CONTENT MATTERS – A PORTENT SERIES

Plug & Play Content Strategy

Exercises to Plan Killer Content

By Augustin Kendall

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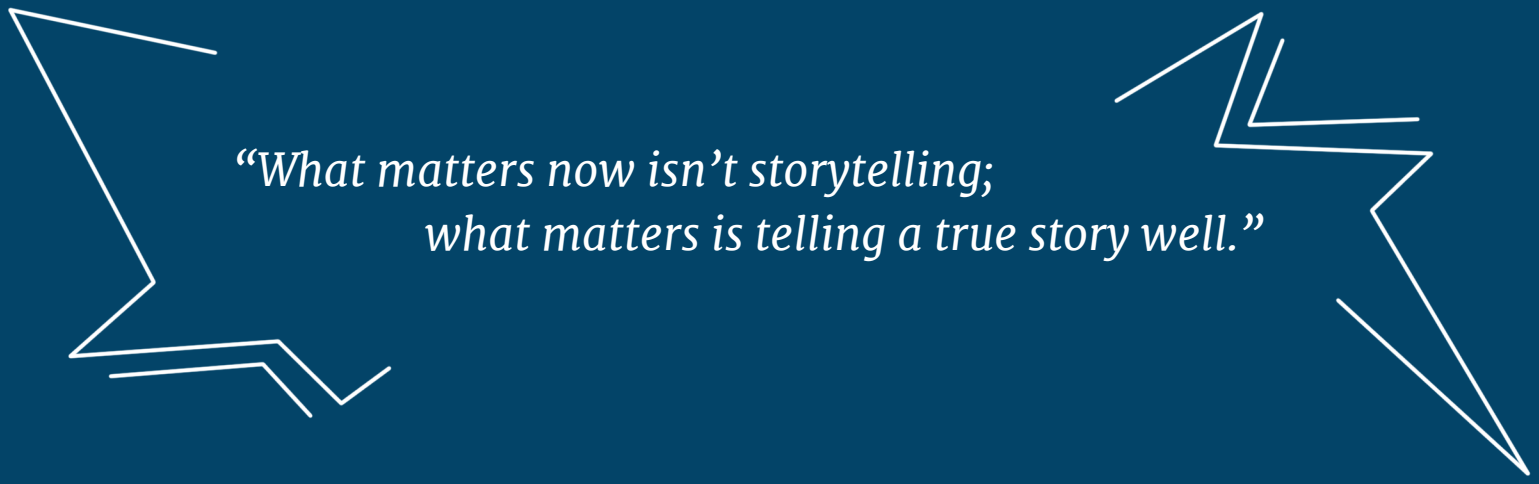

"What matters now isn't storytelling;
what matters is telling a true story well."

Ann Handley, Chief Content Officer of MarketingProfs
and Author of *Everybody Writes*

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Introduction

Content strategy is important. This is the assumption we start with here. If you're not on board yet, I've got nothing for you. Just kidding. Even if you aren't totally sold on content strategy, you know that some of its elements are important to success. Understanding your goals, your audiences, the competitive landscape, and your brand identity helps you do whatever it is you do better. Right? This is content strategy.

Content strategy is important, but it doesn't have to cost you an arm and a leg to get into the game. With plug & play content strategy, learn how to build a strong foundation to support your efforts as you grow.

If you need to improve how you do content and you can't budget a major strategy, this book is for you. Developing a strategic plan for content takes more than an hour, but it doesn't have to take multiple months, either.

Content strategy is also quite academic, sometimes. Quite abstract. It will help you, but it's not the most accessible practice. This ebook helps make it accessible.

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Below is a list of what a complete content strategy looks like. Thoughout this ebook, we'll give you exercises to work through the highlighted items on the list. We call it **Plug & Play Content Strategy** because you can, by following along and doing the work, create a good foundation for your content.

- Defining goals
- User research
- Persona development
- SWOT analysis
- Competitive analysis
- Content inventory
- Content audit
- Content modeling
- Brand, voice, and tone guidelines
- Content creation
- Editorial calendaring

Do just these items compose a complete strategy? No. But it's a strategy for the real world, taking into account your resources, constraints, and your need to get going soon with some sense of what to say, how to say it, and when to promote it to better reach your audiences.

