



# CONTENT MARKETING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION: REACHING TODAY'S ADULT STUDENT

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CONTENTS

- Introduction ..... 5
- What is Content Marketing?..... 7
- What is a Content Marketing Strategy?..... 7
- Why Content Marketing Should be Part of Your Recruitment & Retention Strategy ..... 8
- Direct Marketing and Your Content Marketing Strategy..... 8
  - What is direct marketing?..... 8
  - Why Content Marketing is Part of Direct Marketing and Marketing Communications ..... 8
- Step 1: Getting Started ..... 11
  - Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z..... 11
  - Target Audience, Segments, Personas..... 12
  - How to Create Personas & Why..... 16
- Step 2: Mapping it out ..... 17
  - Your unique story – the benefits that matter for the Persona..... 17
- Step 3: Production ..... 19
  - Staff..... 19
  - Editorial and Production Calendar ..... 19
- Step 4: Testing..... 21
  - Testing Methods and Techniques ..... 21
    - Media Relations ..... 21
    - Calls-to-Action..... 22
    - “Coupon” Codes..... 22
  - Testing Methods and Techniques ..... 22
    - Body Copy ..... 22
    - A/B Testing..... 23
    - Eye Tracking ..... 23
    - In-Page Analytics from Google Analytics ..... 23
- Step 5: Distribution ..... 24
  - Setting Channel Objectives ..... 25
- Step 6: Performance/Key Metrics..... 27
  - Search Listing Positions..... 27
  - Traffic ..... 27

Time on Site .....	27
Repeat Visits.....	27
Clicks and Engagement .....	27
Downloads .....	27
Shares.....	28
New Student Acquisition Cost .....	28
Page Views .....	28
Conversion Rate .....	28
Content Marketing Tools .....	29
Interactive Content .....	29
SEO .....	29
Social Media Marketing .....	30
Testing & Optimization .....	30
Content Marketing.....	30
Marketing Analytic, Performance and Attribution .....	31
Marketing Automation Tools .....	31
About DWS Associates .....	32

## INTRODUCTION

Many colleges struggle to improve adult student recruitment and retention performance for some of the following reasons:

1. They lack a solid understanding of their target audience – an audience that is changing from Boomers and Gen X to Millennials and Generation Z. This lack of understanding causes them to deliver the wrong message and offer at the wrong time via the wrong communication channels which leads to lower conversion, enrollment, retention and graduation rates.
2. They have forgotten about marketing communications – which is all about getting the right message and offer to the right person at the right time via the right channel to motivate the right action – and shifted focused to ‘content marketing’ – which, for many, is all about creating more content. They refer to marketing departments as publishers – and that is not only wrong but will drain your limited resources (human, financial and technology).
3. They believe the hype that Millennials and Generation Z are online so much that they must want all communications and content available to them online – when in fact these groups consist of some very different segments, and many are driven by the quality of the message more than the channel of delivery.
4. They still look at their audience at the generational level rather than the segments within each generation. Not all Millennials are the same – some are married with children and mortgages; others are single and just out of college. Failing to segment is costing you enrollments.
5. They have bought into the unproven concept that if you create enough ‘content’ and optimize it properly, your audience will find it online when they want it – inquiries and leads will surely follow.
6. That testing and tracking performance isn’t all that important which can seem correct when many have marketing focused on leads and enrollment management focused on new enrollments, and retention/advisers focused on retention – these silos create inefficiencies and wasted resources.



This e-Book will explain how ‘content marketing’ needs to be part of your marketing communications efforts, and that success comes from your ability to provide your audience with fast, easy, convenient access to the right information at the right time via the right channels so they can take the desired next step with you. Content marketing means shifting the focus from “creating content” to “providing your audience with the right message and offer at the right time via the right communication channel(s) to motivate the right action.”

Some may argue this is a subtle difference but when you witness so many talking about “What content do we need to create” rather than “what does our audience need now to move forward with us.” As you read this ebook, you quickly realize the difference is not subtle and marks the difference between

an organization that “creates stuff” versus one that “effectively and efficiently enrolls and retains adult students.”

## WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING?

“Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.”<sup>1</sup>

We like that definition – especially because it ends with “...drive profitable customer action.”

Unfortunately, too many have lost focus on that and instead focus on creating more and more content. This eBook will show you how to keep your eye on that ultimate prize.

Please remember that “content” is not limited to just the online/digital world – it includes direct mail, brochures, articles in print publications, manuals, advertising (broadcast, print, out-of-home) and more.

And for this document, “content” refers to “right message” – so it goes beyond the more traditional definition of [ex] a blog post, white paper, e-book, video, etc. and includes the messaging you use in your advertising, emails, direct mail, outbound telemarketing. The reason for this is simple – you can’t separate the messaging you use to capture your audience’s attention and engage them in a conversation from the content you create for them with the intent of capturing their attention and engaging them in conversation.

We don’t believe you can separate the white paper from the email you send to the individual in the information gathering stage of their decision-making process. We believe that content is about the message you deliver in that email and white paper.

So, as you move through this document, remember that what we are presenting is a step above a content marketing strategy that focuses on what white paper gets produced and distributed. Instead, we are presenting a ‘communication strategy’ that addresses who you target and why, what you need to address to motivate prospective students to select you over other colleges and programs.

And remember that the goal is to drive profitable customer action – which goes well beyond ‘soft metrics’ such as ‘Like,’ ‘Follow,’ ‘Retweet’ and focus on the cost to generate a new student and the ability to lower the cost to graduate a student.

## WHAT IS A CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY?

A content marketing strategy is a documented go-to-market plan that explains in detail:

- Your targeted segments by the program (messages by segment)
- Specific features and benefits of the program for each segment (to be featured in messages)



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<sup>1</sup> Downloaded from <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2014/05/where-content-marketing-fits-plan/> on February 24, 2016.

- Media channels preferred by your targeted segments for each stage of their decision-making process
- Insight into the needs, wants, questions, objections that each targeted segment must address at each stage of their decision-making process
- Channel plan that addresses what communication channels to use for each targeted segment at each stage of their decision-making process
- Content Mapping and Scheduling

In the following pages, we will address these and other critical factors that must be part of a content marketing strategy for your college to see marked improvements in performance.

