



# A GUIDE TO **CONTENT MARKETING** FOR THE **PUBLIC SECTOR**



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO THE PUBLIC SECTOR'S FIRST CONTENT MARKETING GUIDE.

While it has become increasingly important -- and even expected -- in the private sector to leverage content to increase engagement with customers, content marketing is becoming more strategic than ever in the public sector to use as a communications tool and to actually increase outcomes.

Until recently, content marketing was seen as a “nice to have” in government. If an organization was able to publish the occasional blog post or graphic on social media, that was a win. But more and more, the public sector is understanding the value that content marketing can have on reaching, engaging and motivating citizens.

**“Content marketing is about creating these meaningful pieces of information, stories and insights with the purpose of attracting and retaining an audience.”**

This became even more apparent in the [2017 Public Sector Digital Communications Trends Report](#), which reflects views of more than 1,200 government employees and found that more than 50 percent of responses indicated that the No. 1 digital communications priority for the public sector in 2017 will be to increase engagement with content.

No longer is content marketing a “nice to have” in government -- it’s more important than ever. Whether you’re just starting to consider using content in your communications strategy, or are an expert when it comes to content marketing in the public sector, this guide will provide something for everyone.

## What is Content Marketing?

Before we dive into the specifics to support your strategy, let’s first define content marketing. In short, content marketing is all about the content. Sounds obvious, right? At the heart of every truly successful content marketing strategy is valuable, relevant and engaging content. Without great content, no other strategic tactics will matter.

Content marketing is about creating these meaningful pieces of information, stories and insights with the purpose of attracting and retaining an audience. [The Content Marketing Institute](#) defines content marketing as “a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.”

In the public sector, content marketers set out on a journey to accomplish some or all of the following goals:

- » To raise awareness in a program, service, or topic.
- » To engage citizens on some level within a public process.
- » To change citizen behavior over time.

At the end of the day, content marketing has the power to help accomplish these goals by driving your audience where you want them to go. The opportunities for awareness, engagement and behavior changes are that much more likely with an active audience.



# 2 PLANNING FOR AN EFFECTIVE CONTENT STRATEGY

*The first step in creating a successful content marketing strategy is to set a vision. What are your organization's goals in the next year, three years, or five years? Setting a vision for what you hope content marketing can help your organization accomplish will not only help motivate you and your team, it will also be an important part of the narrative when presenting the strategy to agency leaders.*

## Start by answering these questions:

- » Is our existing strategy working?
- » Who is our audience, and what channels do they use to communicate?
- » What is our content marketing capacity within our organization?
- » Does content marketing make sense for our audience?
- » What are other agencies doing when it comes to content marketing?
- » How will we measure success?

Answering these questions can help you develop your content marketing plan, which you can use to present to (new or existing) leadership, to set a course for your team, or to better inform new team members as they hop on board.

## The Importance of a Content Audit

One of the most important components of planning for content marketing is the process of auditing an existing strategy. Having a full view of your organization's content picture can be daunting especially for large federal agencies, but it will only help you better understand who controls what channels and how to better leverage certain channels that are underused.

Depending on the size of your organization, you may want to start your content audit by gathering key individuals together who support your agency's content strategy. Set clear goals for the group such as creating an inventory of existing content, organizing content by owner and determining whether or not each piece of content had success metrics. This exercise will help you see where content is overlapping and where there are gaps that your content strategy needs to fill.

***“The first step in creating a successful content marketing strategy is to set a vision.”***

# 3 THE TOP 5 TYPES OF CONTENT MARKETING TO CONSIDER

*There are more than five types of content marketing, but these are the top approaches to consider for your organization. When deciding which content marketing pieces are best for your team, it's important to weigh things like time, capacity and resources. Though very few require additional budget to be successful, some content pieces are more time consuming than others.*

## 1. Website

Overview: Probably the lowest-hanging fruit of all content marketing types is your website. Although some are more user-friendly than others, all public-sector organizations likely have a central hub for visitors to view information, sign up for more information or engage with your organization.

### THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Your website must have an easy path for citizens to find what they need. Nothing detracts website visitors more than making it hard to find what they're looking for. Make sure your homepage has the most recent news, upcoming events or deadline-specific callouts to help guide your visitor in as few clicks as possible. Work with your web design team to ensure that all information is findable within *three clicks*.

Add other ways to connect up front. It's crucial to capture website visitors' attention as they visit your homepage. Whether you use a website overlay (a small popup box that appears to users the first time they visit), or add social icons and email signup boxes, make sure the tools are on the most visited pages. The more traffic you have, the more subscribers or followers you can capture and connect with later.



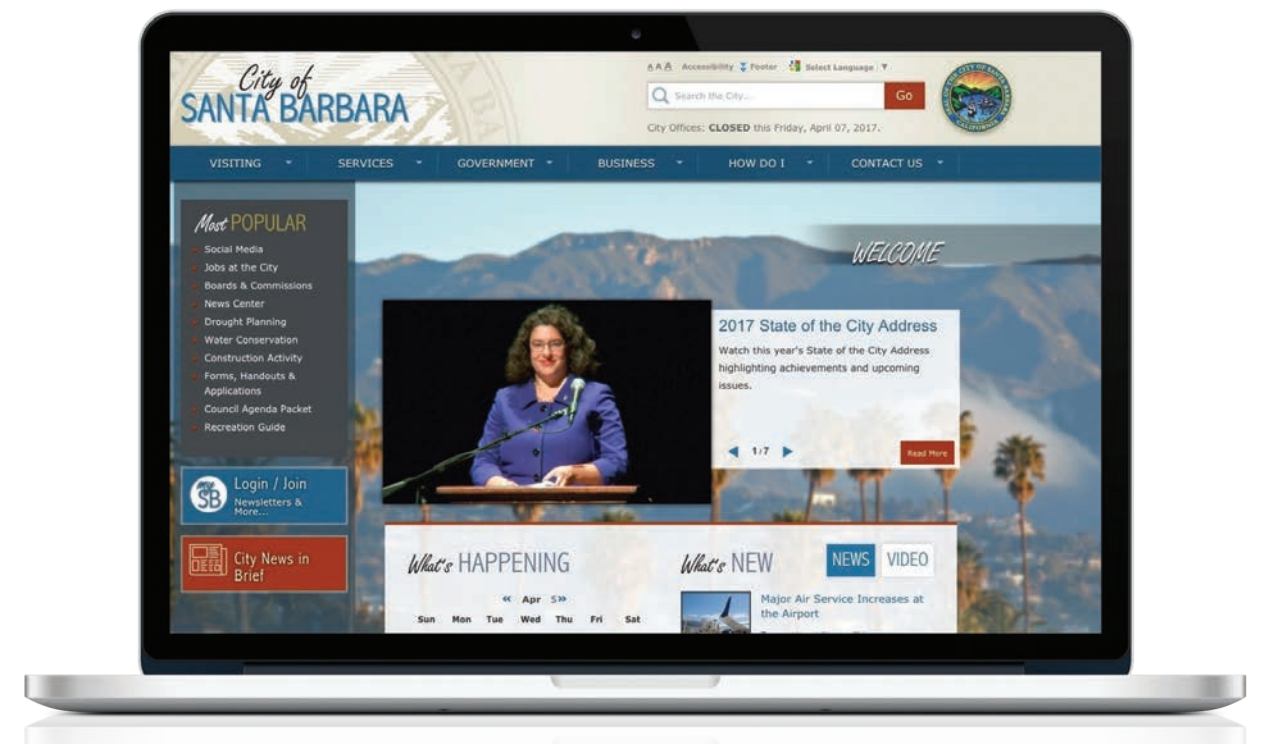
*Are your bounce rates getting up there? Maybe check in on your navigation. Experts suggest having no more than seven items in your top navigation list*

*([bit.ly/2nYOAkk](https://bit.ly/2nYOAkk))*

### HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS:

**Website Traffic:** When reviewing website analytics, measure success by the increase in pageviews or unique pageviews over a period of time. Any time someone loads your page on their device, your website gets a pageview. Unique pageviews provide a more accurate number of pageviews without duplications. In other words, if someone visits your website homepage and clicks around, but then revisits the homepage, that is considered one pageview within a single session -- not two. This metric can give you a better sense of how many people visited your website instead of how many total pages were viewed.

