

Data-Driven Content Marketing

How To Create & Optimize A Content Strategy With Data At Its Core

By Hana Abaza



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Introduction

From *Mad Men* to *Modern Marketing*, we've seen some major shifts in the marketing industry over the years. The biggest shift is one of accountability. Marketers, just like our counterparts in sales, have to show value - show our contribution to the bottom line.

For many, this means embracing a new marketing reality.

At the heart of this is the fact that marketing has to be informed by data, and content marketing is no different. Taking a data-driven approach for content marketing requires three things:

- 1. A fundamental shift in process.** This is especially important if your organization doesn't currently prioritize and encourage an analytical mindset. This includes laying the foundation to track and measure ideas before they go into the wild, and establishing a process for analyzing and reporting results.
- 2. Open communication.** Data comes in many forms, and making informed decisions requires you to consider quantitative and qualitative data, some of which you have access to and some of which may be sitting in other departments or teams.
- 3. The power to make make changes- to iterate.** All of the data in the world is essentially useless you have the power to act on it. Unfortunately, one of the biggest bottlenecks for marketers is the IT department. The content experience (front end) must be owned by your marketing team so they can optimize it based on the results. Either you need a technical person on your marketing team or a [software that allows any marketer to take the reins.](#)

If you can put a checkmark beside each of the above (or can work towards that), then you're part of the way there.

In this eBook, we're going to focus on concepts, tools and tactics to implement throughout each stage of the content marketing process in order to understand what's working and make better decisions.

CH 2

Creating a Content Strategy with Data at the Core

Like anything else in business, you first need to establish clear goals and a strategy (one that you can adapt as you gain more insight into how it's working). Developing buyer personas, defining the buyer journey and mapping the right content to the right persona at each stage of the buyer journey will provide a foundation for that strategy.

I'm going to assume that you have started this process, but if not, here are some great resources that can point you in the right direction:

- 1. [The Essentials of a Documented Content Marketing Strategy](#)**
- 2. [Blogging in the Age of Modern Marketing](#)**

Once your content strategy has come together, it's time to implement a process that's structured yet agile. We're going to look at how to embrace a data-driven approach across four key pillars of content marketing:



1. CONTENT IDEATION

Using data to for better content creation and ideation



2. CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

Analyzing distribution channels for greater impact and targeting



3. CONTENT EXPERIENCE

Optimizing your content experience for your audience



4. CONTENT PERFORMANCE

Measuring what matters so you know what's working

By applying a data-driven approach to this framework, we can make informed decisions and identify what's working at each level.



CONTENT IDEATION

While all of us, at some point, have managed to pull a compelling content idea from thin air, the reality is that ideation can be (and should be) driven by data. To create content that resonates with your audience and your industry, it's essential to understand what's already working.

Luckily, there are several tools that can help identify the trends within your industry and the type of content that's hitting home with your audience. Here are a few that our content team at Uberflip uses regularly:

The screenshot shows the BuzzSumo Pro interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Buzzsumo Pro' logo and menu items: Top Content, Influencers, Content Alerts, Reports, API, Help, Email Us, Blog, and Account. Below the navigation bar, there's a search bar with 'content marketing' entered. To the right of the search bar are 'Search!' and 'Export' buttons. Below the search bar, there's a prompt: 'Enter a topic or domain: big data, cnn.com. Advanced Search Options Save Search'. To the right of this prompt is a 'Sort by:' dropdown set to 'Total Shares' and 'Page 1 of 3130'. Below the search bar, there's a table of results with columns for 'FACEBOOK SHARES', 'LINKEDIN SHARES', 'TWITTER SHARES', 'PINTEREST SHARES', 'GOOGLE+ SHARES', and 'TOTAL SHARES'. The table lists three articles:

Article Title	Facebook Shares	LinkedIn Shares	Twitter Shares	Pinterest Shares	Google+ Shares	Total Shares
10 Words to Cut From Your Writing entrepreneur.com - More from this domain By Shanna Mallon	29,750	3,058	7,039	542	729	41,118
The Ideal Length for All Online Content blog.bufferapp.com - More from this domain By Kevan Lee	63	3,334	12,269	0	4,597	20,263
Writing Tips: How to Come Up With 50 Topic Ideas in 30 Minutes entrepreneur.com - More from this domain By Neil Patel	11,525	1,142	2,025	146	522	15,360

BuzzSumo analyzes what content performs best for specific topics or websites. After typing in a topic or domain, you'll get a results page with the top ranked content for your search.

