Video 1: Why does your business need a content creation framework?

Hello! I'm Abi, and I'm the Content Manager here at HubSpot Academy.

A lot of work goes into creating a single piece of content: research, planning, editing, and more.

Then after the content's done, there's promotion work, reporting...the list goes on. As a content professional, you need to publish a lot of content for each of your buyer personas at different stages of the buyer's journey.

This can feel laborious or complicated—especially if you're working solo.

But a content creation framework that's repeatable, organized, and agile can make the content creation process smoother and more rewarding.

A content creation framework is a structure of processes for publishing content—from the beginning stages to post-publication.

Are you thinking, "A framework for creating content? But won't that hurt creativity?" No.

With a framework in place, your team can foster creative ideas in an organized, scalable manner. A framework strikes that perfect balance between autonomous creativity and long-term content sustainability.

As an example of a very basic content creation framework, let's take a look at HubSpot Academy's User Blog.

The User Blog aims to educate and inspire HubSpot users to reach their inbound business goals with the HubSpot software. We have a diverse group of subject matter experts contributing articles. We also have a variety of editors to make sure the articles are the best they can be before publication.

Then we need to take into consideration the topics we feature, the customers and partners who will contribute articles, and some ad-hoc content to educate our readers on HubSpot updates and news.

That's a lot of moving parts! So to keep things organized, we have a framework. Let's take a look.

This is the User Blog's editorial calendar. It's organized in a Google Sheet. I create each month's calendar one month in advance so that all writers and editors get plenty of notice before their deadlines.

The "Publish Date" and "Publish Time" are documented so that editors know what date and time to schedule their posts for publication.

Then there's the "Due Date" column. This is the date the writer needs to submit their article by. This way, each editor gets a full week to review the article. This is especially important since our editors are either freelance editors with a lot of content to juggle, or they're volunteer editors here at HubSpot who have full-time jobs.

The writer is responsible for writing their article and getting it in on time—so their name is documented in the "Responsible" column.

In the "Blog Post Title" column, writers enter their proposed title or—if they don't have a title in mind yet—they enter a quick blurb on what they plan to cover. Then in the "Description" column, they enter a short sentence or two about what their article will explore.

The next column asks writers to enter a word or two about what HubSpot tools or products their post highlights. This way, I can make sure writers create articles that will educate and inspire HubSpot users. Also, the editor will use these words as tags when they edit the blog post.

The "Status" column reflects what stage in the creation process the blog post is in:

- Pending: The slot may be filled by an article, but the writer hasn't confirmed yet.
- Confirmed: The slot has been filled with an article and confirmed by the writer.
- Submitted: The writer has submitted their article for editing.
- Scheduled: The editor has reviewed the article and scheduled it for publication.
- Published: The article is live.

Lastly, the "Editor" column lists the name of the person who'll be editing each article. This way, the writer and editor can communicate before, during, or after the editing process to make sure everything's in order for publication.

So that's one example of what a content creation framework looks like for content in the short term, planned one month out. You also might want to create a long-term content creation framework, where you plan content up to a few months to a year in advance.

Why would you want to plan content this far ahead?

Well, you need to serve your audience's needs and educate them over time depending on what they're looking for.

For example: I used to be a technical writer here at HubSpot. Our readers were looking for information on how to use their HubSpot tools.

On our team, we needed to create content and publish it quickly to align with product releases. So to make sure we could update our current articles and create new ones on time, I worked closely with our product team to keep track of all upcoming product changes and new releases. These were usually planned up to a few months—and sometimes a year—in advance. So we planned our content to align with those timelines.

We used Trello boards to keep track of how changes were moving through the product team's pipeline. When a change was coming closer to launch, the technical writers had time to collect content for updating and write drafts of new content to educate users about the releases.

These releases also involved product announcements, blog posts, emails, and other forms of content to serve a variety of personas. So we all needed to work together and stick to our long-term content creation framework.