**Bounce Rate:** Put simply, bounce rate tells you how many visitors are coming to your website but leaving without browsing beyond the homepage. This metric is important because it tells you how effective your website is at connecting with citizens right away. If you have a high bounce rate (*above 60 percent*), then it's time to reconsider your website's content or navigation.





## 2. Blog

Overview: Blogs are a great way to build organic visitors to your website -- especially if the topics are timely and useful. Creating a solid blog strategy takes time because being consistent is crucial, but when done right it is a great way to drive website traffic and increase engagement.

### THINGS TO CONSIDER:

If you're short on topics, make citizen questions your top inspiration. Does your organization accept feedback with calls or an online platform? Look into what citizens are asking for. Are they looking for qualifications for filing for unemployment? Are they looking for the best hiking path near them? Write a blog about it and follow up. It's likely that other citizens have the same questions and will find your post useful. Lists are another great way to create shareable content. Do you have a list of top 10 books borrowed this month from the library? Or maybe it's five reasons to attend an upcoming community meeting. Make those into a monthly list of posts.

Blog content won't matter if it's not findable. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is one of the best ways to make your blog content findable, and there are a number of tools that can help amplify your blog to new audiences. To find what keywords your audience is using to search for content, try searching for relevant words in the Google Keyword Planner. This will help you identify which words to include as your header and throughout the blog, and will make your content easier to find. Sending out content regularly via email is also a great way to ensure it gets strong viewership. *The GovDelivery Communications Cloud* is the largest digital communications platform in government, and is a reliable solution to consider.



*Need blog inspiration? Check out this post from GovLoop on the "5 Most Unforgettable Blogs By Government Agencies."*

*([bit.ly/2ntrfGb](http://bit.ly/2ntrfGb))*

### HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS:

**Content Engagement:** In addition to pageviews and unique pageviews (see: measuring success under website), another metric to monitor with your blog is time spent on your site or average duration in Google Analytics. As long as the page you're monitoring -- in this case, your blog -- is the *last page visited* (which you can filter), the average time on the page is a good metric to see how long your blogs are keeping your audience engaged.

**Discussion and Comments:** A great strategy for engagement on your blog is to encourage discussion and activity. By allowing for comments from readers, you're fostering an online community around your blog, which is exactly what leads to greater loyalty and more regular visits to your website. Be sure to monitor comments regularly and respond when necessary. As discussion and comments become more frequent, you'll know that readership is increasing and the topics are interesting to your audience.





### 3. Email Newsletters

Overview: With the highest return on investment of any digital platform, email is standing the test of time. Not only is email the most effective way to reach a large audience at one time, it can also provide valuable insight into your audience with [digital engagement metrics](#).

#### THINGS TO CONSIDER:



**Personalization** is the ticket to successful engagement. In the ocean of email messages that we all receive every day, personalization can help your email stand out in the crowd. Whether it's simply addressing an email recipient by name, personalization can help [increase click rates by 25 percent to 30 percent](#). Be sure to add relatable imagery, actionable messaging and strong calls to action.

**Building an authentic audience** is crucial. While some agencies have access to a large email list -- maybe it's based on unemployment insurance filings or license renewals -- it's important to grow an organic email list based on giving subscribers the power to opt into your emails. When considering if email marketing is the right strategy for your organization, know it will take some time and with a variety of tactics to see your list grow. However, building an authentic list is important and will pay off when you segment your audiences and send more targeted information.

