

## Tame the Content Beast

How to give your buyers high-quality content without going insane

By [Kim Gusta](#)

Tech buyers are smart, savvy shoppers with no time to waste. The majority of them (79 percent) say the quality of the information you provide as a vendor significantly affects whether they'll do business with you ("What Your Prospects Want and Don't Want from You," *UBM TechWeb*, May 2012).

What they want and need is high-value content in order to make good buying decisions. And it's not a matter of doing quick-hit "checklist marketing"; it's about creating quality content that shows your company really understands your buyers' needs, challenges and responsibilities. You have to answer buyers' questions throughout the buying cycle in a helpful, sincere manner.

But high-quality content can't necessarily be created quickly, nor should it be. The good news is quality trumps quantity any day when it comes to content.

There are two key pieces of information to keep in mind. First, technology buyers state that 86 percent of vendor information doesn't meet their needs. That means there is an opportunity for high-tech companies that can deliver content that answers buyers' questions and addresses their concerns throughout the buying cycle. Second, there is a way to do this without dedicating your entire marketing team to crazy, last-minute content creation.

There are five steps to establishing a repeatable content-creation process that tames the content beast:

1. Find out what your buyers want
2. Inventory what you have
3. Create an editorial calendar
4. Apply economies of scale
5. Borrow/ask/steal for content ideas

If you follow these steps, content creation will become a planned, efficient process, and its demands will no longer overwhelm you or your organization.

### **Step 1: Find Out What Your Buyers Want**

"Your opinion, although interesting, is irrelevant." Those of you who've attended a Pragmatic Marketing class likely remember this humorous truth. It gently reminds us to take the time to do buyer research before creating a new product, developing

messaging or going to market with a new solution. It applies equally to content creation.

It's dangerous to assume what your buyers are interested in. The best course of action is to ask. Talk to your buyers and understand their problems. This is the differentiator that separates a company with so-so content from one that creates materials that truly resonate with buyers. Those who take the time to do their homework, talk to buyers and really understand their challenges will create high-quality content that buyers read, share and pass along to their colleagues and bosses.

To start the research process, consider asking your buyers questions such as these:

- What are your most important responsibilities?
- What are your top obstacles/problems?
- Why haven't you considered a product like ours?
- What alternatives do you believe will help?
- How does your boss measure your success?
- Where do you look for new information?

## **Step 2: Inventory What You Have**

It's my experience that most high-tech companies already have lots of content lurking on network drives, laptops or rarely visited web pages. Granted, much of this content might be out of date. But often there are jewels, even just a paragraph or two, in these existing pieces that can be repurposed. Creating content from scratch is almost always more work than editing something you already have.

The challenge, however, is getting your hands on all this existing content. You're probably aware of where bits and pieces reside, but unless your company has a great system for cataloging all content, you probably aren't aware of everything that's out there. That's why the next step is to inventory all your content.

It likely sounds daunting, but you'll save yourself an extraordinary amount of time by reusing existing content. Begin with a simple spreadsheet that lists key bits of information for each piece, including:

- File name
- Author/owner
- Type of content (white paper, video, case study, etc.)
- Target audience

- Sales cycle stage
- Where to find it
- Date created/updated
- Status (Current? Needs updating? Too old to salvage?)

### Sample Content-Inventory Tracker

	Document Name	Author	Type of Content	Audience	Sales Cycle Stage	Location	Date Created/ Updated	Status
<i>Instructions</i>	<i>Insert document's full name</i>	<i>Who wrote it? Note email and if author is outside the company.</i>	<i>What type of content is it? White paper, video, datasheet, etc.</i>	<i>Is content aimed at business or technical audience?</i>	<i>Note which sales cycle stages this content applies.</i>	<i>Where is it saved?</i>	<i>Date created and last updated</i>	<i>Does it need updating or is it current?</i>
<b>1.Example</b>	"How to Manage Multiple Product Launches and Still Hit Your Deadlines"	Kim Gusta <a href="mailto:kim@kimgusta.com">kim@kimgusta.com</a>	White paper	Business	Stage 3: Evaluating Solutions & Vendors	<a href="http://www.kimgusta.com/wp">www.kimgusta.com/wp</a>	Created: 3/11/11 Last updated: 4/15/11	7/5/11 by KG: Update "Resources" section with new website URLs
2.								
3.								
4.								
5.								
6.								
7.								
8.								

Once everything is inventoried, it's much easier to start repurposing content. You can also identify scraps of content to pull together and old content to delete. With inventory in hand, you'll save yourself a ton of work as you create content campaigns for a specific product or service.

### Step 3: Create an Editorial Calendar

Creating an editorial calendar is an important project management task that prevents last-minute scrambling. Essentially, it's a method for matching up planned content with delivery dates, authors, contingencies and more. You plan out upcoming campaigns, events and launches on the calendar and then fill in appropriate content for each.

The editorial calendar also ensures there are no content gaps, which can happen with an ad hoc approach. No more realizing in mid-April, "Oh no, we have nothing for the huge May trade show!" An editorial calendar forces you to think ahead and assign names to tasks. It's also a must-have tool for managing big events, such as product launches.

