



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.

What is content marketing?

Content marketing is 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.

- Content Marketing Institute

Content marketing to support an organisation's strategic priorities has become a power tool for both private and public sector teams. Done well, content marketing can inform, educate and engage audiences effectively, and ultimately impact programme outcomes.

Until recently, content marketing was seen as a "nice to have" in government. If an organisation 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 for reaching, engaging and motivating citizens to make better decisions and take positive action.

As revealed in the *2017 Public Sector Digital Communications Trends Report* which surveyed over 500 communicators in the UK and Europe, the number one priority for 2017 is to increase engagement with government programmes.

Now, content marketing is more important than ever in driving engagement with critical initiatives and services. 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 give everyone a helping hand.

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. Through compelling content and a strong engagement strategy, organisations can have a profound impact in citizens' lives. Content marketing can help: **inspire, educate, remind, encourage, surprise, build trust, create empathy, prompt action, entertain, alleviate fear, dispel uncertainty, challenge assumptions, and change behaviours.**

The list could go on. Content marketing should attend to your audience's needs, spark their curiosity and sustain their attention. Through the provision of regular content, you can help make your organisation indispensable to citizens, establish a trusted voice, and build an engaged audience that is more likely to respond to government's calls-to-action.

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

- » **To raise awareness of a programme, service or subject matter.**
- » **To engage citizens in ways that lead to new knowledge, understanding, better decisions, action and outcomes.**
- » **To change citizen behaviour over time.**

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 organisation's goals for the next year, three years, or five years? Setting a vision for what you hope content marketing will help your organisation accomplish will not only help motivate you and your team, it will also be an important part of the narrative when presenting the strategy and justifying content marketing tactics to leadership at your organisation.

Start by answering these questions:

- » Is your existing strategy working?
- » Who is your audience, and what channels do they use to communicate?
- » Does your organisation have the staff and resources required for content marketing?
- » Does content marketing make sense for your audience?
- » What are other organisations like yours doing when it comes to content marketing?
- » How will you 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 and resources. Find out who in your organisation is already "pushing" content and through which channels. Assess the consistency of the messaging and the effectiveness of existing practices. Work with others to identify areas for improvement, opportunities, and if appropriate, you may want your team to take responsibility for quality control and final approval of any materials in future.

Gather a group of key people to help you with this content audit. Set clear goals for the group such as creating an inventory of existing content, organising content by owner and purpose, 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 FIVE TOP TACTICS FOR CONTENT MARKETING

With more tools at marketers' fingertips than ever before, the possibilities for content marketing extend far beyond the five tactics we've got room to discuss in this short guide. As with all communications, you must first consider your audience. Which channels are they comfortable using? You'll also need to consider the capacity and skills within your team.

1. Website

Your website is probably the “lowest-hanging fruit” of all content marketing tactics available to your organisation. The majority of your web visitors likely arrive after typing into a search engine, perhaps bypassing your homepage altogether. They've come to you, so make their inbound visit count by ensuring they get the information they need quickly. By providing strong content and opportunities to connect further across your site, you'll give web visitors good reason to dwell for longer and depart as “happy customers”.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Your website must make it easy for citizens to find what they need. Nothing annoys website visitors more than difficulty finding the things they need. Make sure your homepage displays 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. And don't forget to always use *plain English*. Add other ways to connect up front. Whether you use an overlay (a small popup box that appears the first time someone visits), or add social icons and email signup boxes, make sure the options to connect further are on all of your most visited pages.



Are your bounce rates increasing? Check in on your navigation. Experts suggest having no more than seven items in your top navigation list. (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 is the percentage of visitors to your website who navigate away from the site after viewing only one page. If you have a high bounce rate (*above 60 per cent*), then it's time to reconsider your website's content or navigation.

TOP TIP:

Use your website as a content source as well as a way to encourage people to subscribe to alerts. Add topic-specific web overlays on relevant web pages to increase subscribers. A web overlay can increase the conversion rate by up to 500%.

2. Blog

Blogging is a great way to increase organic traffic to your website, and retain audiences. Providing regular, timely and useful content via a blog can help you connect with people on a personal level. Blogging helps organisations tell their “story” directly, in a way that is untainted by the media. This editorial-style content helps show citizens that you care about them and want to make their lives easier.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Let your blog topics be informed by citizens’ needs and interests, or the top reasons people feel the need to contact your organisation. Time and resources are precious in the public sector, so make sure the content you share benefits your organisation and readers. Well-themed and shareable blogs can help reduce avoidable contact and alleviate pressure on your front-line services.