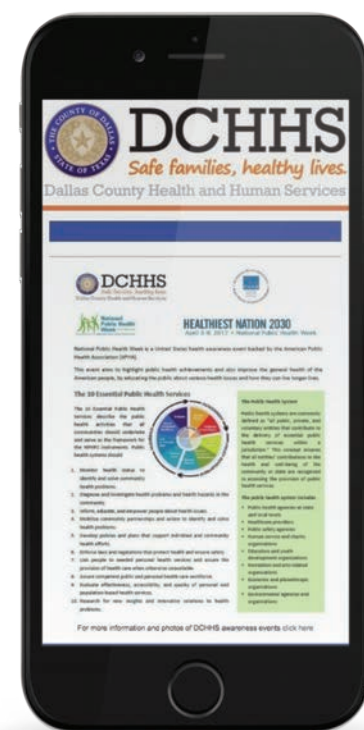
*Not only is email the most effective way to reach a large audience at one time, it can also provide valuable insight into your audience with digital engagement metrics.*



#### HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS:

**Two Words: Benchmark Report.** For the first time, the public sector now has access to an email marketing benchmark report specific to government. Last year, Granicus published [Digital Communications in the Public Sector: Improving Metrics That Matter](#). The report includes five metrics to monitor when it comes to email marketing: click rate, engagement rate, open rate, subscriptions per subscriber and overlay impact. Measure your metrics against the benchmark, and always strive to be in the top 20 percent.

**Reach is the Most Important Metric Without a Perfect Benchmark.** Put simply, reach is the number of people you are connecting with directly through email. And, if government organizations don't grow their reach to a relevant level, many of the other metrics used to measure success in a communications effort won't make an impact. Increasing your reach with support from the [GovDelivery Network](#) leverages 150 million people who are already signed up for public sector news, and can help increase your reach by 100 percent or more within the first three months.



*Remember, one of the greatest benefits of email marketing is that it can support all other forms of content marketing. Sending a new blog or video via email will guarantee an increase in viewership and will lead to greater overall success.*



## 4. Infographics

Overview: Many government agencies produce complex content -- everything from in-depth budget descriptions to translating large pieces of legislation. Infographics can be a great way to transform information into a visually appealing format. Plus, they can be great for sharing on social media.

### THINGS TO CONSIDER:

It helps to have design capacity, but it's not necessary. Infographics may seem like big lifts -- and depending on the topic they certainly can be -- but not having a full design team available to you isn't the end of the world. There are a number of free and easy-to-use tools such as [Piktochart](#) or [Canva](#) to help create infographic images.

Infographics are at their best when supporting other content. Only on social media can infographics largely stand alone. At their very best, infographics also accompany other pieces of content such as a news announcement, program information or a blog. More often, you want your infographic to drive people to your website to find more information. This example from the [Devon County Council](#) in the United Kingdom is a great example using an infographic to outline the adoption process, and links back to their website.