## WHY CONTENT MARKETING SHOULD BE PART OF YOUR RECRUITMENT & RETENTION STRATEGY

The simple answer to this question is because a well-devised content marketing strategy allows you to make better-informed decisions based on hard data that will help you improve performance in recruitment and retention efforts in critical areas such as, but not limited to:

- Lowering your cost to enroll a new student
- Increasing retention and graduation rates
- Lowering your cost to graduate a student
- Increasing your referral rates (which helps lower your cost to enroll a new student even more)

## DIRECT MARKETING AND YOUR CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY

### WHAT IS DIRECT MARKETING?

“Direct marketing is the interactive use of advertising media to stimulate an (immediate) behavior modification in such a way that this behavior can be tracked, recorded, and stored on a database for future retrieval and use.”<sup>2</sup>

The one enhancement we would suggest to this time-honored definition is that you supplement “advertising” with “paid, owned and earned media” to reflect the changes that have taken place in the world since the creation of this definition in 1998.

We strongly believe, based on first-hand experience, that owned media (web site, mobile site, blog, social media accounts) and earned media (word-of-mouth, reviews) can stimulate an immediate behavior modification and that this behavior can be tracked, recorded, and stored on a database for future retrieval and use.

The key is knowing how to do this – which we will address throughout this document.

### WHY CONTENT MARKETING IS PART OF DIRECT MARKETING AND MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

These 5 direct marketing pillars will drive your success across multiple communication channels.

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<sup>2</sup> Bob Stone and Ron Jacobs, *Successful Direct Marketing Methods*, 2007, page 5.



What are the five direct marketing pillars, you ask? Well, here you go – straight out of DWS Associates founder, Dudley Steven’s new book, *Marketing Direct: Breaking Through the Clutter*.

“The five most important things that you have to worry about when creating a direct marketing campaign are, in order of importance, target, offer, format, creative and timing.

1. **Targeting.** Targeting is about seven times as important as other factors. The “who” is the most important aspect of creating and launching a successful direct marketing campaign. Locating and targeting the right prospects in the right way is critical. Sometimes, we as marketers spend more time worrying about the product than we do about the audience and this is backward. The consumer, the prospective buyer or responder is number 1 and the more you know about the “who”, the more likely your promotion is going to produce the desired results.
2. **Offer.** The Offer is about 2.5 times as important. The Offer is the whole proposition and incentives that you offer to generate a response. The Offer is made up of your product/service, your pricing strategy, your service and support proposition and any incentives you might include to get the reader/viewer to respond or buy.
3. **Format.** The Format is about 1.5 times as important. Format includes the medium and the physical shape, size, etc., of your advertisement. Choosing the right format is dependent upon a lot of factors including who you are trying to reach, what media are likely to be the best to reach them, and what media are going to allow you to present your message most effectively. Once you’ve selected the appropriate medium, you then should select the appropriate physical characteristics. If mail, it is going to be a brochure in a number 10 envelope with a letter and BRC or a self-mailer or large format flat or dimensional mailing. The format is affected by cost factors as well. What can you afford to spend on the format and achieve your breakeven or desired financial results?
4. **Creative.** Creative is about 1.35 times as important. These are the words, pictures, the bits that get people most excited. In direct response advertising, the words are the most important part of the creative. Copy is first whether it’s in print or spoken words. The design, including pictures, is there to support the copy.
5. **Timing.** Timing is important but is the last on the list. It varies from market to market. It can also vary from industry to industry and product to product. When do you mail, when do you launch your broadcast campaign can depend on both internal and external factors. For example, there are better times of year to mail certain types of B2C and B2B campaigns. Factors such as elections can impact the results of a mailing. As a rule, you never want to mail into an election. Email messages may do better at certain times of the day or the week depending on the audience and the offer. There are some industry norms for launching direct response advertising campaigns depending on the medium, but in all cases, it is best to test to find the best times to launch these activities.”<sup>3</sup>

Do you see the similarities between content marketing and direct marketing? Both are all about getting the right message and offer (offer) to the right person (targeting) via the right channel (media/channel/content mapping at the right time (stage in the decision-making process) to motivate the right action (modification in behavior) in a way that’s trackable.

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<sup>3</sup> Dudley Stevenson, *Marketing Direct: Breaking Through the Clutter*, 2015, page 17.

The concept that some struggle with is that “offer” must be appropriate to where the individual is within the decision-making process. For example, for someone that just contacted you for the first time and is interested in the cost of the program, the right offer could be information about tuition, financial aid, scholarships, payment plans – not ‘Apply Now.’ The former addresses their needs, answers their questions and helps them determine if they should continue working with you.

## STEP 1: GETTING STARTED

Non-traditional students are the majority – they are the people that are going to help you achieve your enrollment growth goals moving forward.

For the past decade, your non-traditional student has consisted of Boomers (52 to 69 years of age in 2016) and Generation X (36 to 51 in 2016). However, as you read this ebook, Boomers and Generation X are being replaced by Millennials (19 to 35 in 2016) and Generation Z (9 to 19 in 2016).



What do you know about these two groups – and what segments have you identified within these groups as the source of your greatest opportunities to achieve your enrollment goals over the next 5 to 10 years?

A changing target audience requires some research to understand them. Now, some might say that there has been plenty of research focused on Millennials (Ms) – and to an extent, they’re correct. But most of that research has been extremely broad and filled with contradictions which makes it incredibly difficult for you to put together an effective strategy.

In this section, we will focus on the questions you need to answer and how you should go about getting those answers to develop your recruitment and retention programs.

### GENERATION X, MILLENNIALS AND GENERATION Z



For the past decade or so, the argument has been made – typically by technology companies trying to sell you their ‘solution’ for digital marketing – that digital is it and offline is dead.

Unfortunately, this has motivated a great many marketers to act without testing the information coming at them.

Today, many colleges have reduced their spending on ‘traditional’ channels like television, radio, out-of-home, and direct mail to shift their budget to [a] marketing technology (CRM, marketing automation, email platforms) and [b] digital advertising.

