



digitalede

Meetings & Conventions
Leisure Travel

A Real Digital Content Strategy for Destination Marketing Organizations

BOOK FOR DMOs



<http://digitalede.marketing>



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**DIGITAL EDGE HAS
CREATED CONTENT
THAT TELLS THE AMELIA
ISLAND STORY FIRSTHAND,
INSPIRING READERS
WHILE HELPING BOOST
SITE ENGAGEMENT AND
SEARCH-FRIENDLINESS.**

”

Ktimene Axetell,
Director, Digital Strategy
Amelia Island Convention and Visitors Bureau

A Quick Note

Our goal for writing this eBook is to help destination marketing organizations (DMOs) strategize for one of the most important marketing initiatives today: content. Digital content is ever-evolving, always necessary and when you strategize properly and get it right, it's one hell of an influencer.

Take a look at some valuable insights peppered throughout an in-depth, step-by-step digital content strategy—the same one that we apply to our clients and our own content marketing program.

Hopefully by the end of it, you'll be drinkin' the content Kool-Aid and ready to put your new or improved strategy into place.

Sincerely,

THE Digital Edge Team



Before You Dive in...

We thought we'd preface this strategy by answering some questions you might have.

01

What Exactly IS Digital Content?

In a nutshell, digital content is anything that can be published on a digital platform. Examples for DMOs can include: website content including pages and blogs; infographics; social content including posts with imagery and live videos; videos including virtual tours of properties, 360 and vlogs; photo galleries; interactive content including quizzes and games; email content and more.

At the end of the day, however, content is just content if it's not conceptualized, targeted and optimized. We'll discuss this a little further into the book.

02

Is Measuring Digital Content Difficult?

Advances in technology have enabled everyone to measure content better than ever. Even if analysis is not in your job description, or seems to be outside your wheelhouse, it's ok! DMOs don't necessarily have to be analytically savvy to take advantage of today's measurement tools. They just need an analytical sidekick to help with implementation.

“
What gets
measured,
gets improved.”

-Peter Drucker

03

Is This Book Relevant for Smaller DMOs?

Size doesn't always matter. There is strength in numbers but there is much more strength in knowledge. Even small to medium-sized DMOs can implement a successful content strategy!

So let's do this

How do you generate enough real content for a variety of digital platforms without eating up all of your time and limited resources?

How do you know if your content is compelling, relatable and helpful or will retain readers?

How do you align your DMO's goals with content that can be measured?



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It all starts with strategy.

By taking the time at the outset to strategize, you will waste less time and begin to create content that is captivating, relevant and truly moves the needle to deliver ROI for your destination.

Everything should be planned, from defining goals and segmenting your audience, to researching, writing, distributing and measuring.

Producing content alone can be time consuming, but planning and developing a smart strategy beforehand can seem downright laborious.

We are going to walk you through the eight steps we use at Digital Edge for creating a smart, concept-focused and data-driven content strategy for our clients and our company.

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When you are in the ideation phase of creating your content topics, talk to your team to find out what questions they get asked the most. The visitor center teams have the most communication with your destination's visitors. Talk to them. The questions they get asked most are a great starting point for what content you should develop.

Brand agnostic content is what you want to focus on most. This is where content marketing lives. It is unbiased, not self-serving, emulates a journalistic voice and tone and is the most effective 'top-of-the-funnel' content.

Mya Surrency
Co-Founder, Digital Edge



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Determine the goals of your DMO.

Align business goals with content goals.

Communicate with your team.

Always remember: **your goal is the goal**. Sounds self-evident right? But it's easy to oversimplify a goal into a single, analytical measurement—pageviews, for example. This can cause your true goal to not be fully supported.

Some examples of a DMO's goals might include:

- Driving destination awareness
- Driving online form generation or more hotel bookings
- Building attendance to special events
- Educating users on certain attributes of your destination—attributes that will add value to their experience when they visit

Take your simplest goals and begin to strategize for content ideation on a deeper level. For example, if the goal is to target and engage affluent visitors to spend more time on your website, create content topics on your editorial calendar that go beyond luxury product.