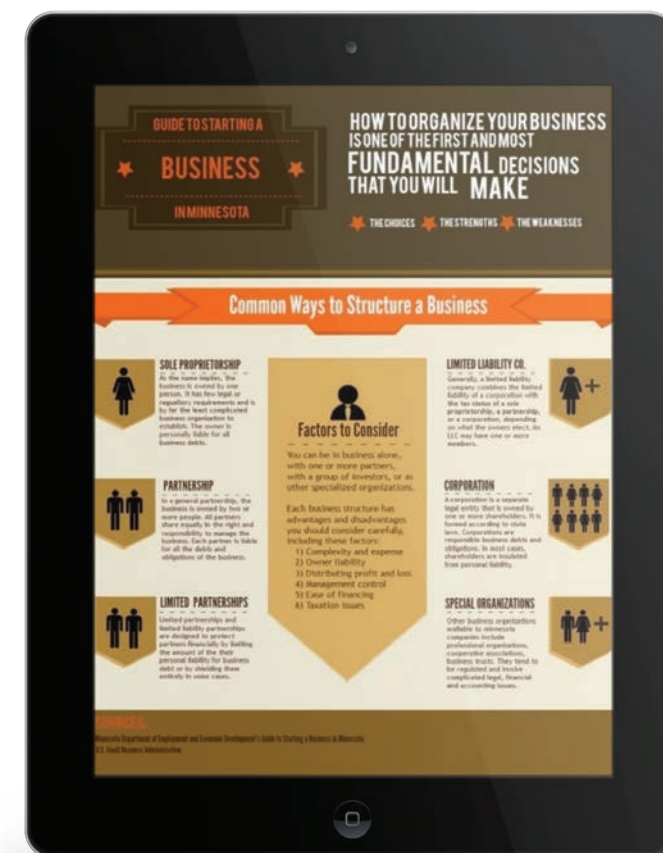


Infographics can be a great way to illustrate an otherwise cumbersome process. Take this example ([bit.ly/DEEDexample](http://bit.ly/DEEDexample)) from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development on structuring a business.

### HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS:

**Social Buzz:** With infographics being so easily shareable on social media, tracking social metrics and social buzz is a great way to measure success. How many retweets or new followers did you get on Twitter? Any likes or new followers on Facebook? LinkedIn is also a great place to measure interactions. If you're exploring social advertisements (paying for a bump in promotions), *Facebook has the highest return on investment* with the most visibility.

**Outcome Metrics:** If the goal of your infographic is to get more people to take action of some kind -- sign up for our email newsletter, click here for more information about this program, visit our website for more ways to volunteer -- then outcome metrics should be closely tied to your infographic's success. As always, having a goal for your desired outcome defined up front is always a good best practice.







## 5. Video

Overview: Although not a new phenomenon, many marketing-focused organizations are predicting that *video will be the No. 1 driver of internet traffic* in the coming years. Of course, within the video trend there are other subtle happenings. For instance, *85 percent of videos on Facebook are being watched without sound*. Video continues to transform, and could be an important part of your content strategy going forward.

### THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Videos are great complements to campaigns. One of the best aspects of videos are that they can make difficult subjects more approachable. For the U.S. Census Bureau, video was the strongest way to communicate the importance of *smoke alarm safety* in their outreach campaign. Storytelling is one of the best ways to ensure that campaign messages get amplified in a meaningful, memorable way.

Being more expensive than other options, video planning is important. A well-done video can be expensive to make if you don't have a production team on-hand. Depending on your budget and strategy, a five-minute high-definition video may not be within reach. But remember that if your goal is to share it social media, quick 10- to 15- second videos like *these examples on Vine* can be created at a low cost. Having a defined goal can help you plan for the best video creation process for your organization.

“One of the best aspects of video consumption is that they can be used to make difficult subjects more approachable.”



### HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS:

**Play Rate:** If a tree falls in the woods, does it really make a sound? This same approach can be said for videos that are created and posted deep within your website where nobody can find them. Making sure that videos are accessible will help increase the most important metric: play rate, or the number of times that people press “play” on your video.

**Watch Rate:** Slightly different from play rate, watch rate is the percent of the video that your viewer actually watched. This metric is comparable to engagement rate - with the limited amount of time you have to grab an audience's attention, it means a great deal when you can hold it for the entire message.



Experts say that the optimal video length is under 2 minutes (source: [bit.ly/optimalvideo](https://bit.ly/optimalvideo)). Engagement drops significantly if a video is over 2 minutes long, but then picks back up slightly between six and ten minutes.

# 4 THE MARKETING FUNNEL IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

*If you haven't heard of the marketing funnel, it's essentially the rule to live by in private sector marketing. In short, the marketing funnel is a way for marketers to visualize the customer journey - everything from discovery to purchasing. This is meant to support the private sector's efforts to sell more products or services, and describes what types of content best support each step within the funnel.*

In public sector marketing, we use a similar funnel differently because of the nature of our relationships with our customers (aka citizens). In the public sector, our primary goal is get citizens to take action, and we use reach and engagement tactics to help drive that behavior change. Here is the breakdown.