Here’s an example.

“29 percent of people aged 18 to 24 say they haven't read a printed newspaper at all in the last year.”

That comes from a March 2013 [YouGov poll](#) commissioned by Guardian.

Scary, don't you agree?

Ummm...no it isn't. Because it also says “71 percent of people aged 18 to 24 say they have read a printed newspaper in the last year.”

Try this one on for size.

“The proliferation of online ad formats has not eroded trust in traditional paid advertising channels. Roughly six-in-10 say they trust ads on TV (63%), in newspapers (60%) and magazines (58%).”

That factoid comes from September 2015 report from Nielsen entitled [Global Trust in Advertising](#).

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*We could go on, and on...but the point we're making is simple. You can rely on the potentially biased research performed by others that have been designed to help them sell you their products, or you can talk to your own audience and learn for yourself how they wish to receive information.*

*We highly recommend talking with your audience and learning for yourself.*

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The key to your success will be segmentation and the development of personas – so that you can be as specific and relevant as possible in your messaging and offers to drive higher response rates, enrollments and more.

#### TARGET AUDIENCE, SEGMENTS, PERSONAS

The best place to start is with your current student population. Start by identifying your students, by program, for the past [ex] 24 months. Then, depending on the data you have available, score them based on the following attributes:

- # of terms/semesters enrolled during the 24 months
- # of credit hours earned
- # of credit hours taken (total credit hours enrolled including withdrawals)
- GPA
- Most recent term/semester enrolled in

You might have other factors you will want to include – but the goal here is to identify your ‘ideal student’ so you can identify others like them for your recruitment efforts.

Why?

Because these students have done what you want a student to do and they have certain factors in common that can be used to improve the quality of your recruitment efforts.

The next step is to append data to the student records to identify additional shared characteristics. You should also append demographic, psychographic and geographic data and, if you work with data firms such as Claritas (PRIZM) or Neustar (ElementOne), you will receive the following information.

Segment Name	Urban Ms
Program of Interest	MBA
Demographics	25 to 35 years of age, single or married with no children under 10 in the home, owns their home valued at \$150,000 to \$200,000
Geographic	Lives and works within 20 miles of campus.
Motivations	Career advancement
Goals	Graduate without debt/pay as they go
Concerns	Cost
Psychographics	Enjoys reading science fiction, watches SciFi channel, belongs to a gym and works out 3-5 times per week. Listens to country music on Pandora in their car and home and office
Social Media Habits	Facebook: Spends 10-15 hours per week on Facebook to 'stay in touch with friends and family' as well as 'gather news about the economy, politics, career'. "Likes" their former college's Facebook Page and has clicked on sponsored content related to their career advancement and/or graduate school.
	LinkedIn: Spends 5 to 10 hours per week and is highly active with 3 to 5 LinkedIn Groups focused on business and professional development. Is a member of their former college's alumni Group.
	Twitter: Does not have a Twitter account

Figure 1: Persona "Urban Ms"

Figure 1 shows what a completed persona might look like – though there are many variations in use. Notice that this addresses demographics, psychographics, motivations, and social media habits. All this information can be used to improve targeting/lead generation as well as nurturing so you see a lower cost to enroll a new student and higher conversion rates.

Below, Figure 2 shows the messages, offers and preferred communication channels by stage in the decision-making process. This level of detail can help drive your recruitment performance by clearly articulating the content of interest and preferred delivery channel for that persona.

Figure 3 and Figure 4 offer examples of reports you receive that address size and location of your audience/persona and their media usage habits. Again, all this information helps you better understand your audience/personas so you can be more effective at recruitment – and retention.

Pre-Inquiry	<p><b>MESSAGES/OFFERS:</b> Major interest is how to fit the cost of this program into their monthly budget so they do not incur additional debt. Key messages are [a] Interest Free Payment Plan, [b] Employer Sponsored Tuition Reimbursement Program, if applicable [c] tips and hints and checklists addressing how to budget the cost of the MBA</p> <p><b>CHANNEL PREFERENCES:</b> Broadcast (TV and Radio), Website, Google Search</p>
Inquiry to Application Started	<p><b>MESSAGES/OFFERS:</b> Discussions with Financial Aid representatives in order to address the near-term issue of cost and budget plus information about how graduates from the program have increased their income with promotions/raises/bonuses</p> <p><b>CHANNEL PREFERENCES:</b> Email, Direct Mail, Phone Call, Text</p>
Application Started to Application Completed	<p><b>MESSAGES/OFFERS:</b> Focus on the urgency of getting started and that completing the online application process by specific dates means they could be starting the program by specific dates which means they are that much closer to graduation and reaping the benefits such as promotions/raises. Use testimonials from current and former students of the program</p> <p><b>CHANNEL PREFERENCES:</b> Email, Direct Mail, Phone Call, Text</p>
Application Completed to Enrollment	<p><b>MESSAGES/OFFERS:</b> Focus on conversations with academic advisor and program chair focused on registering and enrolling ASAP in order to get books on time so there is a successful start to the program</p> <p><b>CHANNEL PREFERENCES:</b> Email, Direct Mail, Phone Call, Text</p>
Enrollment in Term 1 to Enrollment in Term 2	<p><b>MESSAGES/OFFERS:</b> Congratulations on success, and reminders about key dates for registering/enrolling in coming term. Reminders about what awaits them upon completion of the program in terms of potential promotions and increased income based on actual results from past students/graduates of the program</p> <p><b>CHANNEL PREFERENCES:</b> Email, Direct Mail, Phone Call, Text</p>
Enrollment in Term 2 to Enrollment in Term 3	<p><b>MESSAGES/OFFERS:</b> Congratulations on success, and reminders about key dates for registering/enrolling in coming term. Reminders about what awaits them upon completion of the program in terms of potential promotions and increased income based on actual results from past students/graduates of the program</p> <p><b>CHANNEL PREFERENCES:</b> Email, Direct Mail, Phone Call, Text</p>
Enrollment in Term 3 to Enrollment in Term 4	<p><b>MESSAGES/OFFERS:</b> Congratulations on success, and reminders about key dates for registering/enrolling in coming term. Reminders about what awaits them upon completion of the program in terms of potential promotions and increased income based on actual results from past students/graduates of the program</p> <p><b>CHANNEL PREFERENCES:</b> Email, Direct Mail, Phone Call, Text</p>
Enrollment in Term 4 to Graduation	<p><b>MESSAGES/OFFERS:</b> Congratulations on success, and reminders about key dates for registering/enrolling in coming term. Reminders about what awaits them upon completion of the program in terms of potential promotions and increased income based on actual results from past students/graduates of the program. Messages about graduation including registering for the Graduation Ceremonies, ordering cap and gown, etc.</p> <p><b>CHANNEL PREFERENCES:</b> Email, Direct Mail, Phone Call, Text</p>