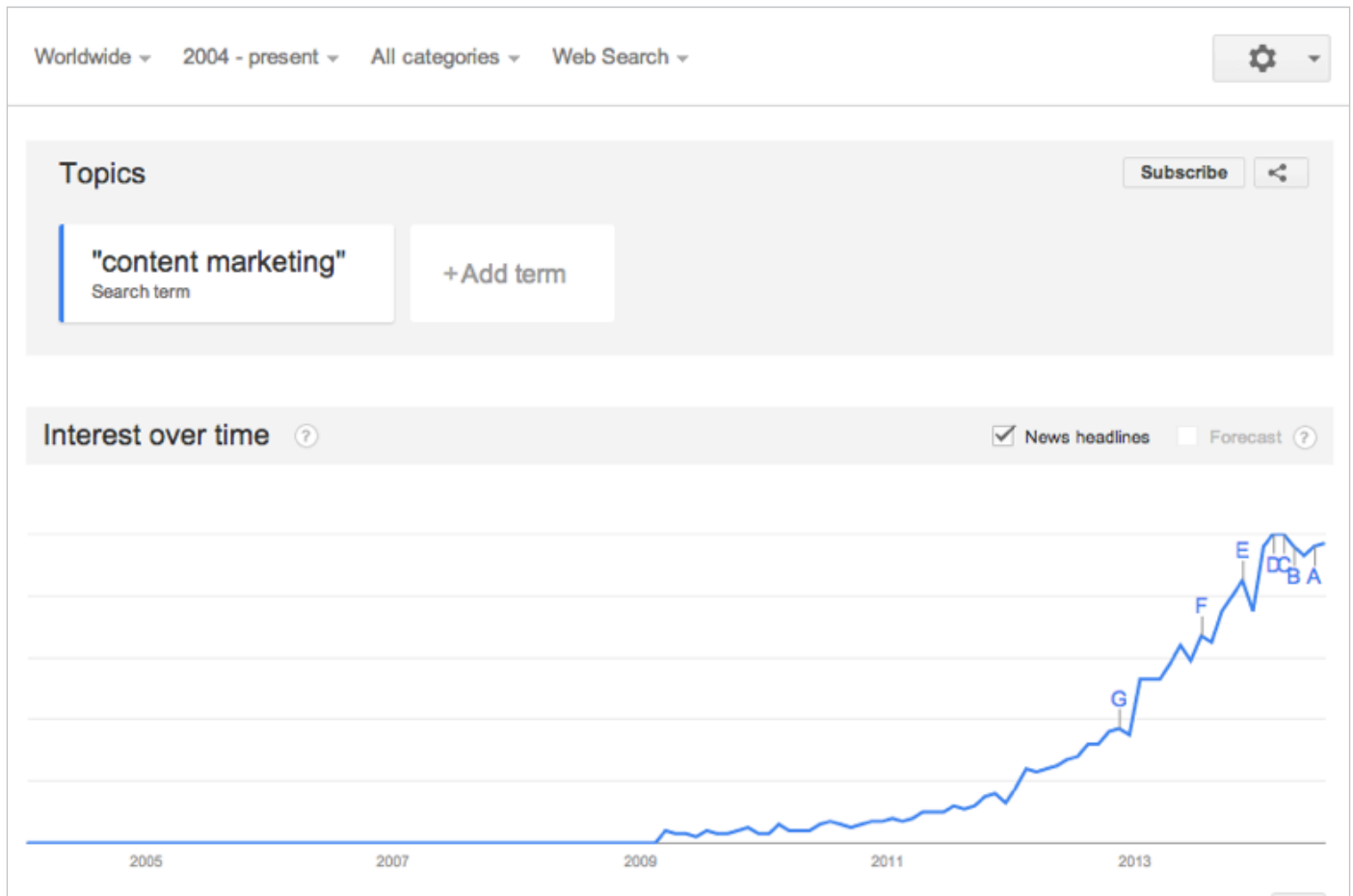
This includes a breakdown of how well the content performed across all major social channels, giving you insight into where your audience lives. BuzzSumo also lets you filter the results by date and by type (e.g. articles, videos, infographics, etc.) so you have a better understanding of which type of content is performing best.



You can do the same search for a competitor's domain and topics to see how you're ranking in comparison.

Google Trends

[Google Trends](#) can help to identify trends for specific keywords and topics. Ideally, you want to capitalize on words that are in the midst of an upswing in interest.



In the example above, we took a look at the term “content marketing” and how it’s trending. If you were able to create compelling, high quality content about this topic as the graph was on the rise (around 2011 / 2012), you’re likely still reaping the rewards. In addition to keyword and search trends, Google Trends also gives insight into rising search terms and geographical data.

Mine Your Own Team For Data

In many companies, the content team works in a silo, separated from demand generation, sales and customer support. This can be a huge disadvantage. These are people with behind the scenes knowledge of what your audience wants to know. They're interacting with customers and prospects on a regular basis and will be able to tell you their biggest pain points.

Whether it's for top of the funnel, educational content or customer-centric content to help reduce churn, talk to your counterparts in other teams and capitalize on what they've learned on the front lines.

For example, here are a couple of questions I like to ask our sales team:

What non-product related questions do you hear on a regular basis?

This helps with "top of the funnel" content. If we can answer these questions using content, we'll not only help our sales team by providing them with content they can send to their prospects, but we'll also answer the question for everyone else.

What are the biggest pain points you hear about?

This speaks directly to a deeper understanding of our buyer persona and is a great way to get ideas for more "bottom of the funnel" content.

Talk To Your Customers

Don't just tweet or email your customers - actually talk to them. Seems like a strange concept, but there's no substitution for a real conversation. Email and social media often lack the nuances that you pick up on when speaking to another human being.

Why does this matter? [Ann Handley writes](#) that, in order for your content to be compelling and effective, it needs to be "useful, inspired, and pathologically empathetic to the needs of the people you are trying to reach."

The amount of information you can glean from a couple of simple conversations can have a major impact on how you position your company, what to create and, as we we move to the next section, where to distribute your content.



CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

Distributing your content is just as important as creating high quality content. A data-driven approach is essential to refine your distribution strategy.

Benchmark Current Distribution Channels

The first step is to set a baseline by analyzing the metrics associated with your distribution channels - this can be eye opening! Tools like Google Analytics, KISSmetrics (or even Buffer and BuzzSumo, if you're primarily focused on social media distribution) will help determine where the majority of your traffic is coming from. Is it social? Search? Or is your content getting picked up by other bloggers?

Once you understand where your existing traffic is coming from, you might be able to gain some valuable insight into where you should focus your distribution efforts. For example, if you discover that people coming from LinkedIn are very engaged, it might be worth putting some paid distribution behind this channel. Alternatively, you can also look into other channels that LinkedIn users also frequent, such as forums or other networks.

