

MEASURING *content*

The metrics you need, and the ones to ignore

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At this stage, most marketing teams know content is a vital part of an overall strategy.

The difficulty, however, comes with demonstrating the value of content. Unlike other services, you can't simply generate an excel sheet to get an overview of what's working and what's not.

Measuring content involves nuance, constant analysis, and creativity. Pulling the right metrics will help you put yourself in the position of your target audience and understand exactly why they are (or aren't) engaging with your content.

Creating content without smart measurement methodologies in place is similar to singing in an empty room, it doesn't matter how beautiful your voice is if no one can hear you.

In this e-book, we'll explore the best methods for measuring your content success. We'll recommend which metrics to focus on, what tools you should use, and how to improve your content based on what you discover.

**CREATING CONTENT WITHOUT SMART MEASUREMENT
METHODOLOGIES IN PLACE IS SIMILAR TO SINGING IN
AN EMPTY ROOM, IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW BEAUTIFUL
YOUR VOICE IS IF NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU.**



PURPOSEFUL CONTENT:

The first step of measurement

With every piece of content you create, it's essential to first consider what you want to achieve. This purpose will shape your overall content strategy into something that will help your company reach goals, rather than simply tick the content marketing box.

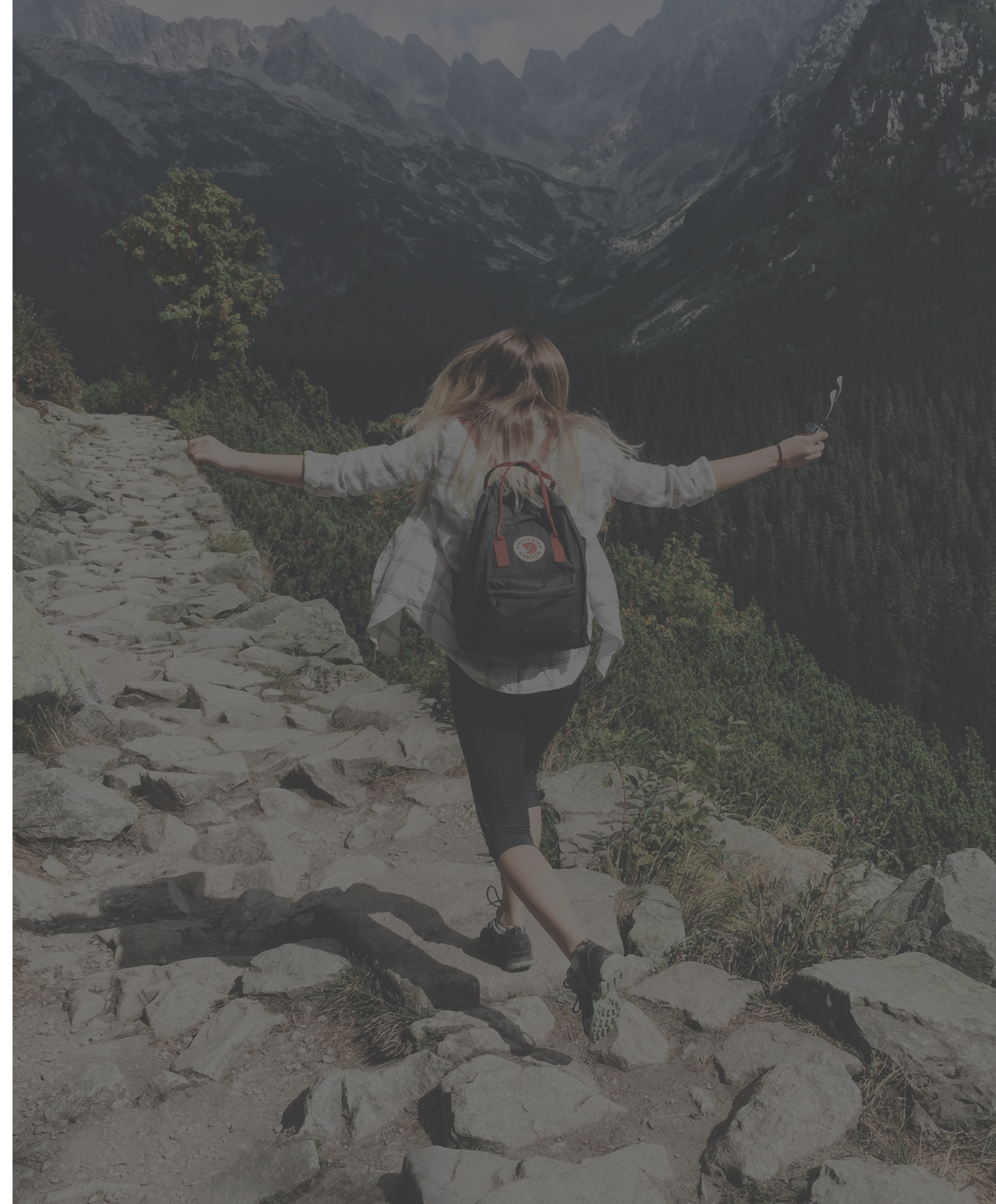
Less than half of B2B marketers¹ (44 per cent) can confidently say they are clear on what content marketing success or effectiveness actually looks like.