Figure 2: Persona: Urban Ms - Messages/Offers and Media Channel Preferences by Decision Making Process Stage

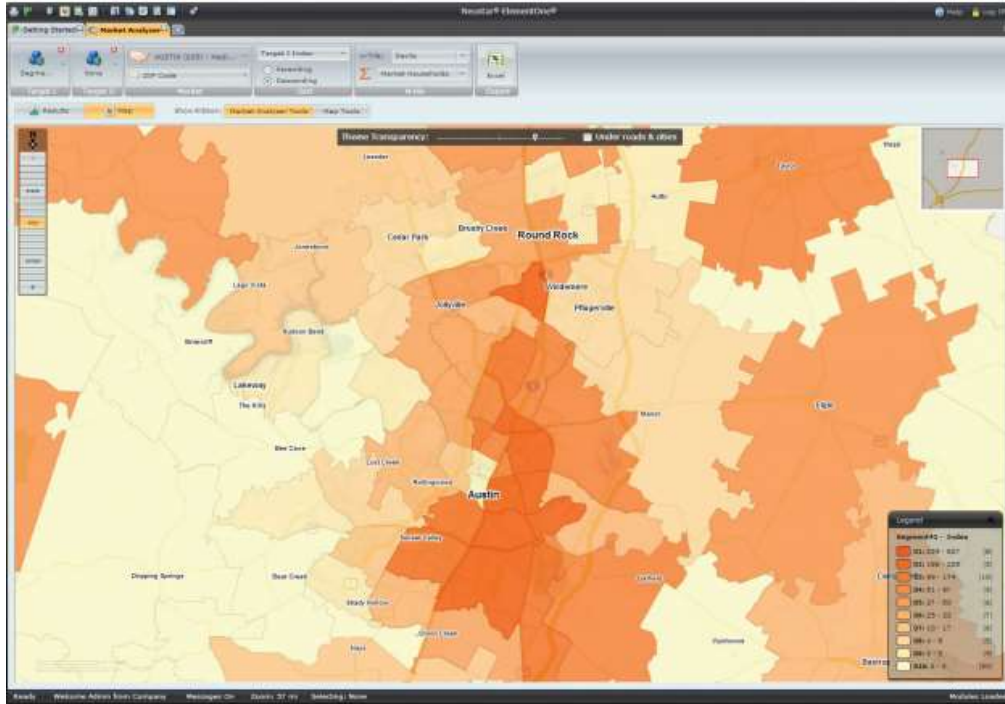


Figure 3: Neustar ElementOne Density Map Shows Where your Audience lives

The screenshot shows a detailed data table titled 'All Profiles' in the Neustar ElementOne software. The table lists various demographic and behavioral attributes for different audience segments, with corresponding numerical values and percentages. The columns include attributes like 'Home Ownership', 'Home Type', 'Age', 'Gender', 'Employment Status', and 'Income'. The data is organized into a grid with alternating row colors for readability.

Profile Name	S1 Index	S1 %Pop	S2 Index	S2 %Pop	S3 Index	S3 %Pop	S4 Index	S4 %Pop	S5 Index	S5 %Pop	S6 Index	S6 %Pop	S7 Index	S7 %Pop
Home Ownership: Own Primary Residence	114	82.81%	74	84.87%	139	85.83%	89	83.81%	132	118.02%	113	88.88%	88	88.88%
No. Married: Adult in Household	107	82.87%	97	84.87%	133	85.83%	139	86.81%	111	85.81%	124	90.82%	99	90.82%
Home Type: House	111	83.87%	87	84.87%	133	86.81%	117	86.81%	139	87.85%	121	90.82%	114	90.82%
Language Spoken in Home: Other English	114	83.87%	87	84.87%	133	86.81%	113	86.81%	114	87.85%	124	90.82%	99	90.82%
Home Ownership: Own House	114	83.87%	79	84.87%	137	88.85%	85	84.87%	138	90.82%	127	90.82%	88	88.85%
Age: 18-24	119	85.87%	112	85.87%	132	86.81%	117	86.81%	117	86.81%	124	91.85%	114	91.85%
Head of Household: Married	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Head of Household: Married	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Number of Children in HH: None	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Head of Household: Single	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Current Residence: Within 1.5 Miles	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Number of Adults Age 65+ in HH: None	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Over the Last 12 Months: Moved	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Employed by Others: Works for State or Federal	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Employed by Others: Works for State or Federal	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Number of Adults in HH: Two	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Male: Head of HH	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Head of HH: Single: Divorced/Single or Widowed	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
HH Income: \$15,000 - \$19,999	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Head of HH: Age: 55-64	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Number of People in HH: Two	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Number of Employed Adults Age 25+ in HH: Two	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Currently Self-Employed and Company Size: Solo	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Occupation: Professional/Technical (Prof)	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Ever Attended School/Trade/Vocational School	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Age: 18 - 24	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Residence Type: Single-Family	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Female: Head of HH	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Head of HH: Age: 45-54	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Occupation: Management/Business & Financial O...	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Currently Self-Employed and Company Size: Solo	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
HH with Female: Bachelor's and Above	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
HH Income: \$20,000 - \$24,999	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Employed by Others: Works for Local, State or Federal	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Head of HH: Age: 65+ Single	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Head of HH: Age: College Graduate	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Number of Adults in HH: Three-Four	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%
Home Index: 300-333 8489-999	111	84.87%	112	84.87%	134	85.83%	134	86.81%	135	86.81%	141	91.85%	141	91.85%

Figure 4: Neustar ElementOne Persona Media Usage

Appending data is the first step in segmenting and will help you develop personas which are even deeper descriptions and insights into those you will pursue.