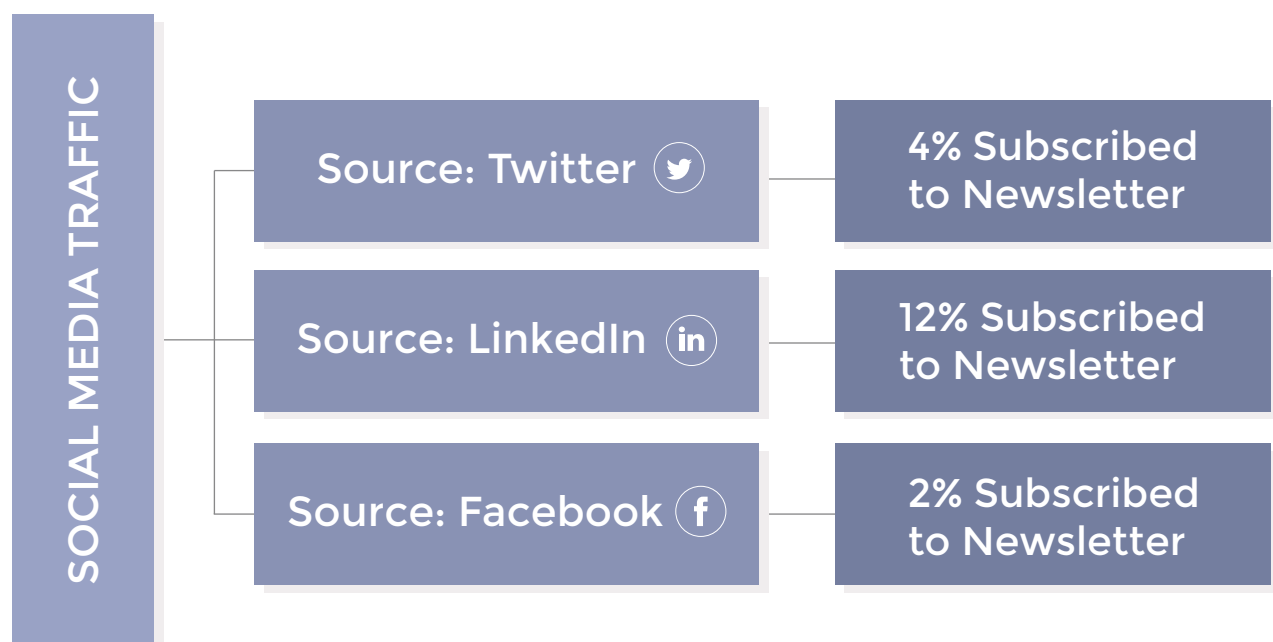
Staying in tune with your distribution metrics can also help identify viable channels you may have been unaware of, such as other blogs that accept guest posts.

Segmenting Your Audience For More Distribution

Once you understand where people are coming from, take the time to segment your audience. Look at the metrics from each source, like time on site, bounce rate and social shares. Are people coming from social media more engaged than people coming from a Google search? Of those visitors, who is ultimately converting to a lead and then a customer?

★ **Further Reading:** If you're new to segmentation, [here are 22 ways you can segment your contacts](#) to get you started.

In the (oversimplified) example below, you can see that people who are coming from LinkedIn are much more likely to convert into a subscriber than those coming from Facebook.



Distribution Channels

While the focus of this eBook is tracking and measuring your content marketing strategy, I'd be remiss if I didn't at least touch on distribution channels. Without knowing your industry, audience and customer, it's impossible to make any concrete recommendations. But, in general, distribution for content marketing falls into the following categories:

1 Social Media Networks

This includes Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Pinterest and countless others. The key is to find a channel that your audience is engaged with and likely to interact with you.

2 Content Recommendation Platforms

Platforms like [Outbrain](#) and [Taboola](#) are great ways to distribute your content to a variety of publications. Be sure to analyze not just click-through rates, but also conversion (for example, a newsletter signup) from these sources so you can optimize where they are publishing your content.

3 Email Marketing

Despite the countless proclamations that "email marketing is dead", the problem is that most marketers don't take the time to execute in a systematic and methodological way, ruthlessly preserving the integrity of their contact database. If the people in your database want to hear from you, they'll open your emails.

4

Forums & Communities

If you're in a particularly specialized market, there are often communities, dedicated forums or subsections of more mainstream forums, that might be a great place to share your content. But as always, these forums are most effective when you are genuinely participating in the conversation - avoid the temptation to spam the hell out of them ;)

5

Content Syndication

Sites like [Business2Community](#), [Social Media Today](#) and others provide the opportunity to syndicate content. If you can find something similar in your industry, it's worth exploring. Be sure to syndicate wisely as it can have a negative impact on your SEO. Pro tip: ask the syndicating site to include rel="canonical" tag when possible.

6

Guest Blogging

Offer to submit a guest post on sites that are either highly targeted (so there's a disproportionate number of readers that fit your ideal customer profile) or slightly broader with a larger reach and considered "[high authority](#)" by the powers that be (i.e. Google).

7

Influencer Marketing

Are there any heavyweights in your industry that love your product? Take the time to develop a relationship with them. Help them in some way (maybe free use of your product?) and turn them into evangelists for your company.

8

Advocate Marketing

Industry influencers aren't the only ones who can act as evangelists on your behalf. Your customers are also the perfect people to spread your message. Using an advocate marketing platform like Influitive is the perfect way to turn customers into advocates, encouraging them to share your content with their own networks.

9

SEO

Like email marketing, SEO isn't dead but it has evolved. As expected, Google is increasingly emphasizing [semantic search](#). In order to have an impact on your content's SEO performance, you have to consider both keywords and the actual language people (your customers) are using.

Understanding whether or not there is a viable channel in any of the above categories takes time, data and experimentation. The key is to lay the foundation to properly track results, prior to experimentation, so you can benchmark and track progress.

**PRO TIP!**

Recycle and reuse your content. For example, if a blog post about a particular topic is working well on Twitter, repurpose the content into a SlideShare or infographic and test it on a channel where visual content works well like Facebook, Pinterest, even LinkedIn.