So having a goal and knowing when you reach it will already put you ahead of the pack.

There are countless goals you can achieve with content, but here are some of the most common to use as a starting point:

- Brand awareness
- Increased organic traffic
- Lead generation/conversion
- Improved search rankings
- Thought leadership
- Customer engagement



We'll explain each of these metrics and how to measure them, but for quick reference, we've created a quick cheat sheet to help:



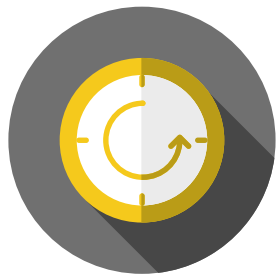
Brand Awareness

Social Impressions,
Social Reach, Social
Shares, Follower
Growth



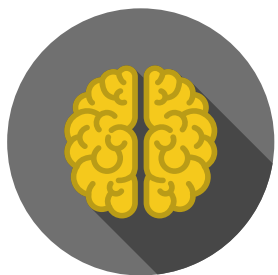
*Increased
Organic Traffic*

Page Visits,
Entrances, Organic
Traffic to Page



Lead Generation

Conversions, Goal
Completions,
Traffic Flow



Thought Leadership

Social Shares, Likes,
Follower Growth,
Referral Traffic



*Improved Search
Rankings*

Keyword Rankings,
Organic Traffic to
Page, Search Terms



Customer Engagement

Time on Page,
Bounce Rate,
Exit Rate

It's likely you want your content to achieve several (or all) of these goals, but having at least one primary goal for each piece of content will ensure you know what it is you should be measuring.

Once you know what you want to achieve, and what you need to track, it's time to determine which tools will help you track and measure.



GOOGLE ANALYTICS

The most valuable tool in the box

It probably comes as no surprise that Google Analytics (GA)² is the ultimate tool for measuring content. GA can give you the base metrics you need to track and measure content—other tools will help you build from there.

For most types of content, engagement is the most important metric. In fact, 72 per cent of those asked³ in a Content Marketing Institute survey said engaging content would be their top priority over the coming year. With such a spotlight on content creation, GA is vital in measuring progress across a number of metrics that can show you where your engagement sits.

Site visits/web traffic:

With 63 per cent of marketers⁴ using site visit figures to measure their success, these numbers should be factored in for any on-site content you create. By using GA to measure your traffic to content hosting pages, you can see how many people visit a page over a certain period of time (lifespan), and how many of those visitors are unique or new—which often translates to new potential customers. Overall page traffic can tell you a lot about your audience and your products, such as whether a particular product push is gaining more attention, whether your overall traffic is increasing due to content, and what content pieces most people are most interested in, to name a few. If there are pages that no one visits, these figures can highlight technical issues within your site, or at least tell you when a piece of content isn't grabbing people's attention.



Time on page:

Time on site may be a quantitative nugget of data, but it can offer real qualitative insights. If the time on site is very low, it means something about the piece of content isn't holding users' interest. The ideal time on site will depend on what sort of content is there.

