



Marketer's Guide to Intel-Driven Content

How to use competitive intel
to get an unfair advantage in
your content marketing





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INTRODUCTION

It's not just "hard" to differentiate yourself through content marketing these days. It's *really* hard. Why? Because lots of marketing teams these days are producing white papers, eBooks, webinars, and infographics. Everyone has a blog. And being on Slideshare isn't unique... everyone has an account!

The only way to get real leverage and outsize results from your content marketing is to stand out. You've got to be faster, leaner, and more interesting than the competition. You've got to do things that are differentiated from others in your market.

Here's the key question: How can you be differentiated if you don't know what's happening in your market?

This guide will show you how to begin to shift toward an intel-driven content strategy that uses your competitor's efforts to your advantage. This guide will help you win. Let's go!

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Chapter One: Find the White Space



CHAPTER ONE: FIND THE WHITE SPACE

The whitespace means topics in your market that no one is covering. It means things on your prospects minds, questions they have, things they'd enjoy learning about, that haven't been covered yet. The whitespace is your holy grail as a content marketer. Here's how you find it.

You're going to start by making a complete inventory of the content your competitors have produced in the past month or quarter, and organizing it into topical themes. Or, you could tag each piece of content with multiple themes.





Content Types

Here are some of the most important content types you're going to want to inventory.



Review blog articles from the competition, and make sure you find all their blogs. Many companies have multiple blogs these days.



Find their podcast, if they have one. This is a rich source of content for many marketers.



Identify all the webinars your competitors have done recently, and make sure you find all the upcoming webinars as well.

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eBooks help you understand how they are covering longer-form content.



Video sites like YouTube are critical content sources to analyze.



Whitepapers are crucial to include in your content map, often containing deeper, more substantive topic coverage than other formats.

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Many companies include videos directly on the website.

Make sure you find these and incorporate them into your strategy.



Research reports are often more cutting edge and contain original or proprietary data.



How-to guides are an essential part of the content mix. Make sure you find all of these... they may be hiding in the help & support area of the website!

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Vimeo, similar to YouTube, is an important place to look for video content.



Don't forget about Slideshare! Find all the presentations, documents and other items posted to Slideshare. Make sure you find the corporate Slideshare account as well as the accounts for influencers and executives.



Infographics need to be identified and categorized as part of the equation.

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Content Types

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You'll want to find the recent newsletters from the competition, if they've issued any.



Check out what the company and it's execs are saying on Medium.

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It can be very time-consuming and arduous to gather all this data manually, so many teams will use a software platform like Crayon to produce the content inventory & whitespace reports.

Once your inventory is complete, you'll be able to assess which topics haven't been covered in sufficient depth, or which topics could use a fresh take from your perspective. You'll end up with a map that shows you just how to differentiate and win with your content marketing!





Chapter Two: Turbocharge Your Research



CHAPTER TWO: TURBOCHARGE YOUR RESEARCH

Let's say you've got a topic in mind, and you're ready to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) to start working on your masterpiece. The last thing you want to happen is you duplicate the content that's been published by a competitor recently! This would mute the impact of your work, and make it very unlikely you'll get much pickup from influencers, journalists and potential customers. Let's avoid that pitfall!





Search through your content inventory from Chapter One and see who has touched on your chosen topic recently.

Make sure you build on the content that's been published, or add to it. At the very least, be aware of it!

Sometimes a quick look at what's been done on a topic recently will be enough to either give you confidence that what you're doing is truly differentiated and worthy of your limited time, or it will indicate to you that with some tweaks or shifts in your approach, you can get to the white space you're hoping for.

Whatever you do, make sure you search your content map before you begin working on content on a given topic. It's a simple thing that is sure to increase your content marketing effectiveness.

Having a complete content inventory from your competitive set at your fingertips makes this research task take minutes, not hours or days. Once you have the data, you can research quickly and publish with confidence!

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Chapter Three: Find Your Influencers



CHAPTER THREE: FIND YOUR INFLUENCERS

When you're completing your content inventory, pay particular attention to the *who*, not just the *what*. That is, don't just look at the topics covered in a piece of content by your competitor, but look at who the influencers and people in your market are who are spreading and talking about that content online.

Sure, it can be hard to know who might have attended a competitor's webinar. But it's not hard to find out who liked their Slideshare presentation! It's not hard to know who has commented on their Medium posts, and who is subscribed to their YouTube channel.





Some of the most valuable data you can surface about the competition from a content marketing standpoint is who they are leveraging to get the word out. Where have they built important relationships that help tell their story and extend their reach?

You should make a list of people you need to build a relationship with to help spread your content. Looking at who the competition is engaging with is a good place to start, because these people are (1) interested in your space and (2) willing to be active content promoters online.

Don't fall into the trap of "if we write it, they will come". In fact, it's up to you to build a people-based engine for distributing and amplifying your content, and you can start by looking at the network your competition is using, because it's hidden in plain site.

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Chapter Four: What's In A Channel?



CHAPTER FOUR: WHAT'S IN A CHANNEL?

Your content strategy isn't just about the topics and who helps you spread the word. It's also critical that you analyze the channels your competition is using to publish content. It's increasingly likely that a company's website is only a small part of the content publishing mix. You've got to find it all!





You need to be differentiated in your content marketing... of course. But it might not be the topic that's your differentiator... It might be the format.

Is anyone in your market using Medium? Slideshare? Vimeo? Prezi? Does anyone have a podcast? Is anyone doing long-form content? Does anyone have a truly interesting Instagram account?

You should inventory all the formats being used among your competitive set to communicate – and pull in – new prospects from the market. There are likely some rich opportunities to differentiate your content strategy simply by choosing the right distribution channels and formats.



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CONCLUSION

It's your responsibility as a content marketer to be differentiated. How can you be differentiated if you don't know what the competition is doing?

We hope you'll use this guide to elevate the quality & diversity of content being produced in your market. Your prospects will thank you for it, and the ROI on your content marketing efforts will go through the roof!

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