



Developing a Content Distribution Strategy

Video: Evaluating Your Distribution Channel Options

Hey there, it's Kara from HubSpot Academy.

Distribution plays a huge role in your content's success. As important as it is to create content for the buyer's journey, it's just as essential to determine how that content will reach your audience.

Content distribution is the process of sharing, publishing, and promoting your content. This is done through various marketing channels, like email or social media.

There are several available distribution channels to choose from, so it's important you pick the right one. All too often, marketers rely on promoting untargeted content through as many channels as possible, hoping to drive results. However, this often leads to spending time on less effective channels and seeing substandard results.

A better approach is to develop a content distribution strategy. An effective strategy involves choosing distribution channels based on your goal, target audience, and results from running tests. Rather than relying on luck, developing a strategy will help you prioritize the right channels and ultimately achieve your goals.

Here's Jen Brault, manager of HubSpot's social strategy and operations team, sharing how developing a distribution strategy has helped her team achieve results.

Jen Brault: A recent example of a successful content distribution strategy that we ran was for HubSpot Academy's new digital marketing certification course. The first thing we did was determine how many new learners we wanted to reach with this certification course, and then we put together our promotional plan in Asana – which is our project management tool – which helped us visualize how we were going to hit that goal. In the end, we had 258% attainment, which means we drove 2.5X as many net-new learners into the course than we had originally planned in 30 days. Allocating the time to develop a content distribution strategy played a huge role in our content's success, because it helped us prioritize the right channels to play on that would reach our target audience and hit our lead goals.

As Jen shared, developing a content distribution strategy can help you prioritize the right channels.

Choosing the right channels begins with understanding your options. Let's review the most effective content distribution channels to help you get started.

Distribution channels can be thought of in three categories: owned, earned, and paid.

Owned channels are the platforms your company owns, like your website, email, and social media accounts. These are the most commonly used channels, since they're free and allow more control over how your content is published. Each of these channels have their differences as well.

Websites are ideal for promoting and publishing blog posts, pillar pages, case studies, and gated content, like e-Books. You can also leverage your website to implement SEO, or search engine optimization, strategies. Here's an example blog post by BarkBox called, "[How Do You Wash Dog Toys?](#)" This post includes common questions and keywords used by their audience, allowing it to be found through search engines.

Content that works best for email includes newsletters, upcoming events, special offers, or any content you can link to. It's also a great opportunity to send personalized content to your contacts. [Here's an example](#) of an email newsletter from REI promoting special product offers, upcoming events, and a variety of blog content.



Social media like Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok each have their own unique abilities. Rather than focusing on the type of content you can promote, it's more important to personalize your promotions for each channel. For example, TED Talks promoted a video about sloths on Twitter by writing a short and conversational caption that met Twitter's character count limit and grabbed their audience's attention. They then promoted the same content on Instagram using a different approach. They shared a picture of a sloth and included content from the talk in the caption, since Instagram is an image-driven platform and supports long-form text.

You can learn more about each social media platform by reviewing the link in the resources section.

Now, let's review earned channels. Earned channels, also known as shared channels, are third party platforms that share your content. This can include guest posts, online forums or communities, and brand mentions. Although you'll have less control over your content, these channels can amplify your content to new audiences and increase brand awareness.

When considering earned channels, it's important to choose platforms that align with your brand. For example, guest posts and brand mentions are most effective if the third-party has a similar audience. This will ensure they're sending the right type of audience to your website. The content you share through online forums or communities should also align with the topic or discussion. For example, Ally Bank, a digital financial services company, used Reddit to promote their brand and banking services through the Playstation subreddit, a forum catered to online gamers. Promoting banking services to gamers may be a stretch, but Ally Bank was clever in creating ad content that spoke to their audience by stating, "You wouldn't settle for a 1-star controller, so why settle for a 1-star bank?"

Finally, paid channels. Paid channels are platforms you pay to distribute your content. Examples of paid channels include Google ads, social media ads, or paid influencer ads. These channels drive new audiences to your content quicker, however, they can become costly.

Google ads and social media ads allow you to control your target audience and require you to pay per impression or ad click. These channels are less about the type of content you promote and more about how you build your ads through each platform. Learn more by taking our digital ads training course in the resources section.

Paid influencer ads are similar to earned channels, since you can choose influencers with a similar target audience. [Here's an example](#) of how Meta Elevate, formerly known as Facebook Elevate, partnered with content creator, HeyFranHey, to create a promotional video that was posted on both their channels. The organization shares, "Our missions align, and that's why we're proud to be working with Fran, a dedicated individual with boots on the ground, to make sure our communities don't just survive, but thrive." You'll build trust and find the most success when working with influencers that align with your business and have a similar audience.