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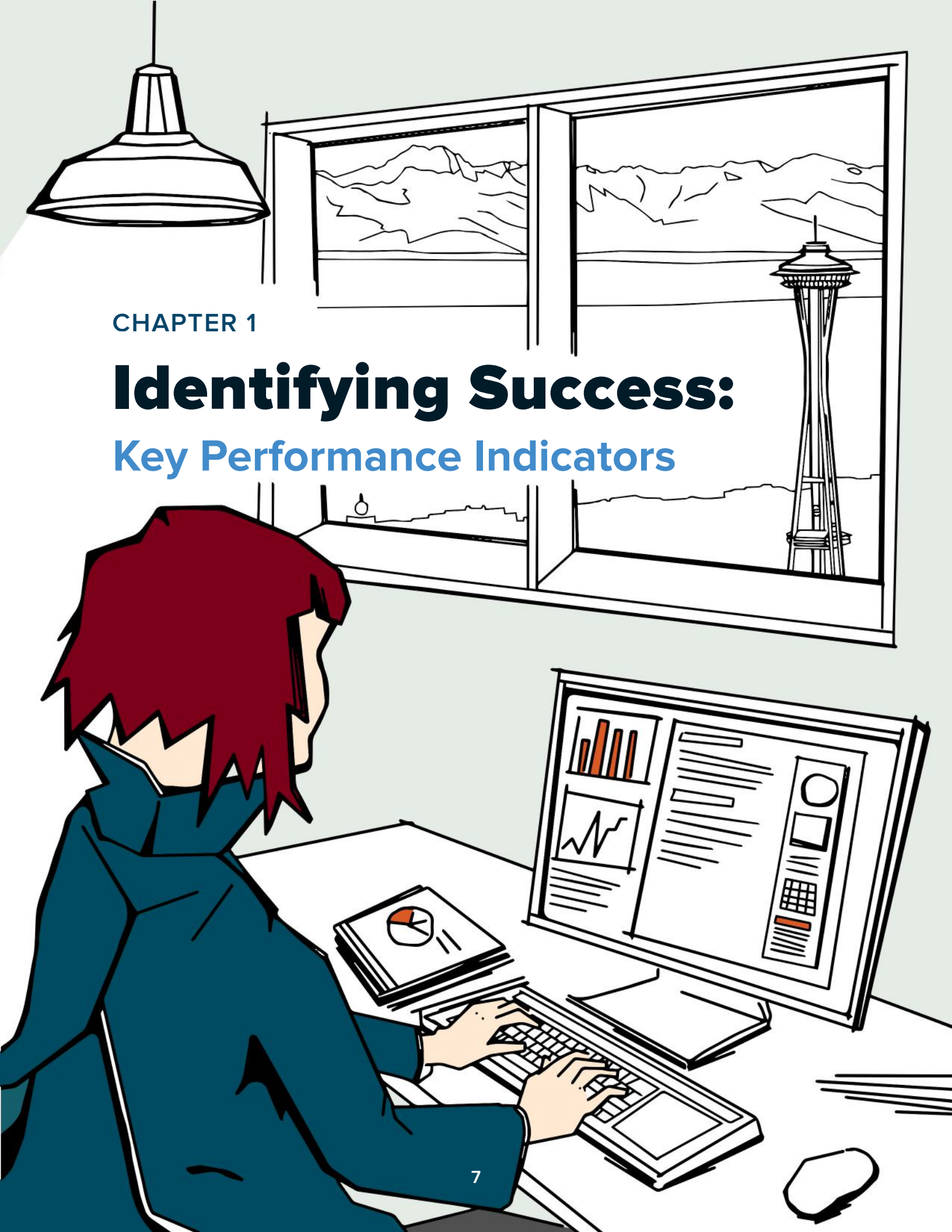
CHAPTER 1

Identifying Success:

Key Performance Indicators



CHAPTER 1

Identifying Success:
Key Performance Indicators

Let's start with key performance indicators (KPIs). These are critical. Operating without KPIs is flying blind. You probably already have these for your business, but many people jump into content without considering KPIs for these specific efforts.

