University of Minnesota

Self-Help Guide

Content Strategy: Plan & Maintain Website Content

Content is one of the main components of a great user experience. This self-help guide walks you through the process of planning the right content to meet your website's goals. It also provides some considerations to help you maintain your website content.

Content Strategy Self-Help Guide

Plan Your Content

Know Your Goals

Before you can decide whether to move forward with a website, take some time to determine its purpose. Without a clear basis for your decisions, your website might not actually meet the needs of your intended audience.

Identify Stakeholders

- Include executive leadership, marketing, sales, customer service, product development, customers, partners, and industry influencers.
    - Conduct interviews to gain insights into their needs, create a stakeholder map, and regularly review and update your list.
- Your success will hinge on your team’s size, capacity, and focus.

Establish Objectives

- Narrow the project’s scope to what you can achieve with your team and its key internal and external stakeholders.
- Identify one primary purpose of your website that comes before the rest.
    - Selecting one primary purpose will help you determine if your website effectively fulfills that purpose. For instance, you could aim to increase enrollment, generate responses to a form, or reduce unnecessary phone calls.
- Once you identify your primary purpose, set clear objectives that will assist you in achieving it. Clearly outline how each objective will guide your content strategy and align with your overall organizational goals.

Know Your Audience

Create a profile that helps you pinpoint the needs and expectations of your website visitors.

Identify Audience Members

- Collect the likely demographics, characteristics, and past experiences of your website visitors.
- Identify a target audience that aligns with these interests and behaviors.
- Develop a persona that will include their expectations and preferences in future discussions about your website.

Understand Audience Needs

- Gather insights into what your target audience is looking for and how your website can meet their needs.
    - Use surveys, interviews, and analytics to gain a comprehensive understanding of website visitors’ expectations.

Identify Content Needs

Turn your attention to the choices you can make based on what you know so far.

Define Audience Requirements

- Specify the content and features your audience expects from your website to ensure their needs are met.
    - Prioritize these requirements to align them with your website's objectives and its resources.

Inventory and Audit Your Content

- Review existing content to assess its quality and relevance. Identify content that requires updates, repurposing, or removal to ensure a high standard of quality.
    - Get started with a customizable content inventory spreadsheet template.

Conduct a Gap Analysis

- Once you know what you have and what your audience needs, then you can identify the remaining areas for you to write or curate.
    - Develop a plan to address these gaps and enhance your content offerings.

Select an Appropriate Platform

- Not all content for your audience needs to be delivered through your website. On the contrary, some material might be better suited for other platforms like email or traditional media.
    - Identify platforms where your audience are most active and where they prefer to receive content.

Develop a Work Plan

There's never enough time, money, or resources to deliver everything that's feasible. Leverage your existing research and make a plan that helps you confidently make decisions about each potential action you can take. Be decisive, it's okay to say "no".

Define Roles and Responsibilities

- Assign specific tasks and responsibilities to each team member to ensure efficient content creation and management.
- Clearly communicate these roles to avoid confusion and hold everyone accountable.

Discuss Measures of Success

- Set key performance indicators (KPIs) to track and monitor the effectiveness of your content strategy.
    - Continuously review these metrics to assess progress and make necessary adjustments.

Create Your Content

Organize Your Content

Source content can come from various places, including an older website, previously sent email, a trifold brochure you printed a decade ago, or even a photocopy hanging at the front desk. The key is to organize and compile this diverse content in a manner that helps you see it all in light of your objectives and organizational goals.

Design Your Content Structure

- Determine the hierarchy of your content with categories and tags that are already familiar to your website visitors.
- Ensure the website’s organization and structure will streamline access to information.

Make Page Tables

- Create a detailed outline for each type of web page you plan to write.
    - Define the purpose of each web page type, including key headings, subheadings, calls to action, and essential messages to convey.
    - Determine which team member will be responsible for the content and establish a regular review schedule to ensure accuracy.

    - Use these page tables as a guide for content creation, ensuring consistent choices across similar web pages as you go.

Write for the Web

Imagine visitors to your website having a conversation with you that you can't alter dynamically. Once your content is published, your audience will encounter the same words from their own diverse contexts, emotional states, and varying levels of urgency.

Establish Voice and Tone

- Consider how your team's personality and linguistic style fits within the University of Minnesota voice and tone to resonate with your audience. Then, write content that adapts to suit various contexts, content types, and communication channels.

Use Plain Language

- Speak directly to your audience.
- Avoid complex terms if you don't need them.
- Plain language will help more people understand your message.

Create Usable Content

- Ensure your content is practical, actionable, and valuable to your audience.
- Focus on providing solutions that answer common questions without depending on separate sources that add overhead to your website maintenance.

Apply Standards

Your website represents the University of Minnesota to anyone who comes across it. Adhere to the standards and regulatory expectations set by the institution.

Make Your Content Accessible

- Ensure all website visitors, including those with disabilities, can access and benefit from your content.
- Adhere to established guidelines set by the Office for Digital Accessibility (ODA) .

Adhere to Regulatory Compliance

- Ensure that your content adheres to pertinent laws and regulations, including data protection and copyright laws.
- Set a plan to continuously review and update your content to ensure ongoing compliance with University policies.

Adhere to Brand Standards

- Maintain consistency with University of Minnesota brand guidelines, including our logos, colors, and messaging.
- Ensure all content aligns with the brand identity and values set by the University.

Launch Your Content

Put all your work to good use and launch your new website. As your work progresses through its content lifecycle, adapt your plans accordingly.

Perform Final Checks before the Site Goes Live

- Verify the presence of a clear call-to-action in all relevant locations.
- Confirm that all links and forms function correctly.
- Double-check for meta descriptions and accessibility compliance where necessary.
- Check whether branding choices are still consistent with University guidelines.

Test with a Soft Launch

- Roll out new features gradually to test their design and gather some feedback.
- Respond promptly to early confusion or criticism.

- Discontinue ideas that aren’t performing well quietly, before promotional campaigns that generate additional buzz.

Measure Your Results

- Analyze your website’s performance against your key performance indicators (KPIs) to gauge its effectiveness.
    - Use this data to make informed decisions and optimize your content strategy.

Create a Maintenance Plan

- Develop a plan to regularly update and maintain your content relevance and accuracy.
- Schedule periodic review meetings and assign responsibilities for ongoing maintenance in between.

Apply Your Content Lifecycle

- Develop a comprehensive process for ongoing content creation, publication, review, and archiving.
- Ensure that each stage of your content lifecycle is clearly defined and effectively managed to maintain the highest quality standards.
- Regularly verify the accuracy and relevance of external sources to ensure your website is based on credible information.