#### HOW TO CREATE PERSONAS & WHY

“Buyer personas are research-based archetypal (modeled) representations of who buyers are, what they are trying to accomplish, what goals drive their behavior, how they think, how they buy, and why they make buying decisions. (Today, I now include where they buy as well as when buyers decide to buy.)”<sup>4</sup>

Once you identified your segments, it’s time to sit down and ask questions, observe behavior.

- Who is this person?
- What is his or her need? (This is NOT why they need your product.)
- Why should she care about you?
- What unique value proposition (UVP) do you offer this persona?
- How do they buy from you?
- How many are there in your geographic market?
- What are their media preferences?

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<sup>4</sup> Downloaded from <http://tonyzambito.com/buyer-persona-original-definition-matters/> on February 24, 2016.



## STEP 2: MAPPING IT OUT

		STAGES IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS					
		Pre-Inquiry	Inquiry to Start Application	Start Application to Submit Completed Application	Submit Completed Application to Enroll Term 1	Enroll Term 1 to Enroll Term 2	THRU GRADUATION
<b>Prospective Student</b>							
Program A	Segment 1	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers		
	Segment 2	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers		
	Segment 3	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers		
<b>Current Student</b>							
Program A	Segment 1					Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers
	Segment 2					Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers
	Segment 3					Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers

For example, Prospective Student: Segment 1 in the Pre-Inquiry Stage starts by searching for content focused on “returning to college” and “balancing family, work and school.” In this early phase of the Pre-Inquiry stage, they are focused on “can I succeed” and “what do I need to know to make college work this time”?

During this time, prospective students search for information that helps them address cost/budget, time management/organizational skills as they related to employed/married returning to college.

In the later phase in this “Pre-Inquiry” stage, they search by school name and program name to identify those schools that offer their program of interest. They are interested in creating a list of potential colleges with the program and are still trying to develop their selection criteria – so content that helps them develop selection criteria is effective. (And it provides you with the opportunity to set their criteria for them – and focus on your unique strengths.)

Google Search is popular, as is branded search. Your website is also important because they will visit the site in search of information. And the typical information they want now is the availability of the program, accreditation (yes/no), credit hours/time to graduation and cost.

### YOUR UNIQUE STORY – THE BENEFITS THAT MATTER FOR THE PERSONA

You now have identified your personas – their unique needs, wants, perceptions and expectations – so it’s time to match that with your unique strengths and develop ways to communicate them to the individual in ways that show how your institution delivers unique benefits.

No more “convenient locations” – instead, focus on how the individual saves time and money because the locations are nearby which cuts down on travel, gas, wear and tear on the automobile.

No more “experienced faculty with real-world experience – instead focus on the individual will be learning practical skills that easily translate to the work they do every day so they can immediately put their education to use and make strides towards the performance that leads to raises and promotions.

No more ‘graduate in as little as 12 months’ – instead focus on the individual being able to earn the credential so they can list the success sooner than students in other programs at other schools, giving them an advantage in the job market.

But more importantly, focus on what makes you unique so the individual realizes that you have no competition – that you offer rewards that cannot be acquired anywhere else because that is what will help the individual make an informed decision easier and faster.

## STEP 3: PRODUCTION

Now is the time to start creating the content and that requires a content creation team, an efficient workflow process that gets you from “Kick-off” to “In-market” as quickly as possible while still producing high-quality content, and the tactical plan which addresses tasks, owners, milestones.



### STAFF

You are going to need people that address the following requirements/duties/responsibilities:

A strategic leader that oversees the daily operations and sets the vision for the team. Typically, a ‘marketing director’ position that understands the program(s) and the persona(s) and is responsible for ensuring that the content that is produced is on target for the persona(s) in each stage of the decision-making process.

A creative director or using the new lexicon a “content” director that ensures that all work produced meets the standards set for the institution, program, and persona(s) in terms of tone, graphics standards, and schedule.

Writers and designers that are responsible for creating the content based on strategic instructions and maximizing the strengths of the communication channels that will be used to distribute the content.

Researchers that are gathering, analyzing and making practical recommendations on the personas because change will occur and you need to monitor your audience and the competition so that you can respond quickly and appropriately rather than try to react. Attention should also be given to key internal areas such as [ex] faculty, staff, alumni, industry/subject matter experts, enrollment, advising because their insights and perspectives can add tremendous value to how you should best respond to changes that occur within your persona(s), the market and within the institution.

### EDITORIAL AND PRODUCTION CALENDAR

There are plenty of tools in the market for this function but the key point to remember is this - you want a simple tool to use that allows your staff to understand quickly

- Topics/Project Title
- Audience
- What is being produced
- Why it is being produced
- How it will be used/Channel Distribution
- What the tasks and key milestones are
- Who owns each task
- Budget
- Goals and Objectives/Projected Results

And remember that the Projected Results must be tied to Key Performance Indicators (KPI) that are tied to your key objectives. Those KPIs include leads, new applications started, new applications completed and submitted, new students accepted, new enrollments etc. Metrics such as 'Like', 'Retweet', and 'Download' are nice but they don't generate enrollment and tuition revenue, so be sure to focus on metrics that pay the bills.

## STEP 4: TESTING

Many ‘content marketers’ focus on [a] digital channels and [b] inbound marketing. Our focus is on “delivering the right message to the right person at the right time via the right channel to motivate the right action.” What that means is that our focus is multi-channel across digital and offline channels AND inbound and outbound.



“Inbound marketing is promoting a company through blogs, podcasts, video, eBooks, e-newsletters, whitepapers, SEO, physical products, social media marketing, and other forms of content marketing which serve to attract customers through the different stages of the purchase funnel.”<sup>5</sup> Some of these tools work well in outbound marketing, so the quotation from Wikipedia may be debated.