Avinash Kaushik identifies the traits of a good KPI as:

- Simple
- Relevant
- Timely
- Instantly useful

Key Performance Indicator (KPI)

> *A key performance indicator is a number. It quantifies the success of a goal, or of qualitative performance.*
>
> *For example, if you want people to fill out your contact form, the number of form completions over some period of time (usually monthly) is your KPI.*

It can be hard to sort out the most important KPIs and metrics from all your possible metrics. Exercise 1, ***Choosing Your KPIs***, will help you.

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Choosing Your KPIs

In this exercise, you're going to figure out some KPIs, or measurements of the goals you're trying to achieve. Basically, you're quantifying your business goals so you can measure success. There are many options, so this exercise will help you identify the ones that matter most to your business and the content you produce. Let's get started.

Write down five short-term goals.

Example: Increase lead form completions by 25%.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Write down five long-term goals.

Example: Hit first-page rankings for 5 primary informational pages.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

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Write down ten behaviors you want your audience to take as a result of consuming your content.

Example: Submit a form for more information.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Now, evaluate each of those behaviors against your goals. Does it directly relate to a goal? If it does, keep it. If it doesn't, cross it out.

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Which behaviors most directly support your short-term and long-term goals? Choose three to five and write them in the first column. Remember the four features of a KPI—simple, relevant, timely, and useful.

The hard part is over. Now you just have to identify metrics that measure each of these behaviors. Write these in the second column.

Behavior	Metric
Becoming a user	*Account signup*
Referring	*Inviting friends via website link*
Customer retention	*A second purchase*

With these metrics in hand, you're ready to start measuring your content. Create baselines by collecting measures for the past three months. You'll use those numbers to set new goals and evaluate your future performance.

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Metrics are different for B2B, B2C, service, SaaS, online only, hybrid online and brick-and-mortar, and other types of companies. We'd love to give you a list of behaviors and metrics to use, but there are too many variables specific to your business for us to do that.

> *"There is no content strategy without measurement strategy. Before embarking on a content initiative, irrespective of medium or platform, it's important to know what you want to achieve."*
>
> Rebecca Lieb, Principal, Conglomotron LLC

But we *can* give you the ***Choosing Your KPIs*** exercise, which should have helped you identify the metrics you need to measure. In the next chapter, you'll work on better understanding your audience so you know how to convince them to take some of the actions you just identified.