When you're planning your content for a month or even a year in advance, remain flexible to account for the changes that will inevitably come up. Sometimes campaigns, timelines, and personas will need to be adjusted.

Video 2: How to build a content creation framework

So, you want to create your content in a streamlined manner. Let's jump into the five steps to building a content creation framework.

1. Conceptualizing content
2. Planning a timeline
3. Creating a workflow
4. Reviewing and editing content
5. Organizing and storing content

When conceptualizing content, the first step is coming up with appropriate ideas for your content offers.

A content offer is something you create and publish in exchange for personal information like a name and email address.

Struggling to generate content ideas? Do some online research, like reading blogs related to your industry or checking out content marketing survey results. Another option is to write down frequently asked sales questions or important industry knowledge that would be helpful for your target market to know.

If you're looking for a list of ways to generate meaningful content ideas, check out the resources section below.

As you gather ideas, focus on creating content for every stage of the buyer's journey—awareness, consideration, and decision.

In the awareness stage, a prospect is experiencing and expressing symptoms of a problem or opportunity. They're doing research to more clearly understand, frame, and give a name to their problem. They're looking for educational content to help them answer some of their questions and concerns—think blog posts, ebooks, social content, and how-to webinars.

In the consideration stage, a prospect has clearly defined and given a name to their problem or opportunity. They're committed to researching and understanding all available approaches and methods to solving their problem or opportunity. Create content that positions you as an expert in your industry. Demo videos, case studies, and FAQ articles are great resources to build relationships with readers and establish trust between your audience and your brand.

In the decision stage, a prospect has now decided on their solution strategy, method, or approach. They're compiling a long list of all available vendors and products in their given solution strategy. They're researching to trim down this long list into a short list and ultimately make a final purchase decision—and that final purchase decision could be YOU. So provide them content such as free trials, consultations, and articles that provide education on your products or services.

For more detail about the buyer's journey and creating content for each stage, check out the resources section below.

Now, back to building a content creation framework.

Step two is planning a timeline. When putting together a timeline, keep in mind that you'll want to maintain agility while still having time to execute on your initiatives.

When planning content creation over the span of a quarter, try to have at least two or three content offers you want to create, and organize your content by buyer's journey stages.

Keep your goals in mind here. Is the focus for this quarter improving volume of leads? Is it increasing the close/won rate for your sales team? Is it growing blog traffic?

Use your goals to determine what content you need to focus on. From there, map out what content you need and when it needs to be live. This will give you a sense of the resources you'll need in-house to create this content yourself. You can also use your goals to decide if you need some external help from freelancers.

In addition to planning out your content offers, identify any company-wide initiatives that will need support from content over the next three months. Examples of additional content are posts on events that you'll be attending, rebranding information, and new corporate partnerships.

The third step is creating a workflow. In the context of content creation, a workflow is an intuitive breakdown of the content creation work. It consists of the sequence of steps a piece of content moves through from its initial creation to publication.

Your workflow should clearly identify who will do what. It should also identify if outside influencers or freelancers will be contributing and, if so, in what capacity.

Because there are multiple components involved when creating a piece of content, you'll want to get pretty granular with your steps—even if you're a team of one. This way, as your content grows over time, you'll have a clearly defined workflow to use when adding the resources you'll need to create more content at a fast pace.

For example, instead of having written, edited, and published as the work stages for an ebook, you might have something like outline completed, first draft completed, editing completed, design and formatting completed, final draft completed, and published.

Here's a pro tip: Think about how you created a piece of content in the past before you had a content creation framework. Consider what went well, what roadblocks you hit, and what you'll need to work into your process to avoid those roadblocks the next time around.

Document your thoughts, and create a workflow based on that. You can always change your workflow steps as your content evolves.

This brings us to the fourth step: reviewing and editing content. You need a reviewal system in place so that your content is accurate, well written, and aligned with your brand. Depending on your team's setup, this review process could involve working with an in-house or freelance editor and having an SEO specialist format and update the content.