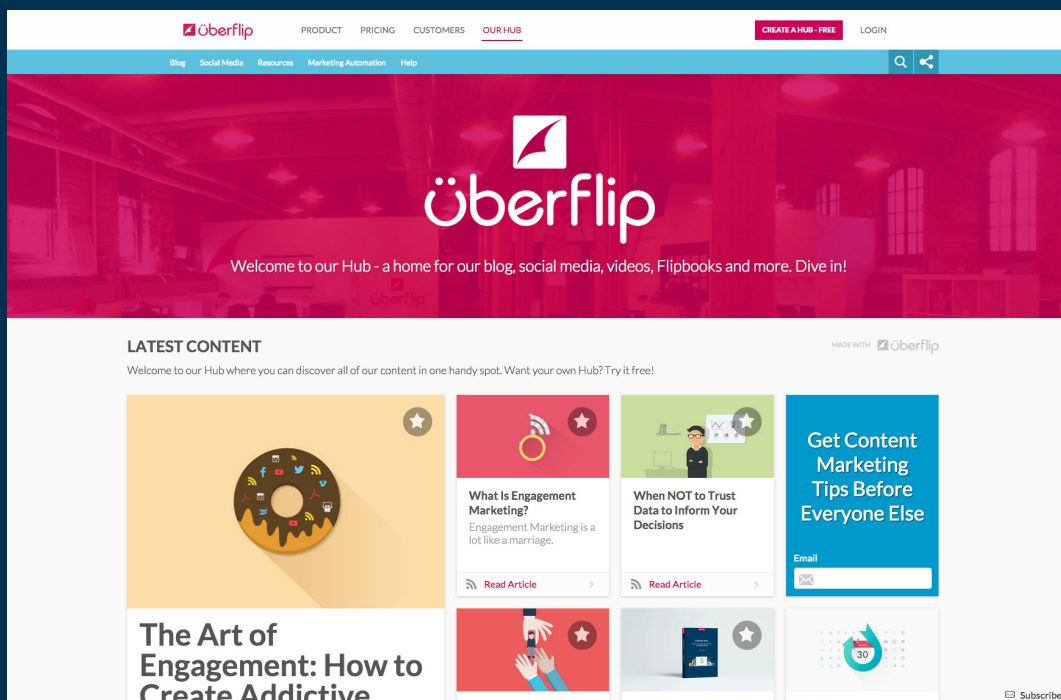


BOOST ENGAGEMENT GENERATE LEADS CONTROL YOUR CONTENT

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CONTENT EXPERIENCE

Creating a killer content experience goes a long way towards increasing the engagement and distribution of your content.

But your content experience must also be designed and optimized for lead generation. Unfortunately, user experience is too often ignored due to a lack of knowledge or a lack of control.

Here are three questions you need to answer when focusing on optimizing the experience.

1. What are you optimizing for?

Is it social shares, newsletter signups, lead generation? Understand the primary goal to optimize in the right direction.

2. Can you measure it?

Do you have the infrastructure in place to measure success? If you're after newsletter subscribers, are you able to measure your subscriber conversion rate? Tools that can help you do this include marketing automation platforms like [Marketo](#) or [HubSpot](#) or content marketing software like [Uberflip](#).

3. Can you change it?

Do you have the control to change the content experience? Whether this is you as a marketer, or working in conjunction with the development team, being able to quickly change and add call-to-actions or create targeted content streams can have a huge impact on your overall performance.

We'll do a deep dive into specific metrics in the next section, but the general concept behind optimizing your content marketing is the same as optimizing a landing page, a sales site, an ecommerce site or anything else.

Given full control over the content experience (without involving IT or developers in the process), marketers can further optimize the content experience to tailor to specific buyer personas. You can tighten the message for more personalized call-to-actions, usually resulting in higher engagement and conversion rates.

**Generate more leads by optimizing the
content experience for conversions**

TRY UBERFLIP FREE



CONTENT PERFORMANCE

Content effectiveness and ROI often gets the least attention because it is the hardest to measure, but it's the most important aspect of taking a data-driven approach to content marketing.

Content ROI comes down to understanding the goal of your content. However, while I'm the first to advocate for the importance of knowing your Content ROI, if your only objective is brand awareness then attaching a dollar figure to your ROI is more difficult. As much as I want you to be metrics-minded, it's important to remember that there can also be intangible benefits to content marketing.

What is Content Performance?

Understanding how to track, measure and interpret performance is at the crux of taking a data-driven approach to content marketing.

While it's usually easy to get a "bunch of data" (provided you have the right tools in place), identifying the right data, interpreting it combining it with qualitative feedback and turning it into something actionable can be tough.

Let's start by looking at two main buckets when it comes to content marketing metrics:

1. Engagement metrics

These enable you to gauge how your content is resonating with people, whether or not you're attracting the right audience and whether or not your distribution plan is effective.

2. Growth metrics

Growth metrics are more directly related to your bottom line and include things like sales, revenue and customer growth figures.

Here's an example of some metrics that fall into each category.

ENGAGEMENT METRICS

Social Shares

Time On Site

Pages Per Visit

Search Rankings

Page Views

Bounce Rate

GROWTH METRICS

Visitor to Lead Conversion

Lead to Customer Conversion

of Leads Generated

of CTAs Clicked

of Forms Filled

Lead to Sales Qualified Lead

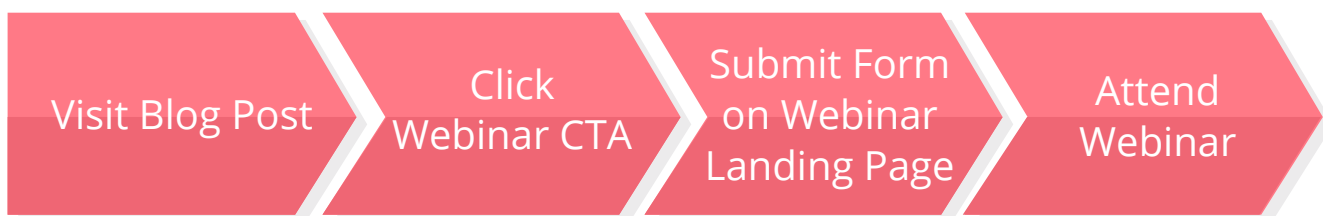
PRO TIP!