Each channel has its pros and cons, but it's important to understand that some channels overlap. For example, Google ads are a paid channel, but they can also amplify your owned channels by boosting traffic to your website. And your company social media profiles are considered owned channels, but your content is published and ultimately controlled by third party social media platforms, like Facebook and LinkedIn. Understanding this will ensure you diversify your channel mix and allow you to combine channels to amplify impact.

Here's Jen again, sharing how she incorporated these channels into her distribution strategy.

Jen Brault: *When we developed the distribution strategy for the digital marketing certification course, we split up our strategy into paid, earned, and owned channels. For paid, we leveraged the channels we had seen the most success on for similar types of content, like our Inbound Marketing Certification Course. For us those channels were Facebook advertising and paid search, especially on Google. For earned, we really leaned into organic search and we went after keywords with high monthly search volume, using a tool called "ahrefs" to identify those*



keywords and the keyword difficulty. We did on-page optimizations and link building to actually rank for those keywords. For owned, we promoted the certification heavily on our HubSpot Academy social media channels. We also leveraged internal newsletters that went out to a similar audience and had placements on the HubSpot Academy homepage.

Developing an effective distribution strategy isn't about promoting your content on every channel, but understanding which specific channels will achieve your goals. You can begin small by using one or two channels, then expand your promotions by using a variety of owned, earned, and paid channels. Now that you're familiar with your distribution options, you can feel confident you're evaluating the most impactful channels that will reach your audience online.

Video: How to Set a Content Distribution Goal

There are several reasons marketers will distribute their content. Some hope their content will drive traffic to their website, while others hope it'll help generate new leads.

Think about the content you've shared before. What did you expect from the promotions? Were you able to achieve those expectations?

Content distribution can support several different initiatives, but your success in achieving your expectations depends on your goal. Setting a content distribution goal is essential because it sets the tone of your strategy and helps you choose the most effective channels.

It's also important to understand that a distribution strategy that worked for one company may not work for you. You might hear about a new channel that's helped an organization drive outstanding results, but you can't assume that channel will work for you. Setting a goal for your distribution efforts will remind your team about what's important and help you develop a focused strategy.

Let's hear from Jen Brault, manager of HubSpot's social strategy and operations team, to learn how setting goals have helped shape her content distribution strategy.

Jen Brault: An example of a content distribution goal that we set is when we try to drive a specific amount of net new users into HubSpot Academy content. If we know we're specifically driving new users, this shapes our distribution strategy. Leaning into paid and earned will help us hit newers audiences, while promoting on our owned channels will drive more repeat users. Knowing this, we prioritize leaning into paid and earned when we're going for acquisition.

As Jen shared, understanding your goal will help you evaluate and prioritize the most impactful channels. But, you need to make sure you set goals that are specific and attainable.

Hoping to see your content influence revenue isn't enough to help craft an effective strategy. This may serve as a good intention, but it's important to clarify how you'll achieve that. That's why setting an effective content distribution goal can be divided into two parts. First, identify a purpose. Then, craft a goal.

Let's review how you can identify your purpose first.

Your purpose will serve as the foundation for identifying the right goal. Ask yourself the following questions to help you brainstorm your purpose.

What content are you sharing? Most content is created with a purpose, especially if it was created for the buyer's journey. For example, a blog post created for the awareness stage was likely created to drive brand awareness or increase traffic to a website. Understanding the reason your content was created can help clarify the purpose



behind your distribution efforts.

Why are you sharing this content? Sharing content for the sake of announcing it as new isn't enough to craft a thorough distribution plan. Think about how promoting your content will impact your marketing.

What are your expectations after promoting this content? Thinking about how your end goal can help you clarify your purpose. For example, you might expect that your new piece will attract new buyers. If so, your purpose may be to generate new leads.

Identifying a purpose first will help you think of the bigger picture, making it easier to narrow down the right goal. Consider these common purposes if you're struggling to identify one: driving brand awareness, increasing traffic, generating new leads, converting leads to customers, or retaining customers.

The next step is to craft a goal. The purpose you identified in the previous step should guide you in identifying a goal. It should clarify how you're going to accomplish your purpose by detailing the specifics. This can be accomplished by making your goal SMART.

A SMART goal is a goal that is specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound.