## The Marketing Funnel

### REACH

The reach phase of the marketing funnel is all about connecting with as many citizens as possible. This can be measured in subscribers, followers, viewers or website visitors. It's your total audience, or the total number of people listening to your message.

In the reach phase, the goal is to get the greatest reach as possible. Many of the citizens you're trying to reach are strangers to your organization, or unfamiliar with your programs and services. So in addition to reaching your audience, this phase is also about education and awareness. During the reach phase of the funnel try these outreach activities:

- » Host events and bring citizens into your organization.
- » Post blogs or infographics to inform citizens about a campaign.
- » Drive followers through social media.
- » Drive specific growth tactics to get more email subscribers.

The goal of this phase is to reach as many people as possible and get them into the funnel for further interaction in the future.



### ENGAGE

While the reach phase of the funnel is a lot about casting a wide net, the engagement phase is much more targeted. Perhaps you've build up an email subscriber list to 20,000 citizens, but know that only 5,000 of them have asked for information on flu shots. By segmenting this group within your audience, and targeting them with specific information about flu shots, you're likely to increase engagement with your messaging. Whether it's higher open or click rates, you're looking for citizens to take their interaction with your organization to the next level.

During the engagement phase of the funnel, try these outreach activities:

- » Create unique content for a specific group within your audience (example: Here are the places to get flu shots this week).
- » Use actionable messaging in order to encourage engagement (example: Click here to sign up).
- » Convince citizens to consider a certain behavior-related action (example: Five reasons to get a flu shot this year).

The ultimate goal in the engagement phase is to motivate your audience from just listening to your message to the first steps of taking action. You want to bring your audience to your website, a piece of content, or a social page.

### CONVERT

In the private sector, conversion would be completion of a purchase. In the public sector, we measure conversion in outcomes or lives changed. In other words, when a citizen has completed open enrollment, signed up for a library card, or participated in a public meeting, for example - we've successfully converted their behavior into a desired outcome. While this is the final step in the marketing funnel, once an audience member is converted the process starts again. You're likely to get higher levels of engagement from those you've converted before, but they still must be engaged with regularly. Here are types of outreach activities that happen during the engagement phase of the funnel:

- » Track actions taken and engagement metrics.
- » Create content that validates citizen's decisions (example: Getting to know your new benefits).
- » Connect post-conversion with a thank you message, or ask them to take a survey about their experience.



# 5 HELPFUL TIPS FOR EXECUTING YOUR STRATEGY

*Now that you've determined which content types are key to your content marketing strategy, it's time to execute. The most important thing to remember when heading into the execution phase is that it will take time to build up your audience and engagement. Content marketing is a long-term game, but it's important to keep up with it consistently to see results. Here are a few tips and best practices to help you along the way.*

## Best Practices

### **CREATE AN EDITORIAL CALENDAR**

No matter your type of content, creating a regular schedule for posting/publishing is an important first step to executing properly. Knowing your capacity and the resources at your disposal will help you map out your content calendar, but start with these helpful hints from the Digital Engagement Services department at Granicus: [5 Tips to Creating the Perfect Content Calendar](#).

### **PLAN BRAINSTORMS REGULARLY**

We all go through times where we need to be inspired, or bounce ideas off of others. Regularly brainstorming with your content team or other teams interested in supporting your content strategy can be a great way to get the juices flowing. If you're already running short on time, try leaving the last five minutes of your weekly meeting to brainstorm. The goal? One great content idea. This will also help rally the team around your content strategy.

### **FOCUS ON QUALITY, NOT QUANTITY**

In a highly saturated space, it has never been more important to produce valuable and useful content. Emphasizing quality over quantity is a strong best practice for ensuring your content strategy is successful. In other words, when it comes to content marketing, less is more. Make sure that your topics are timely and that your pieces are well written. This will help ensure you build credibility and trust with your audience, and keep them coming back for more information.