List posts or “listicles” are a great way to boost engagement with your blog. For example, “5 books you must borrow from the library this month” or “10 reasons to attend a council meeting” is likely to achieve high click-throughs, more dwell time, and social shares. List posts are organised around a number and quickly set readers’ expectations. Our brains love specificity and order, so do give a themed monthly list post a go!

Search engine optimisation (SEO) is one of the best ways to ensure your content is easy to find and accessible to new audiences. Try using Google Keyword Planner to match the words in your blog header and body copy with what citizens are searching. Don’t wait for people to come to you; be proactive about driving more people to your content. Offer a blog roundup option in your list of email updates for citizens, and deliver new blogs straight to their inboxes. The *GovDelivery Communications Cloud* is a reliable solution to help you increase engagement.

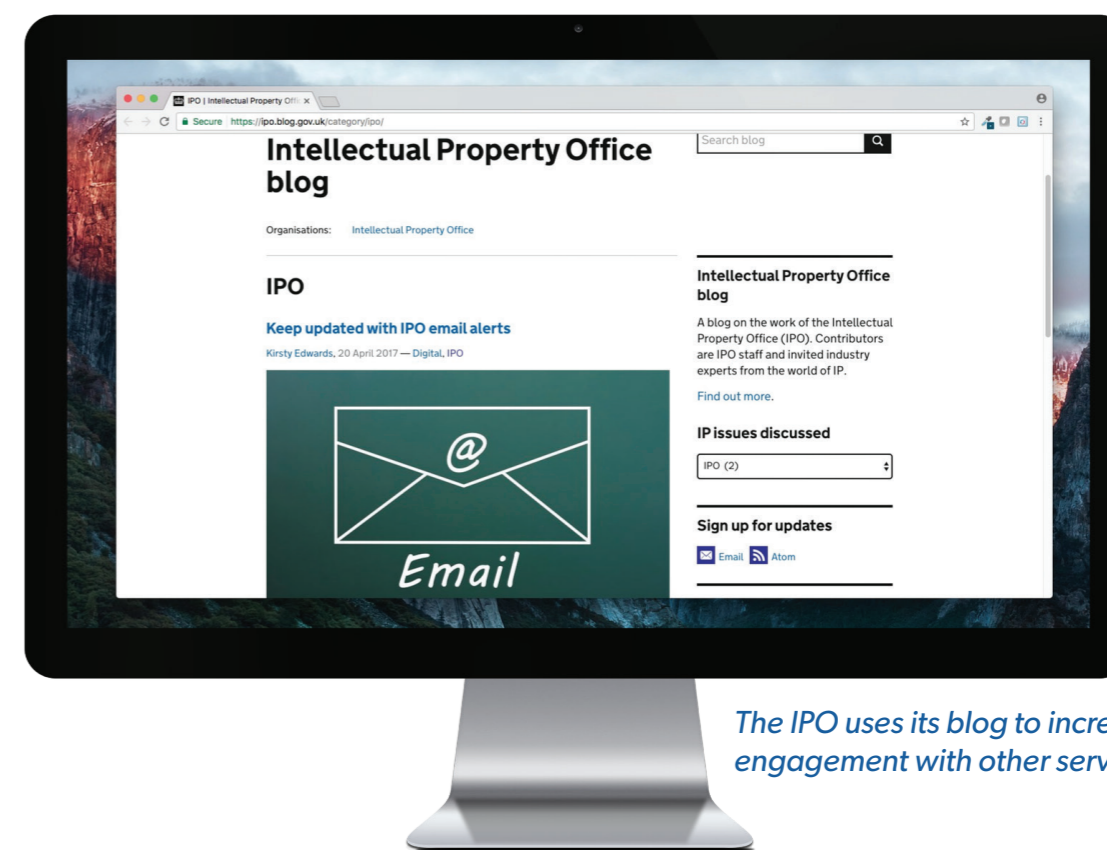


Need blog inspiration? Check out this post from GovLoop on the “5 Most Unforgettable Blogs By Government Agencies.” (bit.ly/2ntrfGb)

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS:

Content engagement: In addition to pageviews and unique pageviews (see: measuring success under website), another metric to monitor 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 readers to comment, 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 of interest to your audience.



The IPO uses its blog to increase engagement with other services too.



3. Email newsletters

With the highest return on investment of any digital channel, email is standing the test of time as a powerful engagement tactic. Not only is email the most effective way of reaching audiences at scale, it also provides valuable audience insight via *digital engagement metrics*.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Personalisation is the ticket to successful engagement. In the ocean of email messages that we all receive every day, personalisation can help your email stand out in the crowd. Whether it's simply addressing an email recipient by name or providing a unique reference number for further contact, personalisation can help *increase click rates by between 25 and 30 per cent*. Be sure to add relatable imagery, actionable messaging and strong calls to action. Check out *10 Excellent Emails in the UK Public Sector* for inspiration.