Making your goals SMART will help set a clear direction for your distribution efforts and ensure you're able to celebrate wins when they come. Let's review how you can create goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound.

Make your goal specific. A specific goal is one that narrows down your next steps. Specificity helps us determine the path between where we are and where we want to be. Let's say you're planning to promote a new pillar page, and your purpose is to increase traffic. A specific goal you can set is: *I want to increase our pillar page's organic traffic by boosting backlinks from other reputable websites. This will increase our search engine ranking, thus bringing in more organic traffic.* There are several ways you can accomplish your purpose, that's why it's important to ensure your goal is specific.

Be sure to make your goal measurable. Measurable goals allow you to track your progress by attaching a number or metric. This will add more specificity and help you understand what you're striving for. For example, it's not enough to state that you plan to boost backlinks from other reputable websites. Achieving new backlinks takes time and effort, so it's important to cap your goal to something measurable. A measurable goal you can set is: *I'd like 45 new backlinks to our pillar page.* Making your goals measurable will provide a benchmark for achievement.

Make your goal attainable. Big goals are admirable, but it's important to balance them with more achievable, short-term goals. Setting attainable goals is all about looking at previous results and adjusting your goal to be relative to those benchmarks. Let's revisit your goal for achieving 45 new backlinks. To prove your goal is attainable, you can state: *We're already generating 20 new backlinks each month without an intentional strategy, so we believe 45 new backlinks in the next two months with a strategy is feasible.* Grounding your goals to be realistic and attainable will ensure you're setting your team up for success.

Next, make your goal relevant. Relevant goals will help you move in the direction you truly desire. You can allocate your time to an infinite amount of activities, but it's important to prioritize activities that will push you closer to your goal. Consider how your goal aligns with your inbound marketing activities or company-wide goals. Let's revisit the previous example again. Remember that your purpose is to increase traffic. You can justify that your goal is relevant by explaining: *This goal aligns with our broader organic content marketing strategy and could also boost our traffic through earned media, as we get mentions from press outlets and third-party bloggers.* Relevant goals will ensure you're aligned with your purpose or overall marketing initiatives.

The final step is to make your goal time-bound. Giving your goal a due date or time frame will motivate you to take



steps every day toward your goal and help you track your progress over time. Think about how long it took you to complete your task or achieve your goal previously. Use that to make your timeline realistic and evaluate your workload for the next few months. For example, your goal for backlinks might be: *I'd like to receive these 45 backlinks within the next two months.* Making your goals time-bound will help you better plan activities with your team moving forward.

As you're creating your goal, you might find yourself balancing between multiple initiatives that can all achieve your purpose. This is where you need to identify your primary goal against any secondary goals. For example, you might have a goal to generate 5,000 new marketing qualified leads in one year using cost-effective strategies. To prioritize your goals, you can identify that generating 5,000 new leads using cost-effective strategies is your primary goal, and achieving this in one year is a secondary goal. This would inform you to invest in channels that cost less, even if it'll take longer to see results.

Setting goals can often feel ambiguous, but identifying your purpose and creating goals that are SMART will ground you in reality. Setting an effective content distribution goal will help you prioritize the right channels and allow you to celebrate your efforts, once you reach that final benchmark.

Video: How to Identify Your Audience's Preferred Channels

Content distribution isn't about getting your content in front of the most people, it's about getting it in front of the *right* people.

Not all channels will reach your target audience. That's why it's important to understand where your audience consumes content and conducts research. Identifying your audience's preferred channels is essential when building an effective content distribution strategy.

Let's hear from Jen Brault, manager of HubSpot's social strategy and operations team, about the importance of researching your audience's content and channel preferences.

Jen Brault: When HubSpot launched season one of our new podcast show, The Shake Up, we had to learn more about where our audience was learning and listening to new podcasts. When building the show's content, the team had already done research on who the target audience was and what type of shows they were already listening to. In order to reach that audience through paid distribution, we decided to meet them where they already were listening to podcast shows. We purchased ads on the podcast platforms they were listening on, bought host-read ads in the shows they were already listening to, and ran display ads on websites they were visiting.

As Jen shared, you need to meet your audience where they are by conducting research and gathering insights. These five tips can help.

First, use your buyer personas. Buyer personas are semi-fictional representations of your ideal customer based on market research and real data. They're one of the core elements to building an effective inbound marketing strategy, since they inform your content and messaging. Buyer personas often include demographics, behavior patterns, motivations, challenges, and goals. They can even outline information about where your potential customers consume content or conduct research.