Luxury travelers visit a destination for a variety of reasons. Show how your destination can create deeper experiences for business, leisure or romantic getaways. (If you don't have an editorial calendar or you're not sure that your content team is making the most out of the current one, don't worry...we'll touch on that in Step 3!)

Communicate With Your Team

Cross-department communication yields valuable insights. For example, your marketing team could communicate with your sales team to learn about common objections and FAQ's, or how the sales team positions the destination's assets. These nuggets could be goal-defining gold.

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2

Research

Research your audience and determine “content personas.”

Determine industry trends.

Take inventory and fill any content crannies.

Take insights from the past.

Learn from your peers.

Researching for your content strategy involves a little digital elbow grease but once the effort is made, it will allow you to create relevant content that is geared specifically to your audience and meets your DMO’s goals.

Get to Know Your Audience

Create content personas. Even if you already know your audience as a segment, creating personas can help you deliver content that will be the most relevant and useful to that audience. For example, a persona for a M&C audience could be “Eugene” the Meeting Planner. You could identify sub-variables for “Eugene” such as:



Planner
Demographics



Planner Market
Segment



Planner's Average
Group Size



Pain
Points



Influencers to Whom
They Gravitate



Where They Consume
Content



What Formats They
Use to Consume It



Your sales team is in the trenches with your audience, hearing firsthand their shared pain points, influences and other variables. Discussions had between your sales team and prospective clients can help you develop content personas and topics that will truly speak to these users. Coordinate with your sales team. You will create valuable content that can be an asset in sales pitches, which could translate into sales for your DMO.

Shirley Smith

Co-Founder, Digital Edge

Shirley Smith



Determine Industry Trends

What are popular or up-and-coming trends within the M&C, sports or leisure travel industries? What are new innovations in technology within these industries, like apps that make planning easier and events more engaging? What's the buzz among industry influencers and experts? Incorporating industry trends into your content not only gives you an edge over your competitors, it also shows your audience that your content is useful and relevant.



Content Inventory

Taking an inventory of your past content will help you determine what is outdated, irrelevant or duplicated, or any content crannies that need to be filled. This will help with search engine optimization and establish your DMO's credibility as destination experts—experts who have a vested interest in their audience's journey.

When taking inventory, ask yourself:

- Is this everything my audience wants/needs to know about my destination?
- Do I have more to tell them about what groups can do in the area?
- Would a planner have as much fun on my site and through my social presence as they would if they met me here?

Take stock in what you find and make plans to fill the content crannies!

Take Insights from the past

The only way to learn from past campaigns is to track them well. This can involve:

- Setting up each piece of content with tags that will help you monitor actions
- Setting up Google Analytics to track micro-goals, user flows and conversions
- Keeping a close eye on your social platforms

If you don't have a system for tracking objective metrics, learn from the past. For example, from a previous campaign, you may have been able to increase some hotel bookings; it may have produced some pretty pictures for the website and people were smiling...but where did you lose certain users?

Without tracking tools in place, hindsight is not always 20/20. When you can objectively obtain insights from the past, it will give you a much clearer vision for upcoming content initiatives. It will allow you to define future goals, pivot, adapt and trim needless content.

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Learn From Your Peers

Don't just look at what your competition is doing and assume it is working for them because it looks fun, innovative or exciting. Dig deep and look for objective indicators; find your destination's unique angle.

Every destination is different. What works for one may not work for another. Often times, a competitive analysis can be approached with tunnel vision. A beautiful web page, Instagram profile or video doesn't always mean that the destination is accomplishing the same goals you are trying to accomplish.

Instead of following your competitors' examples, follow best practices for page optimization and user experience-based design. This will guide you to more success and make you stand out from the competition.