Inbound marketing should never be your sole strategy – you know who your audience is and where they are because of the research and segmentation work, so go direct too. Focus on the communication channel(s) that deliver the result and don’t risk success by ignoring the ability to go directly to the individual within your targeted persona(s).

For example, optimize the checklist that helps potential students decide what college is best for them so they can find it via search but use it as an offer in emails, direct mail, social media posts/tweets, etc. Don’t hope they find the content – make sure they know it exists and where they can quickly, easily get their hands on it.

And make sure that you can track which effort generated the download.

One of the most common mistakes we see is content placed on a website page without any way of knowing where the individual came from to download the content. Imagine having done something that drove hundreds of people to that website page to download the content – but has no idea what you did to drive that traffic!

For example, the media relations team at one college was working with an onsite publisher (a key influencer for their audience) and finally motivated the publisher to review a piece of content that would be of interest to their readers. But they gave the publisher a tracking URL, so the traffic wasn’t attributed to the media relations team’s effort!

## TESTING METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

“It’s one thing for an organization to have a content delivery model. But it’s an entirely different thing to execute well in the space,” Ramona Meyer-Piagentini, Senior Consulting Manager in Digital Marketing for Adobe explains. “Intuition doesn’t play a role in marketing. If you’re going on complete assumptions, you could be missing the boat on driving real impact.”<sup>6</sup>

## MEDIA RELATIONS

Media relations is almost a lost art – and it’s a tremendous opportunity to get that all important 3<sup>rd</sup> party endorsement. Going beyond placing a press release on Newswire and hoping someone picks up

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<sup>5</sup> Downloaded from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inbound\\_marketing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inbound_marketing) on February 25, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Downloaded from <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2013/09/content-optimization-advantage-performance-testing/> on February 25, 2016.

the news, we're highly recommending that you reach out to the key influencers and develop a relationship that leads to greater exposure for your content via their channels. Craft press releases that offer the full story and make yourself available for comments on industry news. Open this line of promotion with professional help from PR firms or tackle it on your own.

Think outside the box – you have faculty that can be a subject matter expert for the local news on the nursing/healthcare sector or the economy. You have staff that can speak about the cost of education and how to manage the cost and limit debt. You have faculty and staff that can talk about the higher ed sector and how technology is helping adults return to college with greater success.

Just remember to set up a process for accurately tracking the performance of the activities. If part of the media coverage effort includes a free white paper for potential students, use a unique tracking URL.

#### CALLS-TO-ACTION

Specifically, the “link/button to click”- test its size, color, shape, wording. Don't look at it as a throw-away driven by graphics standards and never to be changed or tested.

#### “COUPON” CODES

There are two popular options here – the first is “enter this code to get the content,” and the other is “enter this code to get your app fee waived.” One is tied to content, the other to a monetary discount. Let's focus on the one tied to content first – for this to be an effective strategy, you are going to need something of high perceived value, otherwise the use of a “coupon” for content may be viewed as “another piece of information to remember and enter” and that can negatively impact results.

Which leads us to “always test the use of the coupon code.”

Now, if you're offering a free or discounted entrance to a special event, or waiving the application fee – that ‘high perceived value’ is a different story than ‘free checklist to help you select the right college.’

Bottom line, coupons/codes should be used to add to the experience and should not be perceived as “another step, another hoop.”

#### TESTING METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

##### BODY COPY

Working in direct marketing, I have had the honor of working with some incredibly talented people that have taught me a lot of valuable lessons. And body copy is one area where I have learned a lot and been amazed a lot.

Some people like clear and concise – so keep it short and simple. Some like to scan so use bullet points, italics, and bold text. Some want long, detailed content – the longer and more detailed the better.

“Multivariate testing is a technique for testing a hypothesis in which multiple variables are modified. The goal of multivariate testing is to determine which combination of variations performs the best out of all of the possible combinations.”<sup>7</sup>

So, you can test the headline and an image and some copy, but you also need to understand that your greatest challenge is going to be getting the visitor traffic you need to reach meaningful results and

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<sup>7</sup> Downloaded from <https://www.optimizely.com/resources/multivariate-testing/> on February 26, 2016.

conclusions. Which is why you should project a traffic sample size before attempting the test – and if the traffic is projected as too low to deliver statistically valid results promptly, consider restructuring the test to an A/B split.

#### A/B TESTING

Simple, efficient, and fast, A/B testing – also known as ‘split testing’ and ‘bucket testing’ - allows you to compare a baseline control sample with a variety of single-variable experiments to improve conversion rates. A classic direct mail tactic, this method of testing is easy to execute and is a great starting point for testing copy, layouts, images, and colors.

Experiments are typically distributed equally with the original control sample.

Conversion results are measured and tracked for comparison and performance analysis. This method is different from multivariate testing, which applies statistical modeling for experimentation with multiple variables within the distribution.

Check out our post on [A/B Testing: Some Important Tips to Follow](#)

#### EYE TRACKING

Eye tracking is the measurement of eye activity. Where do we look? What do we ignore? When do we blink? How does the pupil react to different stimuli? The concept is basic, but the process and interpretation can be quite complex, but the findings can help drive improved performance.

#### IN-PAGE ANALYTICS FROM GOOGLE ANALYTICS

With In-Page Analytics, you can make a visual assessment of how users interact with your web pages. In-Page Analytics helps you answer questions like:

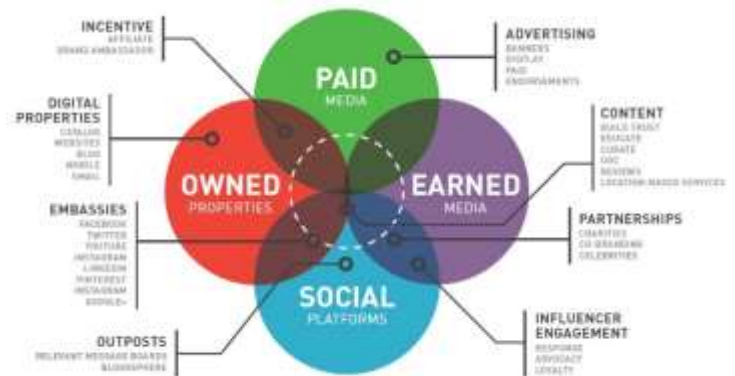
- Is the layout optimal for what I want users to accomplish on the page?
- Are my users seeing the content I want them to see?
- Are my users finding what they're looking for on the page?
- Are my calls to action motivating or visible enough?
- What links are users clicking?