Here's an example of a buyer persona, HR Tina Manager, from a company named HUCACE, a global provider of pre-employment recruitment solutions. Here, you'll find information about Tina's most used channels. Tina researches information online and chats with her colleagues to discover best practices. This means she could be influenced by social proof, so HUCACE should think about how they could use testimonials, social media, and referral programs to drive conversions.



Relying on your buyer personas is a great place to start when seeking information about your target audience's online behaviors. Learn how to create a buyer persona by reviewing the link in the resources section.

You should also conduct online research. You can find a lot of free information online about your buyer's content habits, especially from marketing and tech companies. Each year, HubSpot partners with Litmus and Wistia to publish a "State of Marketing" report that helps marketers prioritize their strategies and outperform their goals. This report gathers data from over 1,500 marketers across the globe and includes insights and predictions from industry thought leaders.

Another company you can rely on to find comprehensive marketing insights is the Content Marketing Institute. You'll find reports like this annual B2B Content Marketing Report, that shares data and insights about content creation and distribution. Check out both reports in the resources section.

Collecting feedback from your current audience is another helpful option.

There are several ways you can collect feedback, like sending online surveys, conducting one-on-one interviews, launching social media polls, or running focus groups.

Online surveys and social media polls allow you to gather quick insights about specific topics. They also enable you to reach wider audiences without substantial time and effort. Fair warning: Surveys can sometimes skew answers based on how a question is asked or the answer options provided.

Conducting one-on-one interviews are more time-consuming than surveys or polls, but they allow you to gather more in-depth details. For example, you can ask clarifying questions or ask your interviewee to elaborate on their answers. One-on-one interviews are great for gathering qualitative insights that provide deeper perspectives.

Focus groups are similar to one-on-one interviews, but they include more people. They allow you to collect qualitative feedback through a group discussion. However, focus groups can cause "groupthink." This is when everyone rallies behind an idea for the sake of moving on or avoiding conflict. Collecting accurate feedback is all about asking open-ended questions to minimize this.

If you're like most marketers, you might not have time to conduct thorough research about your target audience's preferred channels. That's why tapping into audience insight tools can help. Consider looking into SparkToro, a tool that crawls millions of social and web profiles to find what your target audience reads, listens to, watches, follows, and talks about online. For example, if you were looking to run podcast ads that reach college professors, this tool can provide a list of all the podcasts your target audience listens to.

Social listening tools should also be considered. They allow you to monitor what your customers and prospects are saying about your business, products, content, and more. Consider looking into HubSpot's Social Media Management Software and Socialbakers. HubSpot gives you the power to easily monitor interactions, conversations, and audiences on social media, while Socialbaker helps you uncover critical trends to understand your audience, competitors, and the entire market.

Finally, you should review your analytics. This might not be as relevant for newer businesses, but for marketers who have already been distributing content, your analytics are a goldmine. You can discover where a majority of your leads and customers are coming from, and incorporate that information into your content distribution strategy. Most content distribution platforms will already have built-in reporting and analytics, but to get an overview of all the channels your audience uses, consider using HubSpot's Reporting Software or Google Analytics.

HubSpot has an attribution reporting feature that provides insight into which channels are influencing the most new contacts and customers. Google Analytics provides a traffic feature that identifies the channels your website



visitors and target audience are coming from. Reviewing your analytics will help you discover the channels that are driving the most success, so that you can feel confident using those channels again.

Now that you have a few new ideas on how to identify your target audience's preferred channels, it's time to research. It doesn't matter how you go about your research, but it does matter how accurate and reliable your data is. Consider these options, so you can ensure your content is reaching your target audience every time you hit publish.

Video: How to Test a New Marketing Channel

An effective content distribution strategy requires consistent optimization. Identifying a goal and understanding your target audience will help you choose the right channels, but running tests is how you'll refine your strategy and get the most out of your distribution efforts.

In the context of developing a content distribution strategy, testing involves running experiments that help you determine the most effective distribution channels. This is helpful for those interested in exploring a new channel, because it allows you to discover new channel opportunities with minimal risk. Rather than testing new channels during important campaigns and hoping for the best, you can feel confident running carefully crafted tests that ensure long-term success.

But make sure you don't use too many variables, or forget to test for statistical significance.

In marketing, statistical significance is when the results of your research show that the tested variables influence each other and aren't random.

Let's say you test promoting content through LinkedIn and see 50 more conversions than your other social media channels bring. Just because LinkedIn converted more contacts doesn't mean it'll produce higher conversions next time. Running statistically significant tests will ensure you can recreate these results for future promotions.