### **BUILD APPROVED AND EVERGREEN CONTENT**

Whether it's daily, weekly or monthly, your audience will come to expect ongoing communication so your information stays relevant. Creating evergreen content or content that is considered sustainable or lasting will help your communications stay on schedule. Also getting content pieces approved well in advance will ensure you have a wealth of options for posting when new content can't be created.

### **TEST METRICS REGULARLY**

Metrics truly matter in digital communications, but especially when it comes to content marketing. Whether you are tracking your blog or video strategy, checking in regularly on content engagement will be the true indicator of success. If you're looking for a place to start, check out the Granicus Benchmark Report. It provides an overview of the five metrics in email communications.

## The Future of Content Marketing

We know that content marketing in the public sector is no longer a "nice to have" - it's more important than ever to the success of our outcomes. We also know that more than 1,200 government employees said that in 2017 success will be measured by digital engagement metrics. So when a thoughtful and strategic content marketing plan is coupled with a regular analysis of digital metrics, the higher the likelihood of stronger outcomes and greater impact at your organization.

Content marketing can lead to real results. Whether it's more attendance at your next public meeting or an increase in participants in your services, a strategic content marketing strategy will help lead to a more visible organization and a more engaged audience. The future of content marketing will depend on whether the public sector is able to keep building on engagement in content pieces and investing in successful areas of content marketing.

# 6 FAQ'S

*This content marketing guide is meant to be a starting point for you and your organization, but we know there are a number of questions you may have on your agency's strategy. Here are a few top questions we've received on content marketing in the public sector.*

## FAQ's

### ? CAN I BE SUCCESSFUL AT CONTENT MARKETING IF I HAVE A SMALL TEAM OR SMALL BUDGET?

Absolutely. The beauty of content marketing is that it can be designed to scale at the level that is right for your organization. Although it may be more challenging, it is possible to execute a successful content marketing strategy with just one person. You may want to consider focusing on just one content type -- website or blog -- and execute as best you can. Remember: Quality is better than quantity, so being more thoughtful and strategic on which type of content marketing you pursue is key to a small team.

As for budget, we know that email has the highest ROI of any content strategy. We also know that text messaging has some of the highest levels of engagement. That being said, social media and websites are also relatively low cost to maintain and enhance. Accomplishing more with less is one strategy, but there are also other avenues to consider if resources are tight.

### ? HOW CAN MY TEAM AVOID CONTENT FATIGUE?

The most important aspect of content marketing with your team is to set clear expectations from the beginning. Scaling up gradually may be the best approach to gauge what content quantity is best for your team. Start by setting a clear vision and outlining an ideal content calendar for the next month. Based on your resources and capabilities, it might be best to start with one blog a week. For others, that might be look different. The important thing is to set clear expectations, to have mid-strategy check ins and to adjust as needed.

### ? HOW LONG DO WE KEEP A CONSISTENT CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY GOING BEFORE WE KNOW IT'S WORKING?

It depends on your organization's engagement metrics, but the short answer is the longer, the better. The more consistent you can be in your content strategy, and the longer you maintain that over time, the higher the likelihood of engagement. That being said, it's important to know that most effective content strategies take time to see steady growth. If you aren't seeing the types of engagement metrics you're looking for after about six months, try a different path or tone in your content.

### ? WHAT ROLE DOES SOCIAL MEDIA PLAY IN CONTENT MARKETING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR?

Social media can play a very important and strategic role in your content marketing strategy. For the most part, social media (like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn) can drive people to your content piece or website. Creating and posting shareable content (like infographics) can also be great for supporting your growth strategy on social. Social media can both support existing content marketing strategies, as well as increase your chances for a larger audience.

### ? DOES GRANICUS HAVE A PLACE WHERE WE CAN GO FOR CONTENT INSPIRATION?

Glad you asked! [Granicus' blog](#) is a great resource as you develop your content marketing strategy. If you have specific questions or thoughts on blogs that would help you in your strategy, please email [info@granicus.com](mailto:info@granicus.com).



*For more information on how you can use content marketing to enhance outcomes at your organization, visit [granicus.com](http://granicus.com).*





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