## STEP 5: DISTRIBUTION

Earlier we discussed the development of your personas which included insight into what communications channels they preferred to use at each stage of the decision process. When it comes to creating your content distribution plan, you want to start with that insight because that tells you where you need to make your content available as well as where you want to target your advertising (paid media) to generate awareness and engagement.

As you put together your distribution plan, keep these questions in mind:

- What content do we have that they use – and is that content optimized for that preferred channel?
- What content do we have that needs to be improved and better optimized for that channel?
- What do we have that we don't need for this persona(s)?
- Once you have the channels in order, set objectives.





## SETTING CHANNEL OBJECTIVES

The goal here is to identify how you will make the content readily available on those communication channels used by the targeted persona(s), and the definition of success.

Leads	1000	Program A			
Campaign Title	Content/Offer	Persona 1	Persona 2	Persona 3	
Search: Paid	Checklist: Right College	50	10	5	
Search: Organic	Video: Faculty Testimonial	50	10	5	
Email	Checklist: Right College	50	10	10	
Email	Video: Faculty Testimonial	50	10	5	
Social Media: Facebook	Checklist: Right College	25	10	5	
Social Media: Facebook	Video: Faculty Testimonial	25	10	5	
Social Media: Twitter	Checklist: Right College	25	10	20	
Social Media: Twitter	Video: Faculty Testimonial	25	10	20	
Social Media: LinkedIn	Checklist: Right College	25	25	20	
Social Media: LinkedIn	Video: Faculty Testimonial	25	15	20	
Direct Mail	Checklist: Right College	25	15	15	
Direct Mail	Video: Faculty Testimonial	25	15	15	
Events: Face-to-face	Checklist: Right College	10	7	5	
Events: Face-to-face	Video: Faculty Testimonial	10	7	5	
Events: Online	Checklist: Right College	10	7	5	
Events: Online	Video: Faculty Testimonial	10	7	5	
Referrals		10	7	5	
Advertising: TV	Checklist: Right College	10	7	5	
Advertising: TV	Video: Faculty Testimonial	10	7	5	
Advertising: Radio	Checklist: Right College	10	0	5	
Advertising: Radio	Video: Faculty Testimonial	10	0	5	
Advertising: Out-of-Hom	Checklist: Right College	10	7	5	
Advertising: Out-of-Hom	Video: Faculty Testimonial	10	7	5	
Print: Newspaper	Checklist: Right College	10	7	5	
Print: Newspaper	Video: Faculty Testimonial	10	7	5	
Print: Trade Journal A	Checklist: Right College	10	7	0	
Print: Trade Journal A	Video: Faculty Testimonial	10	7	0	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>550</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>1001</b>

In the above table, Program A has a goal of 1,000 leads during a specific time frame – and during that time frame, they are running multiple campaigns (Campaign Title) with content offers. The numbers you see above under each Persona reflect the channel objectives/goals for each piece of content via each scheduled campaign.

How did we come up with these specific goals/objectives? Same as we always have – with historical performance as a baseline; ROI analysis of the media to determine revenue and margins necessary to

achieve breakeven or exceed the media costs and generate the desired profits; and a little SWAG. The important point is [a] every activity/campaign and every piece of content has a measurement to evaluate performance and [b] if we see that actual results are exceeding or failing to meet expectations, we can shift resources to maximize overall performance. For example, if “Social Media: Facebook” with the Checklist: Right College content is on track to exceed 25 leads for Persona 1, we can switch resources from an under-performing campaign/activity so we can get the most from a successful campaign.

## STEP 6: PERFORMANCE/KEY METRICS

There are 'soft metrics,' and then there are 'hard metrics' – we prefer focusing on the hard metrics which include:

- Leads
- New applications started
- New applications submitted
- New students enrolled
- Cost per new student
- Student retention
- Student Lifetime Value



The reason? These pay the bills – and 'Like,' 'Follow' and 'Retweet' don't.

However, other factors that impact your ability to maximize your performance, so let's address those as well.

### SEARCH LISTING POSITIONS

No surprise here – you need to be found easily via search – Google, Bing, and Yahoo.

### TRAFFIC

They found you via search, make sure they visit you too! Research the search terms users employ to find you, you can then create more content with the goal of driving traffic to your site so they can consume more content.

### TIME ON SITE

Remember when this was called 'sticky'? Well the bottom line is the longer they hang around, the greater the chance that you can provide them with the content they need so they can realize you are their best option.

### REPEAT VISITS

You will be able to tell what brought someone to your site for the first time, but it's equally important to understand what brings them back again and again so you can create new content that continues to appeal to them and bring them back to your site.

### CLICKS AND ENGAGEMENT

Clicks are nice to know – it tells you how many people felt the call to action was effective. But even more valuable is the engagement or time spent with the content. For example, your offer is an online calculator to estimate costs and the clicks are through the roof, but no one is staying on the page with the calculator for more than 2 seconds which means they aren't using the tool. Ideally, you would want them using the tool for several minutes and maybe clicking a link on that page to more content, so they spend even more time on your site.

### DOWNLOADS

Gated or ungated content, the act of downloading content is a sure sign of perceived value, and that makes this metric an important metric.

## SHARES

If everyone is willing to share that cat meme across Facebook and Twitter, make sure your content is easy to share so that once the laughter dies down from the cute kitty meme, your audience can discuss the valuable insights and recommendations from your latest white paper.

## NEW STUDENT ACQUISITION COST

The cost per lead is not as important as the cost to acquire a new student. If your cost per lead is \$5, but your cost to acquire a new student is \$10,000, the chances are strong that you are attracting too many low-quality leads or your lead nurturing and the conversion process is broken. Lower the cost to acquire a new student, and you can break-even and attain profitability faster!