Things to consider when building your editorial calendar:

- Make it realistic and don't over-complicate it.
- Don't plan a whole fiscal year's worth of content topics and expect them to stay exactly the same; though it's important to follow your calendar, understand that it should have chameleon content—adaptable to industry trends, news and DMO priorities that fluctuate throughout the year.
- Use one of the thousands of [online templates](#) if you aren't sure about how you would like to set it up.
- Consider the publishing platforms on which you plan for the content to be distributed. Keep in mind any design changes that will need to take place for the content to look appropriate on those platforms.
- Consider the cadence of the content you plan to publish and the optimal times for publishing on each platform.
- Consider building a separate schedule for publishing content on each platform and how those schedules will support each other.
- Consider the content team you are going to use, their understanding and expertise of different content platforms and their ability to adapt content to match each one.



Plan your editorial calendar.

Plan your distribution channels within the calendar.

Your Editorial Calendar

Editorial calendars help maintain organization and consistency. They are the frameworks for the content you will create and distribute. To us, they are imperative in a digital content strategy.

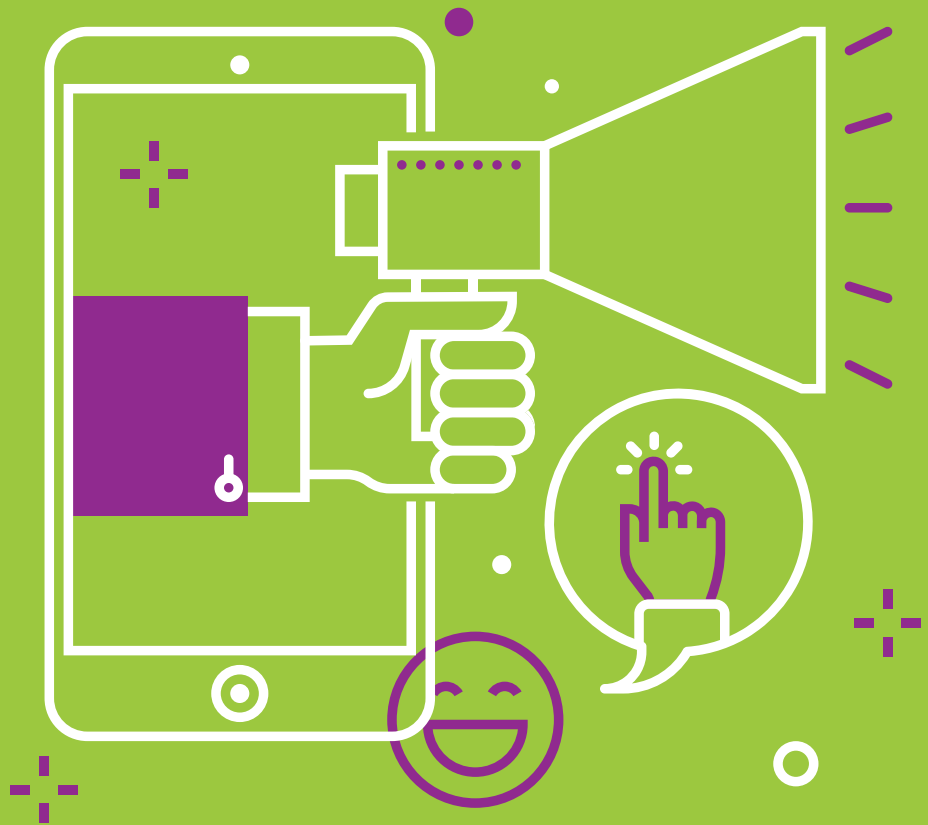
When you're planning your editorial calendar, think like a publisher! Plan themes and determine topics based on your goals, your audience's needs, industry trends and relevancy. Put all of that digital elbow grease from Step 2 to use. By now, all of the ideation, research and preparation should have created a solid foundation on which you can build your calendar.