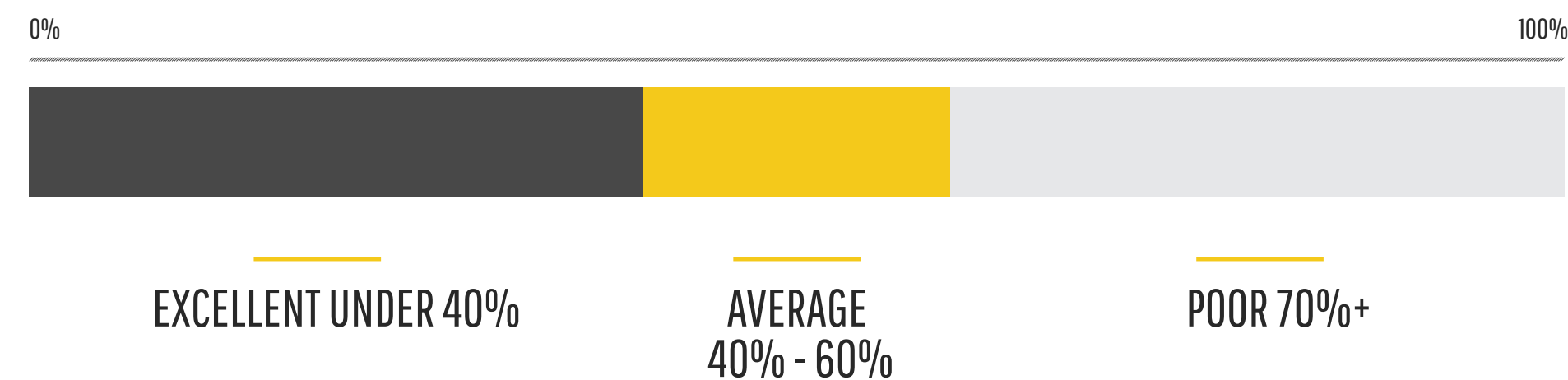
For video content, you want people to stay on the page at least long enough to watch the majority of the footage. For written content, it depends largely on the word count and the complexity of what's listed there.

One study suggests⁵ that 55 per cent of clicks lead to 15 seconds or less of time spent on the page, so if your reader is spending a minute or longer on a URL, you're probably doing something right.

Bounce rate:

The bounce rate is notoriously one of the most confusing metrics when it comes to measuring a piece of content's effectiveness. In short, this figure shows what percentage of viewers who land on a page navigate away without interacting with other content on the site.

For example, when you click on an interesting article on LinkedIn, read the article, and then immediately go back to Facebook, GA will count you as a bounce (no matter how long you spent on the page).



Up to 70 per cent still isn't much of a reason for concern, but if you're pushing past that figure you may need to assess the page to decipher why users are leaving so quickly.



Some portions of your site, like your Contact Us page or your blog, will have a higher bounce rate naturally. This is because people often start and finish their journey on a Contact Us page, or they come to a blog because they are enticed to read a specific article but perhaps not interested in seeing anything else.

That being said, if you have people on one engaging page, it's important to put other elements on that page (such as related articles) to encourage them to stick around, not bounce away.

Entrances:

An entrance is recorded when a visitor first comes to your site through a specific page. Any page can be an 'entrance', and from there a user may continue browsing other places in your site.

If GA is telling you a page logs a lot of entrances, it's a sign it's doing particularly well for a certain search term that brings users directly to that page (rather than your usual main page or other major landing pages). If other sites are linking directly to that page, or if you've promoted it on social, you can also see entrances spike—which is almost always a good thing.

Referral traffic:

Much like a real-life referral, in GA a referral occurs whenever another website directs a user to your page via a link. This could be someone sharing a link on Facebook (this would be counted as a social referral), or mentioning your site within a blog on their own page, for example. Unlike UTM parameters, referral traffic is not generated through links you create on your own.

Google Analytics helps you see who is sending the most traffic your way and how. If you are attempting to evaluate what third-party websites or social networks are most effective at driving eyeballs to your content, this is a vital metric.



Exits:

Are there certain pages on your site that GA shows as having a high number of 'exits'? As the name suggests, these pages are where users are clicking out of your site completely.

The difference between bounce rate and exit rate is nuanced. For a bounce rate, the page being viewed was the only one viewed in a session – meaning users landed on that page first, then left the page without doing anything else. The exit rate, however, is just the last page in the session – a user could have visited every single page on your site, but the last one they visited will be counted toward the exit rate. A high number of exits isn't always a bad thing, as no user will browse indefinitely.

However, if it's a landing page or other URL that should realistically be encouraging users to delve further into your site, a high exit rate would definitely be a bad sign.