Your editorial calendar doesn't have to be anything fancy. Like the inventory tracker, it can be a simple spreadsheet. Make a note of any upcoming events

requiring content. List what content you'll create, when you'll create it and who's responsible for it.

### Sample Editorial Calendar

	<i>Existing or new?</i>	<i>Creation date</i>	<i>Go-live date</i>	<i>Expire date</i>	<i>Content home</i>	<i>Campaign(s)</i>	<i>Responsible parties</i>
"How to Install MagicWare" 3 minute video <i>[Example]</i>	Existing	5/12/11	5/19/11	7/1/11	kingusta.com/samples	Q2 Lead nurturing campaign	Content writer: Kim Video shooting/editing: Henry Production/posting to web: Henry Project mgmt.: Gloria

I recommend using your editorial calendar to plan at least three months in advance. Six to 12 months out is even better. Yes, there will be changes as new information needs are uncovered, unscheduled events arise or new topics emerge. But that's okay. By laying out everything on your calendar, you'll see how changes or additions impact other items, so you can make better planning decisions.

### Step 4: Think Economies of Scale

Many marketers make the mistake of starting from scratch every time they need to create a blog post, webinar, white paper or video. Don't make things more difficult than they need to be. In addition to saving time and effort by repurposing the content you already have, you should consider multiple ways to use a piece of content before you create it.

Improved time and work efficiencies aren't the only benefits of repurposing content. It also helps ensure consistency of messaging. Rather than pulling content from the air, your existing content keeps your messaging on track.

Deploying similar information in a variety of formats also helps you cater to the different learning styles and preferences of your buyers. Some people want to get their information from a white paper; others might prefer to watch a video. By repurposing content, you can address a wider audience with less work on your part.

Content expert Ardath Albee created the *Rule of 5*: Always think of at least five different ways to re-create a piece of content. Do this *before* you create the new piece. This will give you economies of scale and ensure that the new piece of content is truly reusable in multiple ways.

For example, let's say you plan to hold a webinar next month on system compliance. Let's apply the Rule of 5 here and create a short list of other types of content you could create from the webinar:

1. Create a blog series highlighting the five main topics discussed in the webinar. (Transcribe the webinar content so it's quick to write.)
2. Package the blog posts into an eBook or white paper and offer it to webinar attendees.
3. Re-create an image from a webinar slide as a stand-alone infographic and post it on social media.
4. Break the recorded webinar into short "teaser" video segments to post on YouTube or your website. Link each video segment to the archived full-length webinar.
5. Summarize how-to steps covered in the topic in a "getting started" or reference guide.

If you're finding it challenging to figure out five ways to repurpose a certain piece of content, consider it a red flag. The content might be too limited in scope or slightly off-topic. You're probably better off putting your efforts into a different piece.

### **Step 5: Borrow/Ask/Steal for Content Ideas**

In Steps 1 through 4, you set up a repeatable process for creating content easily. You'll likely want to assign these items to someone on your team to be sure they get the attention they deserve.

But no matter how well defined your process, you will sometimes run up against a blank wall when it comes to thinking up interesting content ideas. Here are some ideas on creating high-quality content that don't take a lot of time.

**Answer buyers' 50 most common questions.** Your own sales and marketing people are great sources of customer insight. In fact, anyone in your company who works with your buyers likely knows questions they commonly ask when considering your products or services.

Follow the lead of marketer Marcus Sheridan and bring your salespeople and marketers together in a room. Brainstorm at least 50 questions your buyers

commonly ask. Consider also including the “difficult questions” that most companies shun answering publicly, such as those regarding your pricing or how you compare to competitors. Then create content that answers these questions. If you address them in a series of blog posts, you’ll get great search engine results, as these are often topics buyers search for.

**Examine the sales cycle.** Digging deeper into your sales cycle is another great way to come up with new content. What do people want to know at each stage? Early in the sales cycle, they might seek broader information. “How are my peers solving challenges like this?” “Can your product do x?” Questions later in the sales cycle may be more specific: “How does it integrate with our CRM?” “What’s the installation process like?”

**Curate good content.** Fortunately, not all content you distribute needs to be created by your company. Buyers value quality external content too. You can quote an interesting research study by analysts in a blog post or highlight a great case study. As long as the content is useful to your buyers, consider sharing it (and, of course, giving credit where due).

It takes some up-front work, but your content creation process will become more efficient and strategic. You’ll end up with high-value content that resonates with your buyers and isn’t a load of work to create.

By finding out what your buyers want, conducting an inventory, creating an editorial calendar, repurposing your content and borrowing content ideas, you’ll establish a repeatable process and get that ravenous beast under control.

## About the Author

**Kim Gusta** has a lot of experience taming the cantankerous content beast—first as a corporate high-tech marketer and now as a seasoned copywriter and content expert for technology companies. She specializes in creating powerful content that persuades technology buyers to say yes and take the next step with your company. Her entire career has been in high-tech, including marketing-leadership roles at global companies such as Symantec. She offers free helpful resources for taming your content beast at <https://kimgusta.com/>.