

The Rise of the Content Architect

The digital revolution has changed nearly every aspect of marketing, and content marketing is no exception. However, content marketing is one of the earliest forms for marketing, dating back to the late 19th century. John Deere was an early pioneer with their Furrow magazine, and in 1902 the Genesee Pure Food Company armed its salesmen with Jell-O™ cookbooks, propelling the brand into a household name.

The rise of digital gave content marketing a whole new meaning, with no-name brand Blendtec setting the bar. Whether they intended to or not, Blendtec was one of the early innovators marketing on YouTube with their “Will it Blend” video series. Blendtec made Internet history in 2007 when they took advantage of the buzz surrounding the launch of the first iPhone and blended it. The video instantly went viral and to this day this video still gets comments on their YouTube page.

Today, innovative brands like Chipotle are going all-in on an integrated approach to content marketing. They literally do it all – recipes, social media, short-form video, long-form video, mobile games and now, believe it or not, they have actually created a mini-series for Hulu called Farmed and Dangerous. Chipotle has a rich story to tell around their commitment to high-quality, sustainable farming and the ability to disseminate all of this great content to their audience. By doing so, Chipotle has created an army of followers and advocates any brand would kill for.

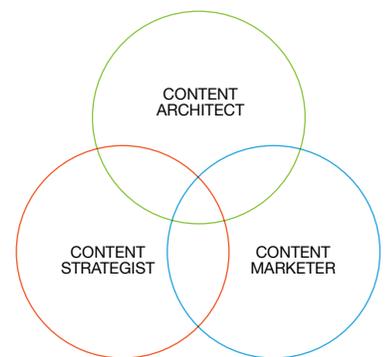
Recently, this loyalty and brand advocacy has become critical to Chipotle’s future. In the fall of 2015, Chipotle suffered every restaurant’s worst nightmare; a foodborne illness crisis. When they addressed the e. coli and norovirus outbreaks on their Facebook page, a number of these advocates came to their defense, supporting their favorite burrito joint through this rough patch. Chipotle’s very survival is now dependent on this extremely loyal fan base.

Not all modern brands are focusing their content marketing efforts solely on digital channels. Brands like LEGO®, Sherwin Williams® and Reebok® use print content marketing in addition to digital. Print content marketing is still considered a tried-and-true tactic with the belief that it elevates the brand, connects with audiences, and ultimately drives revenue.

With endless content topics and seemingly endless marketing avenues how do you choose the right content strategies for your business? How do you assemble a content team that can develop storylines, come up with marketing strategies to disseminate the stories, and manage all of this mass content across many systems and technologies? Traditionally, content strategists have shouldered many responsibilities. However, with the ever-increasing demand for quality content, one person cannot be expected to do it all.

Learn more

To learn more about effectively managing, storing and reusing content across a wide network of sites, channels and systems, read our eBook: [Is Your Content Where it Needs to Be?](#)



The New Content Team

As digital matures, so do the needs of the content strategy team. Traditionally this team was focused around content creation (the content strategist) and dissemination of that content (the content marketer). This model was likely based on a small team for John Deere in 1895, and in 1902 Jell-O subbed in the sales team for the content marketer. As markets have evolved, so have the channels available to them for content distribution.

Content teams have to juggle content between print, websites, social media, continents, languages, teams, and sometimes even brands within larger corporations. It's exhausting to think about all of the logistics and technologies behind this web of content.

Honestly, it's too much to ask of a content marketer or a content strategist. There is a 3rd component to content strategy that often does not have a formalized role in the content team. Some organizations call him a systems analyst, while others place her in marketing shared services. We call her the content architect.

The content architect is the perfect bridge between content strategy, content marketing, and technology. They enable the content strategist and support the content marketer through the use of new, emerging technologies.

Today's typical content team – including strategists, creators, editors, and marketers – is rarely located in one place working off of one system. Together, they create a mass amount of content and will keep that content in whichever system has been built for them, or wherever is most convenient. On top of that, the content marketer is laser focused on delivering relevant, often personalized, content to the right audience in the right location.