If any of these are unfamiliar to you, check out [this post](#) I wrote about Content Marketing ROI, it's a good place to start if you're, well, just starting.

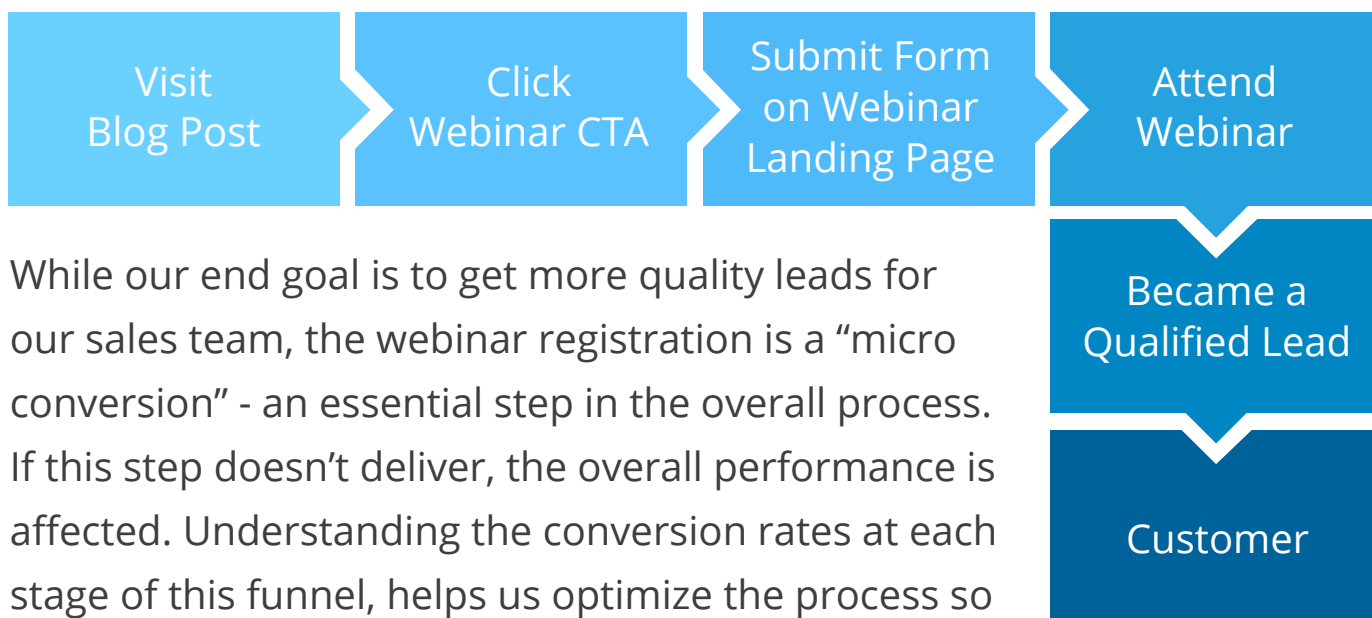
Most marketers focus too much on engagement metrics and not enough on growth metrics. While these can be valuable indicators (and increasing these might be the first step to driving higher growth metrics), they won't shed light on whether your content is impacting the bottom line.

Once again, the metrics you choose to focus on should align with your overall goals. Once you know what those are, you can begin to put together a funnel that will shed some light on what's working and what needs work.

For example, here's what a very simple funnel might look like at Uberflip for one of our webinars.