Building an authentic audience is crucial. While your organisation may already have access to large mailing lists collected by different service areas, it's important to grow your email subscriber lists organically too, based on people opting in to receive updates. Although email marketing requires some time and patience, an *effective outreach strategy* (coupled with the power of the GovDelivery Network) can help build a captive audience quickly.

Giving subscribers choice from the outset and control over how and when they hear from you will help you grow an audience that genuinely wants to engage with you. Ask a handful of relevant questions as they subscribe to help you segment your audience and send targeted messages.

Not only is email the most effective way of reaching audiences at scale, it also provides valuable audience insight via 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 per cent.

Reach is the most important metric without a perfect benchmark. Put simply, reach is the number of people you have the potential to connect with directly through email. And, if government organisations don't grow their reach to a relevant level, the impact of any communication is limited, and many of the other success metrics will be severely hindered. Increasing your reach with support from the *GovDelivery Network* leverages 10 million people in the UK (150 million worldwide) who are already signed up for public sector news. Being part of the network can increase your reach by 100 per cent 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

Many government organisations must publish complex information such as budget descriptions and legal documents. Infographics can be a great way to present critical information in a visual and accessible way, doing away with hundreds of pages of jargon! Infographics can also be shared easily on social media.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

It helps to have design capacity, but this isn't always 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 infographics.

Infographics are at their best when supporting other content, such as an announcement, blog or action plan. Only on social media can infographics largely stand alone. More often, you want your infographic to act as a summary and drive people to your website to find more information. For example, *Devon County Council* uses an infographic to help make its adoption web pages more appealing and memorable. The infographic conveys information at the same time as driving an emotional response through the use of emotive imagery and colour.

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 offers 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, find out about this new initiative, visit our website for more ways to volunteer -- then outcome metrics should be closely tied to your infographic's success. The infographic will be one piece of your content marketing strategy, which needs some defined goals right from the start. It's good practice to set some measures of success for each tactic too. What are you aiming for?

DID YOU KNOW?

People following directions with text and illustrations do 323% better than people following directions without illustrations.

Source: W. Howard Levie, Richard Lentz, ECJT

DID YOU KNOW?

Infographics are shared and "liked" on social media 3X more than any other type of content.

5. Video

Although not a new phenomenon, many are predicting that online video will be responsible for *80% of global internet traffic by 2019*. The rise of video is already bringing some interesting trends, for instance, *85 per cent of videos on Facebook* are being watched without sound, which has a number of implications for marketers including the need for effective text commentary to support the visuals.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Video can be a powerful tool for campaigns, helping to distill complex subject matter into a succinct and memorable message. For the U.S. Census Bureau, video was the strongest way to communicate the importance of *smoke alarm safety* in their outreach campaign. For a group of NHS communicators, *video was a powerful tool for recruiting nurses*, and some health organisations are even using video as a way of reducing GP appointments, pointing people first to a *suite of "self-help" resources*.

Video has a unique ability to tell a story in a direct and personal way, often prompting empathy and a deeper understanding among viewers.



Video by Eastleigh Borough Council to support its recycling programme.

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS:

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

Watch rate: Slightly different from play rate, watch rate is the percentage 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.

Top tips: It's all well and good creating video content to support a key campaign objective, but it's useless if no one finds it. You need to know how and when to share it. Here are *10 places to distribute your video to make it a success*.

65% INCREASE IN CLICK THROUGH RATES WITH THE WORD "VIDEO"

19% INCREASE IN OPEN RATES



The shorter the video, the better. 2 minutes is the sweet spot. After that, the drop-off in engagement is significant. bit.ly/optimalvideo

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 visualise the customer journey - from the moment someone "discovers" your product or service right through to purchasing. Similarly, organisations in the public sector can benefit greatly from understanding the different stages of a citizen's journey toward a desired outcome, and how they eventually come to interact with government (for example voting in an election or applying for a school place).

You can think of the marketing funnel in the public sector as the process of using reach and engagement tactics to drive citizens to take appropriate action. At different moments, different types of content can help "move" citizens along the funnel and support this behavioural change.

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 achieve the highest reach possible. Many of the citizens you're trying to reach are strangers to your organisation, or unfamiliar with your programmes and services. So in addition to reaching your audience, this phase is also about education and awareness. Try using these outreach activities to build your audience:

- » Host events and bring citizens into your organisation.
- » Share blogs or infographics to inform citizens about a campaign.
- » Offer bite-size shareable information over social media and build a following.
- » Make it easy for more people to subscribe to your email updates.