SOCIAL METRICS

More than just cat videos

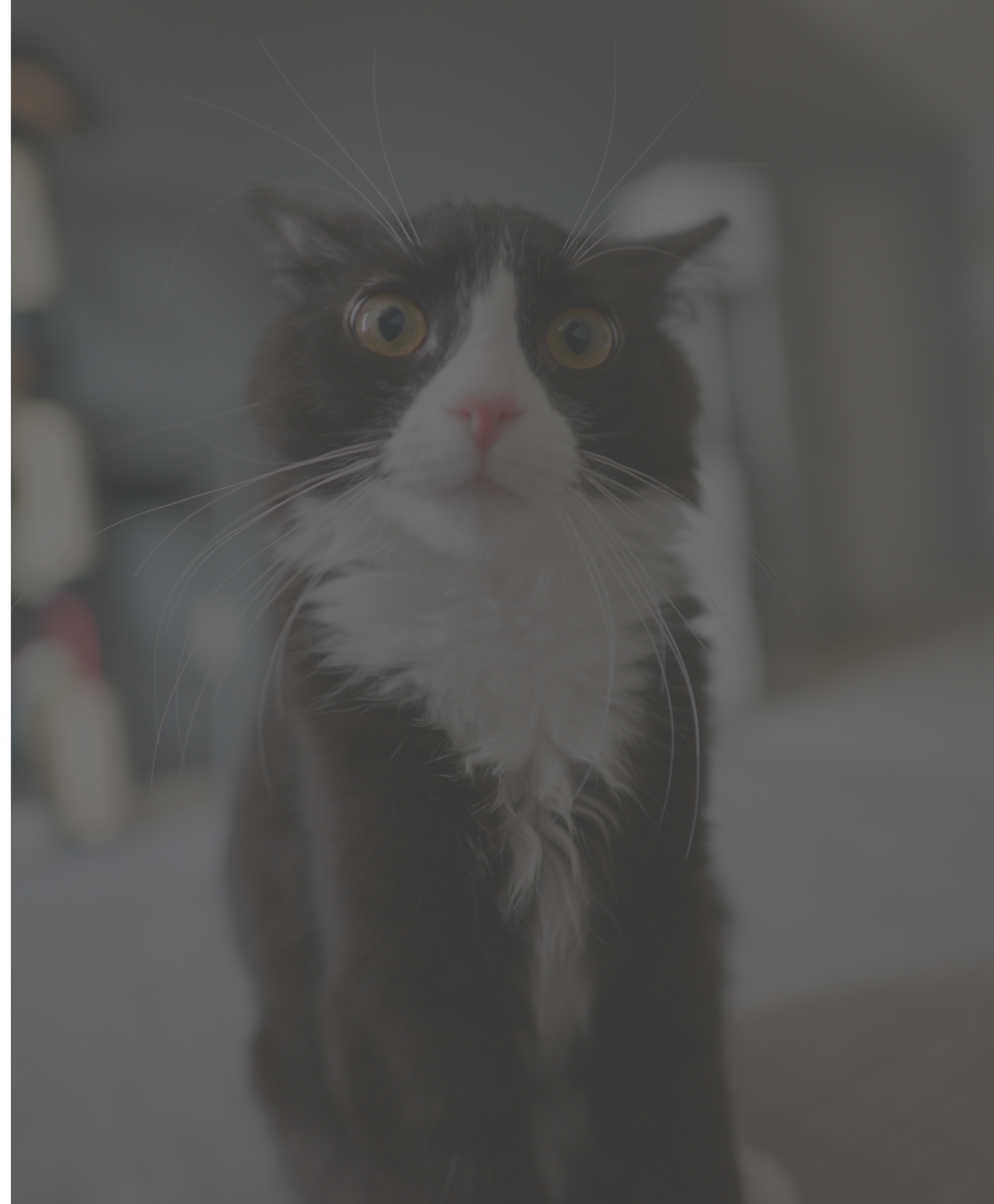
As soon as you add social media platforms to the mix, you're tapping into a smorgasbord of new and useful metrics.

While not all content should be shared on social (informational landing pages, for example, probably won't perform very well), there are certain content goals that are impossible to achieve without social: brand awareness and thought leadership.

Social media can also be an excellent way to drive overall traffic to your site via content. For content marketers looking for ways to test and analyze content, improve their brand awareness, or connect with new audiences, social media is a must.