## PAGE VIEWS

As we mentioned earlier, getting site visitors to spend more time on your site means the content is engaging, they are finding their time on your site to be a valuable investment – and this increases the potential for the visitors to move forward with your institution into the application, enrollment and retention stages.

## CONVERSION RATE

With a variety of tools, including Google Analytics, you can track how many visitors act on your site – submit a completed form requesting information or subscribing to a newsletter, or even registering for an event. Again, these are great signs that the content you are offering is high value!

## CONTENT MARKETING TOOLS

The following section is for reference and guidance only – it is not an endorsement.

### INTERACTIVE CONTENT

**DWS Associates**: Not to toot our own horn, but we need to mention that DWS Associates builds a great deal of interactive content in the form of calculators, mobile apps, quizzes, and surveys. The examples on our website are focused on marketing, but we can build custom interactive apps and tools.

**SnapApp**: The Boston-based company offers online tools for building calculators, quizzes, infographics, interactive videos and other types of interactive content.

**Knack**: Knack uses mobile games to match people to opportunity.

**Contest Factory**: Contest Factory is a contest company that creates online promotions, games, and sweepstakes that help you to engage your customers, build brand awareness and grow your business. Our patented contest system provides the most comprehensive platform in the industry for developing contests in social media, mobile devices, and websites that deliver real results.

**Woobox**: Interactive apps for social, email, mobile, and web.

**Formstack**: Formstack is an online form builder that enables users to create any online form, including surveys, contact forms, event registrations, and order forms. Users can then integrate the forms into their websites and begin collecting data.

**Wishpond**: Wishpond makes it easy for marketers to create landing pages and contests, track leads, send emails and more

**QuizRevolution**: A platform for do-it-yourself quizzes and surveys.

**Badgeville**: Offers award-winning enterprise gamification and analytics solution delivered as a service.

**SurveyMonkey**: Known for its survey capabilities, newly offered ‘quiz’ functionality helps bring further interactivity to the table.

### SEO

**Brightedge**: BrightEdge transforms online content into tangible business results, such as traffic, revenue, and engagement.

**Yoast**: Yoast optimizes websites, making them more usable, easier to navigate, faster and more reliable.

**SEMRush**: SEMrush is a powerful and versatile competitive intelligence suite for online marketing, from SEO and PPC to social media and video advertising research



[Buzzstream](#): BuzzStream is web-based software that helps the world's best marketers promote their products, services, and content to build links, buzz, and brands

[SEOlytics](#): SEOlytics is the controlling software for the sophisticated analysis of your SEO activities.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

[Storystream](#): Increase audience engagement by keeping your digital channels alive with relevant, social and live content using our powerful tools to aggregate, curate

[Sociota](#): Sociota is an award-winning digital marketing company. We love helping businesses get results from their online marketing

[Hootsuite](#): Hootsuite is a social media management system for brand management.

[Trackmaven](#): digital marketing software which analyzes your content across 15 different online channels.

[Networked Insights](#): Networked Insights provides analytics that enables companies to make data-driven marketing decisions and improve media efficiency

[Sproutsocial](#): Sprout Social is a social media management tool created to help businesses grow their social media presence.

[Conductor](#): A content and SEO platform that helps you get discovered online by customers.

[Sistrix](#): The Sistrix Toolbox is the premier tool used by SEO Professionals

#### TESTING & OPTIMIZATION

[Optimizely](#): Enterprise-level A/B testing and personalization for the web and mobile apps.

[Sitespect](#): provides the world's only tag-free web and mobile site optimization platform, enabling online businesses to test everything and target anyone.

[Webtrends](#): provides web, social and mobile analytics and several other software solutions related to digital marketing.

[Userbrain](#): The easiest way to fix your site's usability problems.

[Growth Giant](#): Optimize your website continuously and get maximum conversions.

#### CONTENT MARKETING

[Kapost](#): a content platform for B2B marketers

[Pulsepoint](#): helps brands engage the right consumers at scale by fusing the science of programmatic distribution with the art of content marketing.

[Contentrunner](#): connects people who can write content with the people who need it.

[Storify](#): Create stories using social media. Turn what people post on social media into compelling stories

[Percolate](#): a complete web and mobile software platform to manage all your marketing in one place

Contently: helps brands do great content marketing at scale—with smart technology, content strategy expertise, and a network of 50000 freelance creatives.

MarketMuse: Using AI to enable marketers to create and optimize rich, topically relevant content at scale.

CueContent: End to end content marketing for B2B brands – creation, publishing, distribution and lead generation.

MARKETING ANALYTIC, PERFORMANCE AND ATTRIBUTION

Neustar Market share: enables large companies to measure, predict and dramatically improve ... It includes applications for cross channel attribution, mix modeling

Beckon: software to help marketers understand and beautifully communicate the business impact of everything they do

ConversionLogic: Cloud analytics and machine learning for enterprise marketing means attribution evolved.

BrightTarget: The next generation of data-driven marketing.

C3Metrics: Complete Attribution Platform

MARKETING AUTOMATION TOOLS

Leadlander: enhances the ROI of your inbound and outbound marketing automation efforts by showing you which website visitors are responding to your online

OntraPort: all-in-one business and marketing automation platform that removes the burden of technology for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Autopilot: easy-to-use software for multi-channel marketing automation

CallidusCloud: Transform revenue results with Lead to Money- marketing automation, CPQ, sales enablement, compensation, customer experience, and sales analytics

Salesfusion: provides an easy to use marketing automation platform that allows sales and marketing teams to be successful.

CampaignDock: Use life cycle and drip email campaigns to share your content with each contact.

Salestraction: a simple marketing automation system that allows you to create a steady flow of new customers

MobileROI: leading mobile marketing automation platform

## ABOUT DWS ASSOCIATES

Founded in 1982, DWS Associates is a full-service marketing firm that develops and implements multi-channel marketing programs for organizations targeting business-to-consumer and business-to-business audiences in global markets. Our focus is on data-driven, innovative lead generation, lead nurturing, retention, and referral programs that attract, engage and retain profitable customers. Our staff brings strong experience to your business in market research, competitive intelligence, business intelligence and analytics, strategic planning and campaign management - so we help you increase sales and marketing performance while building strong, unique, differentiated brands.