices with slower connection speeds. To achieve this goal, your Smart Content must:

- Be accompanied by an Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) version, cross-linking with it, so that search engines can easily identify, index, and serve the right content format for every request. AMPs should be created and edited automatically as marketers work on the standard content

- Standard HTML content must be responsive so that it can be accessible quickly while preserving great user experience when loaded onto mobile devices

- Any resource files included in the content must be optimized for performance as well. Images must be compressed while preserving quality, and JavaScript and CSS files should be unified into a single file of each -- minified and compressed

It may be difficult to identify heavy and slow-loading website pages, especially on large websites that include collections of heterogeneous content that were developed and maintained on separate domains or content management systems.

Brands can leverage site auditing solutions that examine page size and page load speed to flag and optimize heavy pages quickly and at scale.

Activate conversion points

Content writers and strategists often focus more on the messages they wish to convey to the reader and less about the attitudinal or behavioral change that the messages seek to drive.

Often we see a fragmented user experience in consuming content and then acting upon the content.

Smart Content emphasizes content performance. For content to be considered smart, it must clarify its call to action (CTA). Marketers must incorporate CTA blocks directly into the body of content.

Lead-generation forms can also be embedded into the content, reducing friction even further by eliminating website clicks and visually coupling content with the expected action.

As mentioned earlier, some content readers may not be ready to convert or take action immediately after reading the content piece. As a safety net for conversions, marketers should implement content recommendations at the bottom of the page to keep visitors clicking and reading.

BRIGHTEDGE CONTENT

Create Smart Content Faster

Smart Content powered by BrightEdge Content

Is your content performing in the moments that matter?

Today's customers are looking for content that fully answers highly specific questions, so that they can make informed decisions. AI-powered and natively integrated in BrightEdge Platform, BrightEdge Content helps search, content and digital marketers to redefine and elevate their content marketing programs. Blending the best of search marketing and content marketing best practices, BrightEdge Content powers the development, activation, and automated optimization of Smart Content.

BrightEdge Content enables content writers and strategists to discover profitable content opportunities and to understand what top competitors are publishing to get ahead. Marketers convert these insights into Smart Content that ranks faster, acquires new customers, and stays optimized for search and mobile.

Pull ahead of the pack with Smart Content

Today's marketers struggle to identify the right content that will effectively engage their target audiences. And without adhering to SEO and mobile best practices before publishing content, they struggle to predict when and how new content will perform online. The answer lies in the development of Smart Content that ensures that content is found in key moments that matter for customers - when and where your target audiences is looking for it.

BrightEdge Content has helped us increase our organic search traffic by 60% year-over-year. Its Smart Content outperforms some of our blog content by up to 6x.

Avi Bhatnagar, Director of Digital Strategy
WhiteHat Security

100% ▲ ORGANIC IMPRESSIONS   60% ▲ ORGANIC SITE VISITS   150% ▲ WEBSITE LEADS
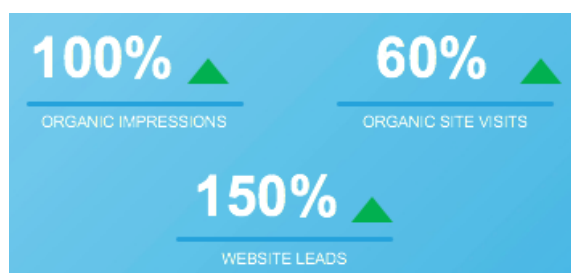
Discover profitable revenue opportunities

Leverage topic strategies, based on industry-leading data analysis of your content and the competitive landscape, to uncover, quantify, and prioritize opportunities for new content that accelerates site visits, conversions, and revenue.
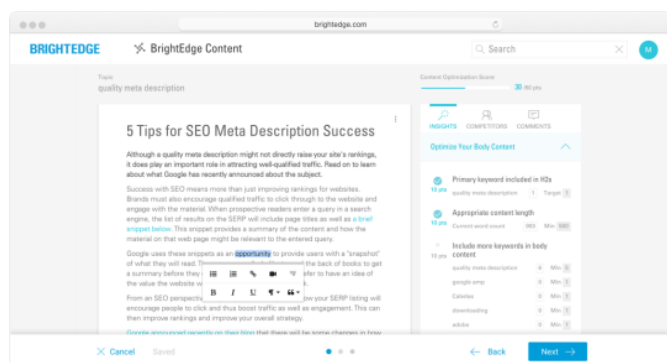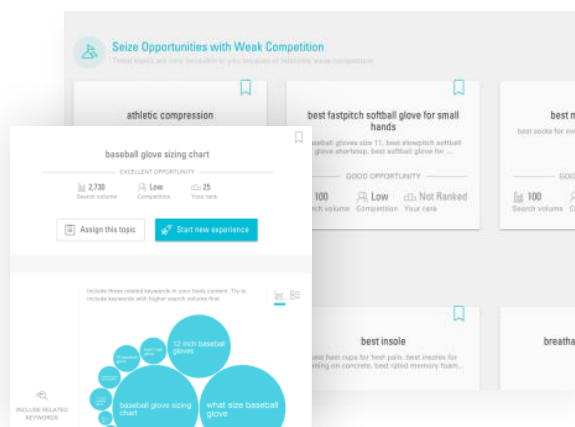
Create content customers easily find and love

Use intuitive workflow, flexible approval processes, full content and image editors, as-you-type SEO recommendations, readability assessments, automatic in-text linking, and smart CTAs to produce content that looks great and reads flawlessly.

Keep content optimized and mobile-friendly

Create AMP versions of your content automatically for fast page load. Insert dynamic content recommendations to keep visitors engaged. Keep up with emerging Search and Mobile trends and standards with automated page optimization.
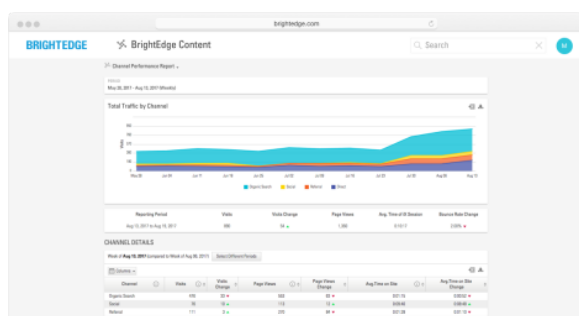
Understand contribution to the bottom line

View the performance of your content items, analyze how they acquire and engage organic and campaign traffic, and visualize their contribution to your key business metrics.

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A checklist for making Smart Content

❑ Focus your content strategy; produce better content w/higher impact

❑ Target precise reader intent; think outside-in

❑ Identify profitable opportunities; ones that drive results

❑ Tailor content format to intent; use the format they expect and demand

❑ Develop pre-optimized content; make optimization foolproof

❑ Activate and automate intelligent valuable internal linking

❑ Publish content faster with fewer delays

❑ Capture demand through voice search; natural language, lists

❑ Amplify content on social media

❑ Integrate AMP markup and analytics

❑ Attribute conversions to content performance

❑ Keep content optimized, do not set it and forget it, update it

❑ Accelerate page load, speed kills – the competitors

❑ Optimize conversion points and calls to action