Plan Your Distribution Channels

We suggest listing the distribution channels for each content piece, each month, on your editorial calendar. When determining channels, determine which goals you are aiming to accomplish and which audience interactions will help you accomplish these. Examples of distribution channels include:

- Email
- Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube
- Mobile apps
- Blogs
- Media publications and many more



For one month, your content goal may be to target leisure travelers for your award-winning food scene. Visual platforms like Instagram can be excellent for raising engagement and creating interaction.

What about leisure travel for luxury, or planners of small regional meetings? What about big sporting events? You'll need to research digital channels and decide where your target audiences and personas live. This will help you determine where and how you share your content, and what interactions are optimal.



4

Create Captivating Content

Determine content challenges.

Create captivating, quality written content.

Create optimized content.

Create quality video content.

Have a publisher's mindset.

The nucleus of this particular strategy: the content...the story. How will you captivate your readers with your content? How will you tell your story?

As we know, content can live through many incarnations. Quality content for destinations is not just a collection of words on a page. No matter what form it takes on, it should have a living intention behind it that is fueled by research, honesty and relatable experiences.

Content Challenges

Often times, we find that DMOs will aim to beat content quantity demands solely. They end up producing a smorgasbord of manufactured, low-quality content that takes up all of their limited time and doesn't truly help their destination.

Other times, we see content that is disorganized in structure or design, reads confusing or uses distracting media, such as unnecessary videos or graphics. Why is this? Because, well... the Internet is fun! You can add whatever you want to a page because website CMS's have so many interesting features that you think your users may need or want.



I prefer keeping the content simple when we're designing components for our clients, especially with emails and landing pages. In my experience, designs that have compelling imagery, a few lines of copy and a strong call-to-action are the most effective. If a design calls for several buckets of information, try and keep that simple as well. The less someone has to scroll down a page to find out exactly what they need, the better. We always want less bounce!

Rob Kemp

Creative Director, Digital Edge

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "R Kemp".





Honestly, people don't spend much time reading emails - they just skim over the content. Because of this, it's important to get your message across as succinctly as possible, and sticking to one goal with a clear call to action will help keep your reader focused and drive conversions.

Courtney Godwin
Interactive Media Manager,
Digital Edge

Courtney Godwin



Create Captivating, Quality Written Content

The art of the written word is not dead in this digital age. You not only need captivating and quality written content for SEO and credibility, but you need it to help narrate your story. It should bolster your destination's brand and authenticity. A few things to keep in mind:

- Make it clean
- Make it useful
- Make it interesting & thought-provoking
- Make it easy to digest

Then decide where you want your readers to go after they have digested your content. Be it email, social media posts, blogs or site content, make sure you are creating a clear path that leads users to your end goal.

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Create Optimized Content

You always want to create optimized, quality content so that it opens up digital ‘thoroughfares’ in search engines—leading your audience directly to the content that you created specifically for them.

Kerrie Yancey
Content Creator, Digital Edge

Kerrie Yancey



Yes, keywords are important, but you have to go beyond keywords to create quality, optimized content. Often times, short, poorly written (but keyword-optimized) content is created but quality is lost. When optimizing, it's all about the user experience.

On the frontend, make sure your content has variety and is:

- **Sticky**: it holds the user's attention and it keeps them coming back
- **Evergreen**: it's always relevant and up-to-date (this will require a content refresh from time to time)
- **Specific**: targeted to specific industries, events, seasons and destination attributes
- **Diversified with Links**: the common adage among web marketers holds some serious weight, "Links are the currency of the internet."
- **Keyword rich**: it has useful/well-searched keyword strings

On the backend, make sure your content is:

- **Optimized for mobile**: you can test for mobile friendliness with several online tools
- **Optimized for search**: apply simple HTML elements to ensure you are found within the SERPs (search engine result pages)



Create Quality Video Content

It can only take a single, well-executed video to forever change your business. It's storytelling in motion. What story do you want to tell?