**THERE ARE CERTAIN CONTENT GOALS THAT ARE
IMPOSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE WITHOUT SOCIAL:
BRAND AWARENESS AND THOUGHT LEADERSHIP.**

Social media metrics are one of the top five⁶ methods used by marketers to gage how their content is faring, what's popular, what gets the most engagement, and what helps create the all-important click-throughs these platforms can bring.



Facebook:

There are more than 1.1 billion active users⁷ on this platform every single day, with 16 million users in Australia alone.



THAT’S NEARLY 7 OUT OF EVERY 10 AUSTRALIANS.

The fact that companies can create pages and share content for free makes it one of the best social tools on the web.

There are many paid tools you can use to get a deep dive into your Facebook analytics—we use a number of them at Croud. However, if you don’t have enough engagement on social media or aren’t ready to commit to a paid service, there’s still much to be learned from the free Facebook Insights system. (To access this, you need to have an official business page. If you use paid advertising on Facebook, you can also use this tool to track the success of your boosted content.)



Facebook Insights allows you to divide your content by type (status update, video, photo, etc.), and the site will show you exactly how many people saw each one (reach), clicked on it, shared it, liked it, or followed any links within your post. You can even judge how unpopular a post was, as Facebook will show you if anyone hid the post from their timeline, hid all your posts, and even unfollowed you. With all those metrics put together, you can create an image of what your fans do and don’t like. Of course, you should also monitor comments from your followers for a more qualitative review of their reactions. (Certain tools can help you gauge “sentiment”, though this is still an imprecise science.)



Regardless of your fan base, there are plenty of tried and trusted guidelines for Facebook posting. For example, posts with relevant images generate as much as 94 per cent more views⁸ than those without. Generally speaking, afternoons (when people are starting to get bored of their day job and look for distractions) are the best times for Facebook posts⁹ – though you’ll also find early mornings before work and weekday evenings as people are winding down to be quite popular.



Twitter:

Twitter offers a hefty 313 million monthly users¹⁰, and, like Facebook, is free for companies to use to share content. Whenever you share something, the goal is to create likes, retweets, comments, and click-throughs. The challenge is that you only have 140 characters to reach your goals. Over time, Twitter has enhanced its own version of analytics, and it’s now easier than ever to track how well your Twitter content is doing, even if you don’t promote your tweets.

For example, Twitter allows you to see how many users have seen your Tweet – a metric known as ‘impressions’. This number may increase or decrease depending on the time of day you post, whether or not you include an image, which hashtags you incorporate, and how many followers you have overall. Twitter’s analytics section¹¹ takes this even further by offering a range of metrics on your profile, including your top Tweets, top followers, profile visits and new followers, which can all further help you measure your successes and create more content that your fans will love.

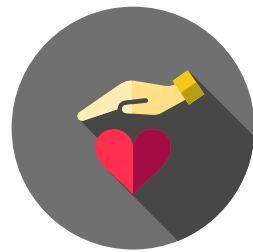
If you’re already getting good traction on Twitter, it can be useful to track your follower growth over time. This metric can show you that not only is your content pleasing to your current base of followers, but that it’s reaching new audiences—something that’s vital for businesses trying to grow their customer base.



Instagram:

Instagram is the photo sharing platform du jour with more than 600 million active monthly users¹², and while it may be a little limited in the analytics department, there are still certain tools you can use to measure metrics.

What to measure on Instagram:



Comments & Likes Received



New & Lost Followers



Hashtag Engagement



Engagement per Follower



As of yet, the primarily mobile site doesn't offer its own metric-measurement section like Facebook and Twitter, but there are programs that will do it for you instead. Our favourite by far is Iconosquare¹³. (It is in fact what Croud uses to help clients understand their Instagram metrics.) This tool allows you to monitor follower numbers, follower locations geographically, post performance including likes and comments, most successful posts, hashtag performance, and more. Iconosquare recently moved from a free beta testing platform to a fully paid service, which speaks to its success and usability.

If you aren't ready to pay for a platform, the best thing to do is to manually track your likes, comments, and follower growth. Look for patterns that show how content is performing---do your users like text on imagery, for example? Are they more likely to engage when your image description includes a question or particular hashtag?

Every time you post, record the number of followers, and check how that number fluctuates over the next few days. If you see the follower number spike or plummet following a post, consider what about the photo may have led to that change.



BEYOND MEASUREMENT

Putting the metrics to good use

So you've created content, measured it with a range of tools, and have stacks of metrics in front of you. Now what?