So, how can you effectively run tests that provide reliable results? There are five steps:

- Identify a channel to test.
- Develop a hypothesis.
- Build your test.
- Run the experiment.
- Analyze your results.

Let's take a closer look at what's involved in each.

Identifying a channel to test is first. Choosing a channel depends on your goals, target audience, and whether you have the resources to create promotional assets for that channel. Let's use an example to help illustrate what this could look like.

SnoozeCity, a fictitious mattress retailer, created a new mattress quiz to help struggling sleepers assess the right mattress for them. They wanted this content to drive new leads for the company, and set a goal to generate 1,000 leads by the end of the year. Knowing they had a hefty goal to achieve, they considered promoting the content through Instagram – a channel that worked for them previously – but they also wanted to test another channel that could drive better results. They planned to target their primary buyer persona, Side-sleeper Solange, and learned this audience used social media. They evaluated the different social media channels and considered the resources



needed to create the promotional assets for each channel. SnoozeCity decided to test promoting their content through TikTok and compared the results to Instagram.

This is a great example of how you should consider your goals, audience, and resources to choose the right channel.

Once you've chosen your channel, it's time to develop your hypothesis. A hypothesis is a research-based statement that aims to explain an observed trend, and create a solution that will improve the result. Just like a science experiment, creating a hypothesis will give you direction for what you're testing. It'll also serve as a benchmark for whether your expectations were met. Let's revisit SnoozeCity.

SnoozeCity wanted to test whether TikTok was a worthy new channel to invest in by comparing how it performed to Instagram, a channel they knew worked. A hypothesis for their test was: *Promoting the mattress quiz through TikTok will drive 10% more conversions than promoting it through Instagram.*

This is a strong hypothesis because it's specific and doesn't tackle multiple variables at once. When developing your hypothesis, make sure it has a clear metric, it isn't subjective, and you can prove or disprove it.

Now it's time to build your test. This is where you take your hypothesis and figure out the details of how you'll create and launch your experiment. Important details to determine include your promotional assets, the test timeline, KPIs (or key performance indicators), and DRIs (or directly responsible individuals) for the major activities. Here's what SnoozeCity's test looked like.

They planned to run their test for one month, starting on May 1st and ending on May 31st. It was important to gather a large sample size, so they planned to promote the content three times on each channel. Promotions happened on May 1st, 11th, and 27th, all at 12 PM. They needed to create three video assets to share on both channels and the quiz's landing page. Their KPI was quiz conversions. Finally, they assigned DRIs to major activities, such as "Keyana to create the video assets," "Calvin to run the Instagram promotions," and "Flora to monitor the TikTok promotions."

Your test should provide just as many details, or more. Make sure you're running your test long enough to gather enough data, and that you minimize any variables outside of your hypothesis. Test durations vary and depend on when you'll reach statistical significance, but experts recommend running your test for at least one or two weeks.

After you've built your test, it's time to run the experiment. A majority of the heavy lifting is done by this point, and now it's a matter of waiting for the experiment to run its course. You can continually monitor the test to make sure all promotions have gone out as planned, but don't get too wrapped up in the results. It can be tempting to make assumptions during the experiment, but allowing your test to run its course will ensure accuracy. Once the course has reached completion, it's time to analyze the results.

One of the most important aspects in this step is to test for statistical significance. Consider using HubSpot's free Significance Calculator or Neil Patel's A/B Testing Significance Calculator. You can find links to these tools in the resources section. The other important aspect is to determine whether your hypothesis was correct. Let's see what this looked like for SnoozeCity.

After running the experiment for one month, they found the quiz landing page received 2,000 views during the test period. Instagram converted 150 people, which was a 8% conversion, and TikTok converted 390 people, which was a 20% conversion. The team used HubSpot's Significance Calculator and determined the test was statistically significant. The hypothesis was also correct, since TikTok drove 12% more conversions than Instagram. This test informed the team that TikTok was a reliable channel they could use for future promotions.

Similarly, your analysis should include metrics, as well as what those metrics mean for your distribution strategy. It's



okay if your hypothesis proved incorrect, since this information is still valuable in understanding which channels aren't worth your time and money.

Testing new channels using this five-step framework will ensure you're creating repeatable experiments that are statistically significant. You'll be able to trust your results and feel confident deciding what this means for your distribution strategy. The more you test, the more you'll learn. And the more you learn about how your content performs on each channel, the easier it'll become reaching your target audience online.