Projections show that global Internet traffic from videos will make up 80% of all Internet traffic by 2019. (Source: [Cisco's Visual Networking Index](#))

Video content can tell a more captivating story than static images or written words, and when done properly, it can bring a DMO's destination to life with a richer experience.

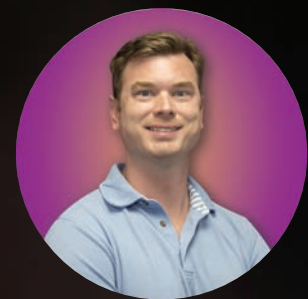
Consider these ideas for utilizing video in your content strategy:

- Video series for specific topics
- Special event videos
- "Man on the Street" type videos
- Destination/meeting space overview
- Drone aerial video and photography of your destination
- Videos of your destination meetings or events
- Videos of places and things to do while visiting
- 360 Virtual Reality

Andrew Woods
Interactive Media Designer,
Digital Edge



"It is of no surprise that video is THE medium of choice by marketing specialists. I like stats, so I'll provide a few: Video boosts conversions by 80%. Video in email boosts open rates by 20% and increases click-through rates by 300%. Marketers receive a higher ROI and higher retention rates. Video is preferred 400% over text and encourages social sharing. Statistically there should be no reason not to use video in your strategy."



Matt Leamon
Interactive Media Designer,
Digital Edge



Content is just content if it's not conceptualized, targeted and optimized.

Gerald
Mascot, Digital Edge



Have A Publisher's Mindset

Today, DMOs need to become the publishers of their destination's stories. Continually developing content is the cornerstone of a successful DMO marketing plan.

Google isn't ranking websites with listings and static content as highly as they were in the past. Because of this, many DMOs have seen their organic traffic decline sharply. By becoming content focused, you will see SEO benefits along with an increase in the engagement of your target audience.

When your content is published, it should be tailored and optimized specifically for each and every platform it calls home. Remember what we mentioned in the beginning of this book?

5

Distribute



We won't tap dance around it... this step can be a lot of work, but it can be done successfully. As we mentioned earlier, even small DMOs can be excellent content strategists. Along with the other steps in this strategy, having a professional team of digital specialists in the distribution step is powerful; however, if you have the know-how, resources and destination expertise, you CAN do it!

Review planned channels.

Determine common challenges.

Back content with advertising.

Review Planned Channels

If you follow this strategy, a lot of the distribution channel research will be done when you build your editorial calendar. However, you might want to review your digital channels and make sure you have a good grasp on them.

Each channel has its own angle for results; you will need to adjust your content accordingly. For example, for social platforms we try to think in terms of engaging content that will easily encourage users to share, like and comment. It's imperative to understand the different channels that your audience utilizes, and how to leverage them to accomplish your goals.

Determine Challenges

Determine which channels may pose common challenges like digital fatigue or high competition. Which channels are beyond your budget or will require manpower that you don't possess? How can you combat these challenges when planning your distribution channels?

We suggest focusing on the top producing channels and managing those fervently, instead of trying to be everywhere. There are ways to squeeze the most out of your distribution efforts.

Back it with Advertising

According to [Marketing Solutions](#), 80% of North American brands agree or strongly agree that digital media advertising is cost effective and provides ROI. You've already invested in producing this content so in order to maximize visibility outside of organic views, it's important to invest in paid media to increase traffic and generate quality leads, or whatever your goal maybe.

6

Wait...

Let your components marinate.

Sounds like a cop out for a step, doesn't it? This is actually harder to do than you might imagine. Maybe your instincts have been to wait but you have gotten pressure from others to act...and act now!

Just...wait...

Make sure the results you are monitoring have enough time to stew before you draw conclusions on them. Keeping a constant hand on the pulse can cause you to make unnecessary pivots before really understanding the outcome of the content. A good rule of thumb is: don't use results and data to change live content for at least 60 days.