In the review process, follow these seven best practices:

- Set clear expectations.
- Define roles in the reviewal process.
- Determine a timeline.
- Use a style guide.
- Track edits.
- Manage progress.
- Optimize for search engines.

Let's dive into each of these in more detail.

Set clear expectations: The reviewer should know what they're looking for: grammatical errors, fact-checking, story gaps, wordsmithing, and more.

Define roles in the reviewal process: Each person should know what they need to do and when. Maybe you have a developmental editor looking at your content's overall focus and structure before a copy editor goes in for more detailed edits. Or maybe you have a single editor reviewing everything. Whatever your team looks like, clearly defining who does what will eliminate chaos and keep things on track.

Determine a timeline. With so many people involved in publishing content, set due dates and a high-level timeline so that each person is held accountable for their contribution. In many content environments, one missed deadline affects everyone's work. To keep your team agile and conscious of their deadlines, share a rough timeline with the team, get everyone's buy-in, and then finalize it.

Use a style guide. Your content needs to be consistently authentic, well written, and aligned with your company's brand—even among various writers with different writing styles, skill levels, and voices. A style guide is that common thread all content reviewers can use so that their edits establish consistency across a diverse group of writers.

For information on how to create a style guide, check out the resources section below.

Moving on to the next best practice: Track edits. Whether you have one editor or multiple editors, have your content reviewers make suggestions by tracking changes as opposed to making edits directly. This way, the content creator knows where to make changes as opposed to figuring out what was altered.

Next, manage progress. Use some sort of document, like a project management software, to track progress. This document should reflect the roles, timeline, and deadlines you've determined for your reviewal process. Since you could have a team of people working together on a final product, tracking the reviewal progress provides transparency across the team and keeps all stakeholders on the same page. It also allows for agility so that you can remain flexible and adjust deadlines if need be.

Here's a pro tip: If you're looking for a place to start, consider using Trello. It's free, and—more importantly—Trello makes collaborating with others easy.

And finally, optimize for search engines. You put a lot of effort into creating your content, so you want your audience to find it in their web searches. After your content is created, do some spot edits to search engine optimize your content. This could involve swapping out some words for keywords or maybe having an SEO specialist optimize specific sections.

So that wraps up reviewal best practices.

The sixth step in building a content creation framework is organizing and storing content. Once your content is done, store it in a centralized location where your team can access it—like Google Drive or Dropbox. If you have a content management system, also known as a CMS, then you could choose to store it there as well.

Organizing your content in a way that's easy to understand is critical for repurposing, reusing, or even finding that content down the line.

One way to organize your content is to develop a clear naming system. A sample system could include content format, buyer's journey stage, campaign, and year.

For example, let's say you developed an awareness stage ebook back in 2015 to

support a campaign for a new product launch on rock climbing gear. Your name for this content offer could be ebook-awareness-rockclimbinggear-2015.

While you can choose a specific naming convention formula for hosting your files, the goal should be to easily access files when needed.

Keep in mind: Your content creation framework should always be evolving. Your business's goals will vary from quarter to quarter and year to year, so your content creation framework should align with those changes. On top of that, content marketing is always changing. Stay up to date on industry trends and best practices so that you can incorporate them into your framework.

Video 3: Determining the resources you'll need for a content creation framework

To build a framework for scalable and organized content creation, there are two main types of resources you'll need: your team and your tools.

Let's start with your team.

There are five primary types of responsibilities in content creation:

- Content management and strategy
- Writing
- Editing
- Designing
- Distributing

First, let's cover content management and strategy. This responsibility involves creating a long-term content plan, mapping it to the business needs, ensuring the other responsibilities are met, and analyzing the reports.

This person is the leader of the group and works with everyone involved so that things move along smoothly to the finish line. Most businesses hire a content marketing manager or content marketing strategist to fill this role.