The content architect manages the technologies, systems, data, and all of the processes surrounding the distribution and maintenance of mass quantities of content. They ensure editors and content managers have easy access to all of the content across an organization. And they enable marketers to target the right content to the right audience across all of the digital properties an organization manages. This is the role of the content architect.

Can One Person Do it All?

As the role of content in marketing has expanded, so has the need for support. Some organizations have expanded internal support of content marketing initiatives while others have taken more of an outside approach, bringing on freelancers and consultants with one or two managing the process in-house. In either model, organizations need to centralize the orchestration of content strategy. Similar to a great creative director in a world-class digital agency, the content lead needs to understand and manage the whole process end-to-end. Do they need to be a great marketer? A great writer? A great technologist? No, not necessarily, but they need to understand each component and have the ability to bring them all together to create and execute on a great content strategy.

Content teams today have a new problem: too much content. Not a bad problem to have, right? Well imagine this scenario:

You lead a content team at a medium size yoga brand. You sell yoga mats and blocks and balance balls. Today your content team focuses on creating video, imagery, and print content for your website, blog, social media, and YouTube channel. You're so successful at content marketing that the executive team gives you the go-ahead to bring on an extremely well-known yoga personality, effectively acquiring another brand. This yoga star has her own site, social media, and YouTube channel already, and now her content falls under your umbrella. Her team uses a different CMS to manage the site, a different video platform than you're using today, and they're located in a different city.

Now, let's say that a major sporting goods retailer, like REI, is so impressed with you that they acquire your brand and name you new head of Global Content Marketing. Now, not only do you have your original yoga content and content management system, you have those belonging to your yoga personality and now all of the content and systems belonging to the major retailer that's just acquired you. As a good head of content you want to make sure everyone within your team, from junior copywriter to video producer, has access to all of the best content across your vast organization.

All of a sudden, you wake up one day and realize that you either need to become a technologist, or find one to help.

What to Look for in a Content Architect

The content architect needs to be a technologist at heart, however they need to understand content strategy and content marketing. They likely come from a MarTech background and should have a deep understanding of content management and personalization tools and technologies. They also need to understand the realities of content teams today.

One all-too-common approach to managing mass quantities of content (like in our yoga example) is to build one huge monolithic system and put all the content in one centralized location where everyone can access it. While this approach sounds like it makes a lot of sense, the execution of this plan often falls short. It doesn't take into account the needs of the people actually managing this content and working with it on a daily basis. What works for the copywriter for your yoga eCommerce site won't necessarily work for the video producer who publishes the yoga videos for your yoga star. It also fails to look to the future. Today we have no idea what types of content we'll want to be producing 5 or 10 years down the road. What if the next Mark Zuckerberg comes along and creates a way to project your yoga star into my living room so I can workout right alongside her instead of watching her on my boring flat TV?

A content architect inherently understands the needs of everyone on the content team, and looks for systems and technologies that will work around the team, rather than having the team reorganize themselves around technology. While there are a lot of ways to solve this problem, one powerful tool content teams have at their disposal is metadata. Metadata is all of the data points surrounding content. Who created it, when it was last edited, where it's being used and any other data points content creators or editors care to share around the content itself. Metadata is light. Metadata is simple. Metadata is easy to move around, whereas assets are not.

By simply bringing together all of the metadata belonging to all of your content assets across your massive technology ecosystem, the content architect can build a system around the needs of the content creators and marketers. Product descriptions can continue to live in the eCommerce system, while yoga videos reside in your video platform.

Once all of this metadata is consolidated and centralized, content managers and editors from across the organization can search it, browse for assets, add their own assets, and even update existing assets. Third party content creators can plug into the system and all of a sudden your content team has access to those assets as well.



Content leaders need to think bigger than content strategy or content marketing. They need to understand the people, processes, technologies, and content types that all come together to create many different types of content on a massive scale. They may not need to be experts in strategy, marketing, and technology, but they need to understand each piece of the puzzle enough to know when to bring in specialists. As organizations continue to grow in size and complexity so do their content and content marketing needs. To achieve a consistent user experience across channels and content mediums, teams must solve the problem of too much content, and give their editors and marketers tools that enable them to achieve their goals and drive consumer engagement.

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