Obviously there are instances when making proactive changes are necessary. The good thing about digital content is that it can be changed.

However, thoughtful content needs time to live, collect results and evolve. All too often the need for instant gratification causes changes that greatly affect a proper analysis of the results.

Let the content marinate. Questions or concerns don't always necessitate knee-jerk reactions. Content marketing takes time to develop ROI. It takes time to create trust and loyalty among your audience. It takes time to establish your importance on the web.



Trusting the process can be challenging but it's important for our clients to understand. Sometimes a formulaic approach is what delivers the best results.

Jessica Huggins

Project Manager, Digital Edge

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Jessica Huggins".



“

Don't report numbers, report on performance! Try to manipulate the data to answer the questions: How? When? Why? Focus on these more so than the hard numbers. How was a user coming to my website's content? When were visitors more likely to come to my website? Why were they engaging? Or bouncing? Finding a way to make the numbers understandable to your team will help measure goals from a performance perspective.

Mae Demdam

Director, Integrated Media
Buying & Strategy, Digital Edge

Mae Demdam



7

Measure

Determine what metrics you will use to measure content.

Destinations that use data insights and analytics to adjust content and plan future campaigns have a huge advantage! Data is objective and can put you and your DMO in an objective mindset.

It's time to measure.

How did you do? What went wrong? What needs to change? It's time to take an analytical look at the content and hammer those malleable ideas until they work.

Examples of Google Analytics for well-measured content can include:

- User Engagement: an assessment of the user's response to the topic, destination article or event. An individual's degree of engagement may be determined directly through interaction or may be assessed through observation of the user's behaviors.
- Bounce Rate: the percentage of visitors to a particular web page who navigate away from the site after viewing only one page. A rising bounce rate could be a tell-tale sign that your content is not relevant or useful.
- Conversion Rate: the proportion of visitors to a website who take action to go beyond a casual content view or website visit, as a result of subtle or direct requests from marketers, advertisers, and content creators. Typical conversions for your DMO could include newsletter sign ups, guide downloads, RFPs or bookings (if you have a booking engine).
- Time on Page: an average of the amount of time all visitors to a page spend on that particular page.
- CTR: the ratio of users who click on a specific link to the number of total users who view a page, email, or piece of content.

Analytics allow you to dive into the results of your content campaign so you can make any necessary changes, adapt content to your data and redistribute impactful content accordingly.

8 Adapt & Redistribute

In the case of social media platforms, if content resonates and is especially engaging, redistribution allows it to live longer and become seen by new followers or those who might have missed it. Content shelf life is very short on social platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, so reposting on a regular basis is key. Never miss an opportunity to redistribute, reuse and recycle awesome content!

Adapt

Fortunately, with the advancements in technology, you can gather focus group-quality insights from data collection and use that intel to adjust your content and adapt it to your data. This is where email can be fun! The majority of email service providers offer built in analytics and tracking that allow you to see direct results of your marketing efforts.

Reuse. Recycle. Redistribute

When you publish content on your website, you should also let it breathe throughout your other platforms. Typically, we plan content to be distributed and redistributed via website, email newsletters, press, social media and other digital partners.



As we Draw to a Close

We hope this book has given you some fresh insights into your current content strategy, or a newfound confidence to integrate your own digital content strategy into your marketing program. At Digital Edge we believe a strong content program is the foundation for a successful online marketing campaign for any destination.

Our tight-knit work family is a talented team of storytellers that go on location and behind the screens to bring destinations to life. This is where content strategy gets real!

We'd love to work with you from Step 1 through Step 8...and beyond!

Thanks for reading.

Shelly Smith R. Kemp Meg M. Sweeney
Jessica Huggins
Courtney McClintock
Madison Leamon
Cathy Phillips
Uma G. Leland
Kenneth Yancy
Al Wood



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