The second responsibility is writing. Typically, a content writer or marketer will do the writing. While many businesses have niche or technical markets, the individuals writing your content don't always have to be subject matter experts. Instead, much like a journalist, they can work with internal and external subject matter experts to create compelling and useful content. While many companies choose to write their content in-house, some choose to outsource that work. Writers from companies like Scripted or Upwork can create tailored content for your marketing campaigns.

And where there's writing, there's editing. Once content has been planned and created, it needs to be edited. Just because a piece of content has been created doesn't mean it's ready to be published. Editing ensures alignment with your business's messaging, your target market's needs, and the goals the content is meant to solve for. An in-house

editor or freelance editor is perfect for this. But if you don't have an editor, consider having a teammate with a knack for communication review your content. A fresh set of eyes and a different perspective can make your content stronger.

Next is designing. Once the content has been written and edited, it needs to be packaged in a way that's appealing to readers. Having an attractive, fluid format and design can make all the difference in getting someone to stay on your site and enjoy consuming your content. Effective design also plays a huge role in information hierarchy. You need a high-quality design to structure your content in a way that's easy for readers to understand and navigate.

Think about it: Can you remember a time when you looked at a website or flyer and decided not to read it because it didn't visually make sense?

In marketing, we use the term blink test to refer to the 3 to 5 seconds an average site visitor spends scanning a website visually and then deciding if they want to spend time looking through it. So make it easy for your audience to scan your content, pull out a few important details, and then engage further. A good designer can be the difference between a below average blink test pass rate and consistently getting people to stay on your site.

Try using tools like Canva to step up your content design. If you're not able to do this work in-house, consider a freelancer.

Finally, there's distributing: A content distributor, also known as a social media coordinator or specialist, is responsible for bringing the content to market through a strategic promotion plan. They need to either create or coordinate the creation of promotional content, map it to the available channels, and schedule it for publication. They're also the person responsible for analyzing the results of the campaign.

Depending on your team and business context, you might have one person fill multiple roles. Just make sure that person isn't strapped with too much responsibility. Have a checks and balances system spread amongst multiple teammates. If your team members are already at full capacity, look into freelancers to pick up the additional work.

Here's a pro tip: If you're just getting started with building your team or looking for resources to help you complete a project, consider hiring a freelancer as your first team member. To learn more about the advantages of using freelancers as well as how to get started with hiring one, check out the resources section below.

So that covers your team. Now let's talk about tools.

To build your content framework, you'll need 3 main tools:

- CMS
- Analytics tools
- Planning and internal communication tools

A CMS is a tool for creating, editing, and publishing digital content. There are different types of content systems—such as HubSpot and WordPress—so you'll need to identify what works best for your company's needs. Whichever CMS you use, be sure you have the ability to edit your website, create and publish content for your blog and landing pages, and optimize content for search engines.

You'll also need analytics tools. Use your analytics tools to understand the impact of your content on your business and identify opportunities for improvement.

Most paid-for CMS tools come with built-in analytics. And any social platforms you use will also have built-in analytics. But if you're looking for an analytics solution with extra insights, then HubSpot and Google Analytics are strong choices to consider. In fact, try using both—the two platforms offer different kinds of insights that, combined, create a complete picture.

To learn about the differences between these two reporting platforms as well as how they work together, check out the resources section below.

Also, consider adding tracking links to all your promotional activities. This way, you can see what's working and what's not. To build a trackable link using Google's campaign URL builder tool, check out the resources section below.

Once you have your CMS and analytics ready to go, you'll need planning and internal communication tools. You'll use these tools so that your team can communicate easily, see any updates, avoid version or draft control issues, and clearly delineate their responsibilities and assignments. You could start off with Google Drive or Trello, then transition to something more robust as your team and content grows.

With these resources in mind, you're well on your way to building a content creation framework. And you're one step closer to making meaningful connections with your audience—at scale.