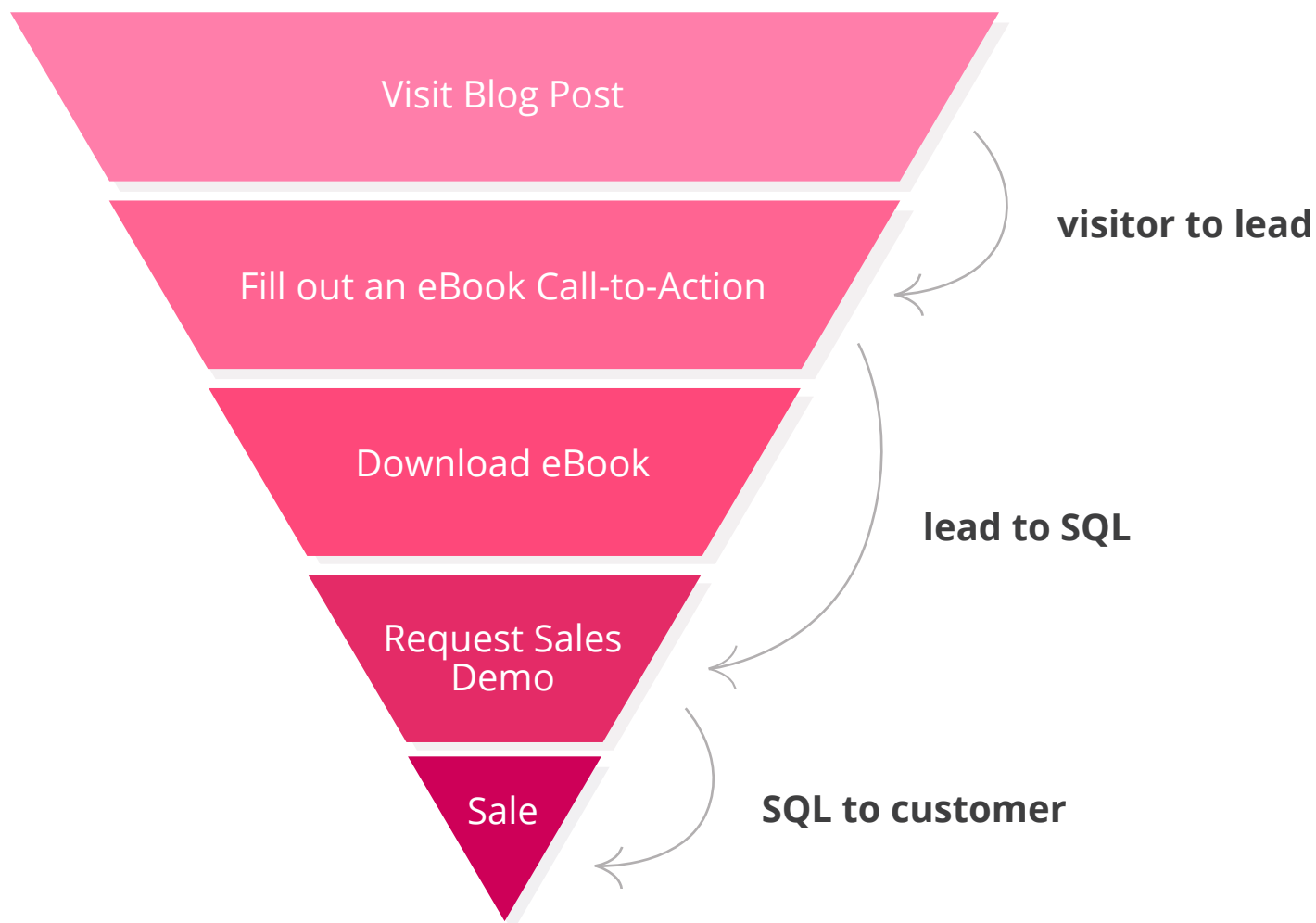
If my end goal was simply webinar registrants, I could stop here. But, I can also take it a step further to see the impact on growth.



While our end goal is to get more quality leads for our sales team, the webinar registration is a “micro conversion” - an essential step in the overall process. If this step doesn't deliver, the overall performance is affected. Understanding the conversion rates at each stage of this funnel, helps us optimize the process so we can maximize the end result.

As you can see, once you've mapped out your funnel, you can begin to determine what the overall return on your content marketing might be.

Here's another way to look at funnels, in this case, for an eBook.



You can see that, while there are several steps in the funnel, I'm looking at some overarching conversion rates in this case. I want to know:

- ★ Visitor to Lead conversion rate
- ★ Lead to SQL (Sales Qualified Lead) conversion rate
- ★ SQL to Customer conversion rate

Unfortunately, most content marketers don't have visibility into these metrics. If you can't answer the question "is it worth it?" and back up your response with compelling data (e.g. number of leads generated) then you're wasting your time.

Tools to Measure Performance

While there's no shortage of tools to help you measure performance, there are a few that can get you most of the way there.

Google Analytics

[Google Analytics](#) is a great way to analyze where your traffic is coming from, engagement metrics like pageviews and sessions (used to be called "visits"). Beyond that, you can also analyze behavior flow to see where people go next. And, if you want to go a step further, you can also set up events or goals so you can measure things like click throughs, conversions, etc.

Two reports that are particularly valuable in GA are the channel and landing page reports. The first lets you drill down into specific traffic sources so you can see what's driving the most traffic. This is a great way to discover different referral sources that you might be able to further exploit. Here's what it looks like:

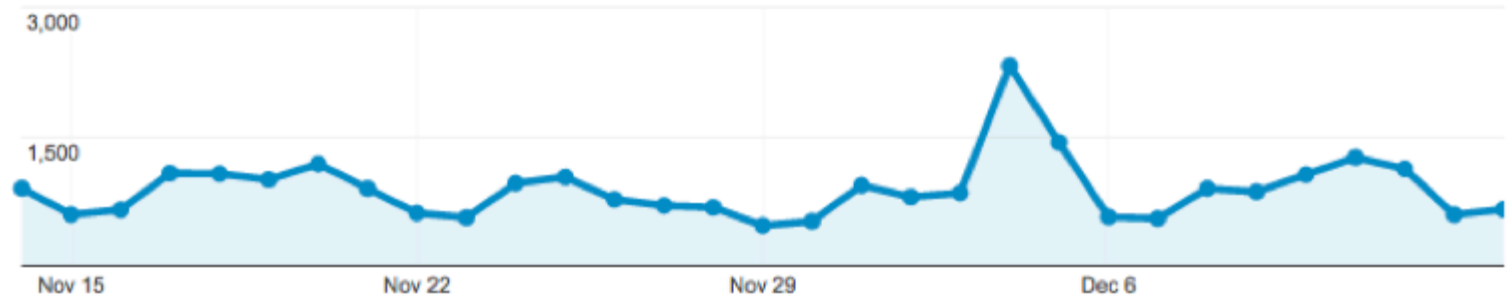
Channel Reports

Summary Site Usage Ecommerce

Sessions vs. Select a metric

Day Week Month

Sessions



Primary Dimension: Default Channel Grouping Source / Medium Source Medium Other

Plot Rows

Secondary dimension

Sort Type: Default



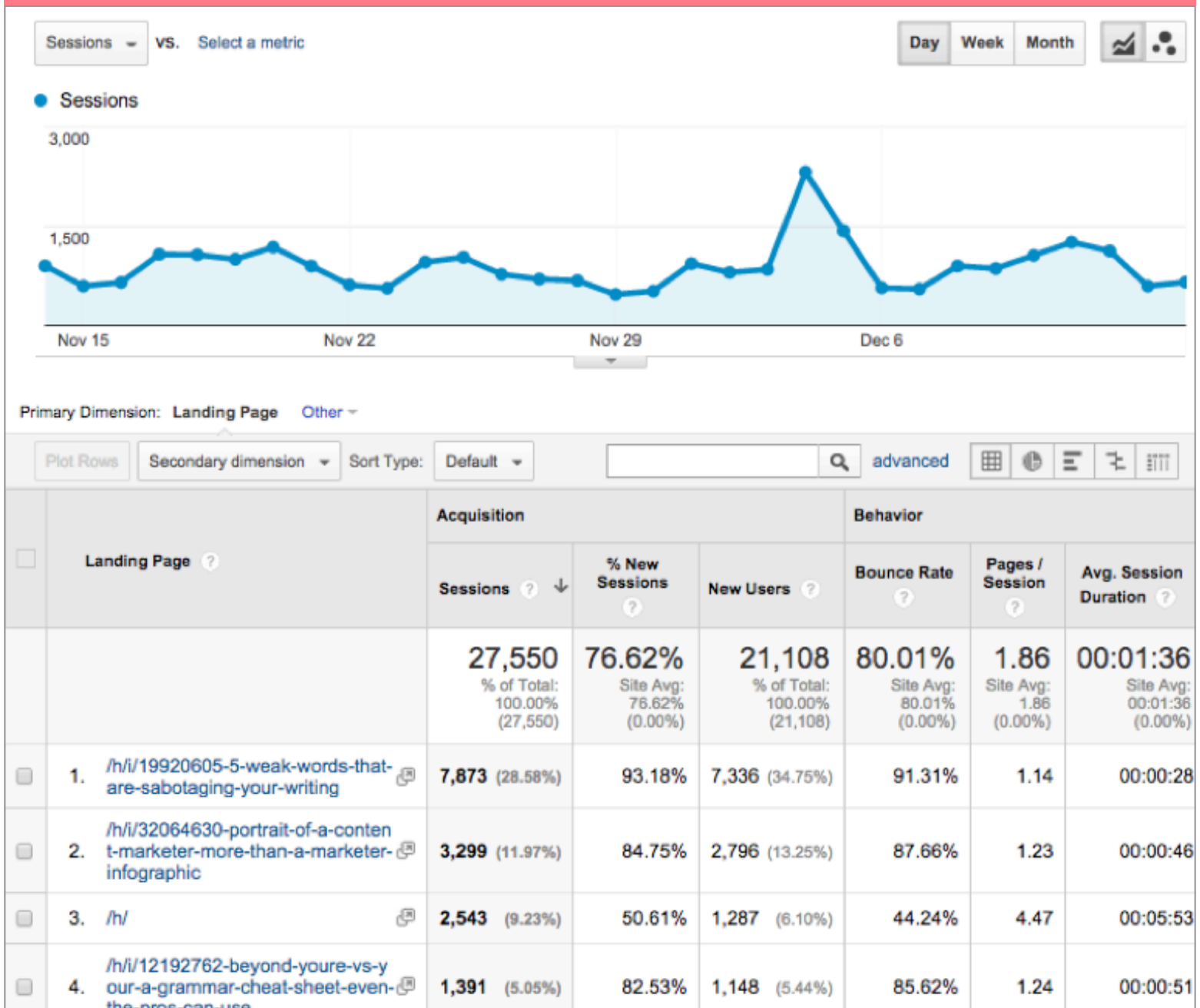
advanced



	Default Channel Grouping	Acquisition			Behavior		
		Sessions ? ↓	% New Sessions ?	New Users ?	Bounce Rate ?	Pages / Session ?	Avg. Session Duration ?
		27,550 % of Total: 100.00% (27,550)	76.62% Site Avg: 76.62% (0.00%)	21,108 % of Total: 100.00% (21,108)	80.01% Site Avg: 80.01% (0.00%)	1.86 Site Avg: 1.86 (0.00%)	00:01:36 Site Avg: 00:01:36 (0.00%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Paid Search	9,476 (34.40%)	90.38%	8,564 (40.57%)	90.30%	1.18	00:00:28
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Direct	4,866 (17.66%)	74.23%	3,612 (17.11%)	74.04%	2.45	00:02:26
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Social	4,384 (15.91%)	77.51%	3,398 (16.10%)	85.86%	1.31	00:00:57
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Organic Search	3,685 (13.38%)	80.11%	2,952 (13.99%)	81.11%	1.76	00:01:50
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Referral	3,345 (12.14%)	59.28%	1,983 (9.39%)	55.70%	3.51	00:04:02
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Email	1,762 (6.40%)	32.86%	579 (2.74%)	70.60%	2.39	00:01:51
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. (Other)	32 (0.12%)	62.50%	20 (0.09%)	71.88%	1.41	00:02:19

The second landing page report tells you how each piece of content is performing with respect to pageviews. Again, this isn't the only metrics you should measure to establish success, but it can be a good indicator.