Try asking yourself these questions to determine if your content is hard at work – or hardly working.

1. Is my content achieving what it is meant to achieve?

This one is simple – is your content hitting the goals and targets you set for them during the planning?

If so, great, but don't stop there. Look at the types of content that are succeeding the most, and find ways to promote them further. Both Facebook and Twitter offer options to boost your posts for a charge, or you can try EDMs, services like outbrain, or influencer marketing projects to help spread the word.

Also look further than just your goals. Are there things your content is achieving that you hadn't planned for? For example, was that article intended to grow your fan base instead helping you rank for a specific keyword? Take all those metrics, weigh them up, then make a decision about whether you want to change the article, write something else to hit your original goal, or even write more like it for more keyword growth.

2. What's not working?

Measuring your metrics may be able to tell you when something isn't working, but it can't always tell you exactly why or how to fix it. This part is up to you or your digital marketing agency to analyse and fix. It will largely depend on your goals and the type of content you're creating, but here are a few of the most common problems:



Bounce rate: If your bounce rate is up around the 70 per cent mark or higher, there is a problem. In short, a bounce rate generally occurs when a browser clicks a link and one of two things happen:

- They don't like or need what they find there (this is indicated by a low time on page)
- They like what they find, and spend time on page engaging with it, but then don't feel compelled to visit anything else on your site (indicated by high exit rate)

In the first scenario, it's important to analyse what exactly is driving people away. Is there not enough information listed, or is that information hard to find? Is the headline/link pointing to the page misleading? Is the page hard to look at visually due to small text, poor graphics, or other aesthetic issues?

In the second scenario, consider whether the page is actually intended to drive people elsewhere on the site. If the next step after reaching that page is to contact you or move to another domain, then the exit rate may not be a bad thing. If you do want them to continue engaging on the same domain, find ways to make it easy for the user to travel to new content. Do this with links throughout the content, or sidebar links to popular and related articles/pages.

Social reach:

If your posts across social media are not hitting the audience numbers you're after, there are a few avenues you can take. First, is the content itself up to scratch? Take a look at what followers are saying when they share or comment on it. Compare it to other pieces that have done well (both your own and that of competitors) – are there any major differences? Consider the times of day you are posting and experiment with different moments to see which ones work best for the platform. If everything else seems fine, you may need to try boosting it with paid promotion just so more people can see it. And remember, a high volume of followers/fans is essential for social success, so you may want to implement a follower growth programme like those we offer at Croud to make sure your audience is big enough from the start.



Traffic jams:

If you're not pulling in the organic traffic you want, it's often down to an issue with the mix of strong keyword research and informative, engaging content. Getting both right is a tough ask, as it demands two very different skillsets—you need both strong content analysis as well as a technical review from an SEO expert. It's also why many people use professional content marketing agencies, which offer departments in both areas to expertly meet the needs of both requirements. Croud SEO and Content work side by side on a daily basis, as this is vital to successfully create and analyse traffic flow to our clients' sites.

3. What's next?

Like any department within your company, the work doesn't stop once you've reached your target. Perhaps you take a moment to celebrate and enjoy the success, but next comes the task of setting new benchmarks, planning and preparing, then working to carry them out.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Using metrics to measure your content may be challenging, but it's also vital to a good marketing strategy.

Anyone can follow a few simple tips to help improve their own goals, metric measurements and strategies, so long as you're willing to invest the time and effort. After all, a massive 91 per cent of the top performers¹⁴ in content marketing are those who are very or extremely committed to the cause. Unless you're confident in your ability to create strong strategies and content, an agency may be your best bet. At Croud, our content experts live and breathe metrics every day. Our time is spent generating reports, creating and measuring content, and nurturing success – and you can't get much more commitment than that.

Put yourself in the position of your target audience and understand exactly why they are (or aren't) engaging with your content.

Creating content without smart measurement methodologies in place is similar to singing in an empty room, it doesn't matter how beautiful your voice is if no one can hear you.

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FOOTNOTES & SOURCES

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A person in silhouette is running across a polished, reflective floor in a modern building. Large glass windows in the background show a view of trees and a clear sky. The word "croud" is overlaid in large white lowercase letters, with a short yellow horizontal line under the letter 'u'.

croud

For more help and advice on measuring your content, please
get in touch on 02 8937 3543 or at hello@croud.com.au.