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



ENGAGE

While the reach phase of the funnel is about casting a wide net, the engagement phase is much more targeted. Perhaps you've built a list of 20,000 email subscribers and know that 5,000 of them meet the criteria for "being at risk of flu and its complications". By segmenting your audience according to different criteria or sociodemographic characteristics, you'll increase the relevancy of your messages and engagement rates. Higher open and click rates mean more citizens are going to take their interaction with your organisation to the next level. For example, send those 5,000 people a series of targeted messages to encourage them to get their free annual flu jab. Try these outreach activities:

- » Create unique content for a specific group within your audience (example: Here are the places to get flu jabs this week).
- » Use actionable messaging to encourage engagement (example: Book your appointment here).
- » Persuade citizens of the benefits of a specific action or behaviour (example: 5 reasons why you need a flu vaccine this month).

The main aim of the engagement phase is to keep your audience's attention and prepare them to take action. Move them from passive recipients to active listeners and doers. You want to bring your audience to your website, a piece of content, or a social page to motivate them.

CONVERT

In the private sector, conversion would be completion of a purchase. In the public sector, we measure conversion in terms of programme outcomes or lives changed. In other words, when a citizen has completed a driving licence application, volunteered to sit on a committee, or enrolled in online learning, for example - we've successfully "converted" them into an active citizen whose behaviour supports 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 you must continue to nurture them through targeted messaging. After converting your audience to action:

- » Track actions taken and engagement metrics, and map the touch-points or specific messages that saw success.
- » Create content that validates citizens' 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 tactics 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 your audience and engagement. Content marketing is a long-term game, and it's important to have a plan and be consistent in order to see results. Here are a few tips and best practices to help you along the way.

Best practices

CREATE AN EDITORIAL CALENDAR

Creating a regular schedule for publishing content 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 for Creating the Perfect Content Calendar](#).

COLLABORATE AND BRAINSTORM REGULARLY

We all go through times when we need inspiration or to bounce some ideas off 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 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 targeted content that serves a real purpose in people's lives. Emphasising quality over quantity is a strong best practice for ensuring your content strategy is successful. Make sure that your topics are timely and that your pieces are well written. This will help ensure you build credibility and trust among your audience, and keep them coming back for more.

STOCK UP ON APPROVED EVERGREEN CONTENT

Whether it's daily, weekly or monthly, your audience will come to expect ongoing communication that is timely and relevant. Creating some "evergreen" content or content that is considered durable will help give your communications a solid core. You'll also have back-up if new content is thin on the ground.

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 key metrics for 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 programme outcomes. We also know that more than [1,200 government employees worldwide](#) said that success will be measured by engagement metrics in 2017. So when a thoughtful and strategic content marketing plan is coupled with regular analysis of digital metrics, the higher the likelihood of stronger outcomes and greater impact at your organisation.

Content marketing can lead to real results. Whether it's higher attendance at your next public meeting or an increase in participants in your job seekers' support services, a strategic content marketing strategy will help lead to a more visible organisation and a more engaged audience.

The future of content marketing will depend on whether the public sector is able to keep up with demand and find ways to ensure the content is being consumed.



If you need help increasing citizen engagement with your organisation's content and services, please get in touch. It's our forte.

6 FAQs

This document serves as an initial guide to content marketing in the public sector. Here are just a handful of the questions we've come across in your industry:

FAQs

? 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 organisation. 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 making thoughtful and strategic choices about the format and distribution of your content is most important.

As for budget, we know that *email has the highest ROI* of any marketing tactic. Use it as a source of information as well as a vehicle for driving engagement with other types of content. We also know that *text messaging* has some of the highest levels of engagement, while social media and websites are relatively cheap to maintain.

? HOW CAN MY TEAM AVOID CONTENT FATIGUE?

Set expectations among your content production team right from the start. Planning a monthly content calendar can help keep everyone together and on-track. You may want to start small and scale up gradually, taking team capacity and skills into account. Regularly review how things are going and be prepared to make changes as needed.

Don't be averse to allowing your team to try new things. With a decent smartphone, it's even possible to create simple video content that's fit for some purposes, so let your team experiment and be creative.

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

It depends on your organisation'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. It's important to know that most effective content strategies take time to see steady growth. If you aren't seeing the engagement levels you're looking for after about six months, try something different.

? 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 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 you'd find useful, please email info@granicus.com



For examples of how Granicus' digital engagement technologies and services are supporting public sector organisations like yours please visit uk.granicus.com



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