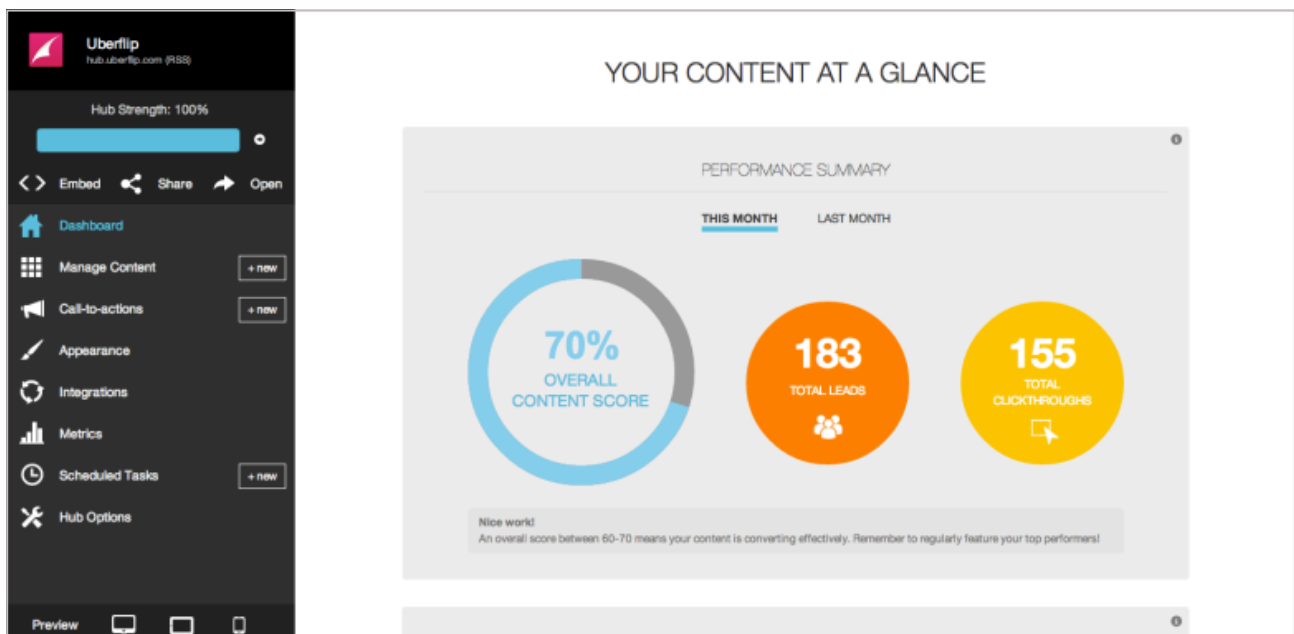
Landing Page Reports

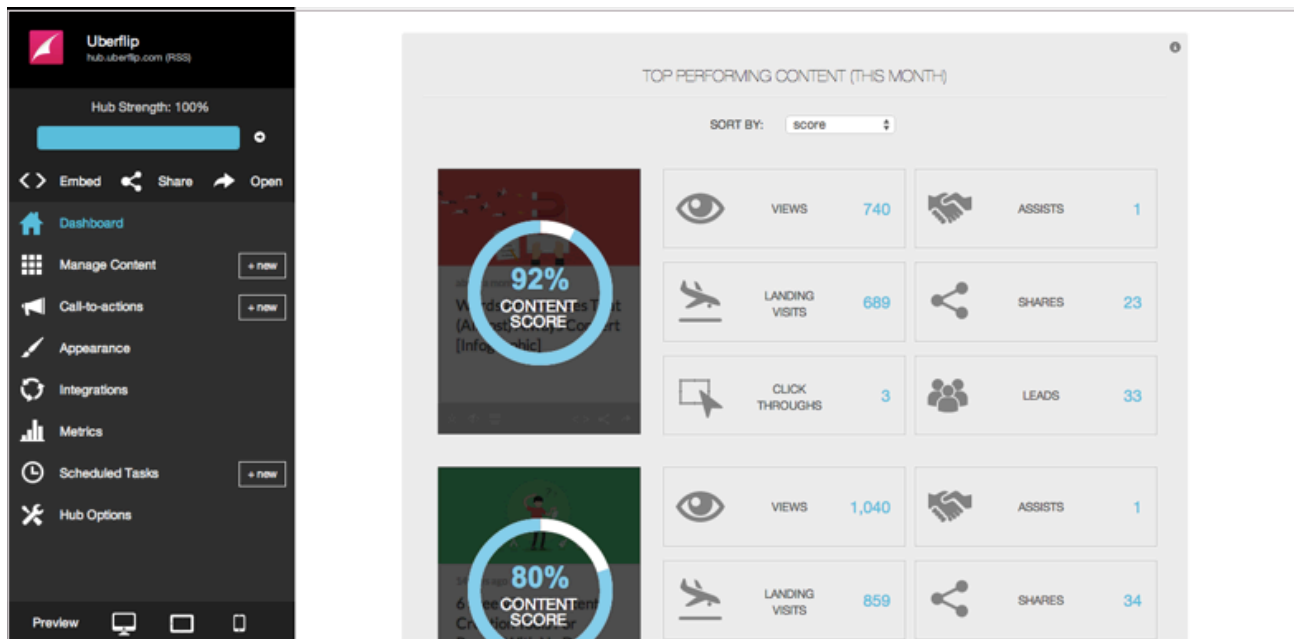


Uberflip Content Score

At Uberflip, one of the metrics we use on a daily basis is Content Score via our [content automation software](#). Content Score allows our team to see what content is performing best. The score is calculated based on specific variables like pageviews, social shares, leads generated, assists, etc.

While we can also dig into each of these metrics separately, looking at engagement metrics from Google Analytics (page views, time on site, etc.) alongside how call-to-actions are performing in our content hub, Content Score tells us what's performing well at a glance, at the moment and over the past few months. This insight helps us improve content creation and distribution by focusing on sharing high-converting content, ultimately driving more leads for our sales team.





At the end of the day, understanding which content is generating leads can help guide your creation and distribution strategy, enable your sales team and drive growth. In a sense, you need a way to score your content in order to create more of what works and whittle out the remaining noise.

Uberflip lets you gauge your content's performance at a glance!

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CH 7

Conclusion

Effective content marketing isn't a "hit or miss" practice; you can significantly improve your success rate by taking the time to analyze your performance.

A data-driven approach to content marketing will help you step out of the dark and truly understand what is (and isn't) working. Digging into your metrics to extrapolate relevant information can help guide your overall content strategy and decision making process.

So take a deep breath, dive into your metrics and embrace all the data that's at your fingertips!

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CONTENT MARKETING

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