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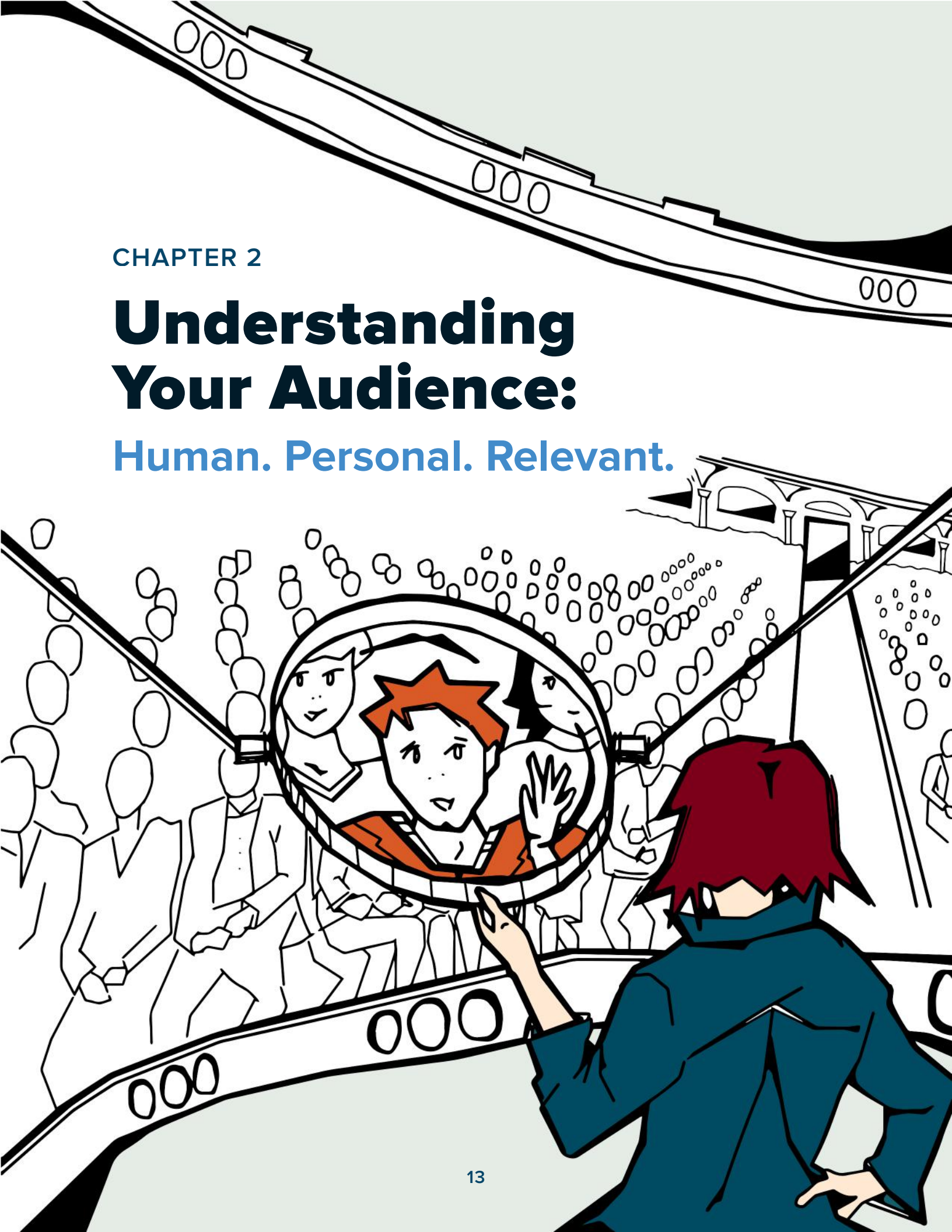
CHAPTER 2

Understanding Your Audience:

Human. Personal. Relevant.



CHAPTER 2

Understanding Your Audience:
Human. Personal. Relevant.

If you don't already have personas, do the work to create those before you complete this exercise. But isn't creating personas part of content strategy, you say? It sure is. It's also more complex than an exercise can tackle.

Need guidance? Check out our post, Creating Great Personas. While not exhaustive, that article will get you started. We recommend some user research in addition to what's laid out there.

Buyer Persona

> *Hubspot defines a buyer personas as, "a semi-fictional representation of your ideal customer based on market research and real data about your existing customers." Hubspot is pretty smart about marketing, so we'll go with their definition.*

Don't stop there, though. Once you have personas, get into their heads with this empathy map exercise. It'll give you insight that the words on the page just can't. The goal is to **figure out how to better connect with your customers** by focusing on the messages they're exposed to and what they think about in their day-to-day lives.

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Empathy Map

This exercise will help you think like a customer so you can focus on what your audience cares about, not what you care about, when creating content. Writing about what they care about is the best way to capture and keep their attention.

We're going old-school for this—set up on a whiteboard or giant paper pad. (If you don't have access to this, print out the next page and jot down notes.) Draw a big circle and divide it into six sections. Label each one: thinking, feeling, hearing, seeing, saying, doing. Put the name, age, and job title/role of your persona above it.

Now fill in the spaces.

- What is this person thinking about every day?
- What are they feeling?
- What are they hearing (from friends, colleagues, the media)?
- What are they seeing (media, events)?
- What are they talking about (to friends, colleagues, family)?
- What are they doing with their days, evenings, and weekends?

Answer these questions as they relate to your persona, not just your topic. Remember that this person is not focused on your specific messaging all day long. By imagining what else they are thinking, feeling, and so on, you might find ways to connect with them beyond your immediate subject matter that are still relevant to your business.

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Name: _____ Age: _____

Role: _____

Doing	Thinking	Feeling
Talking To	Seeing	*Example: People want quotes on the spot* Hearing

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Personas are necessary, but seeing the information on the page about your target customer only gets you so far. The whole point of a persona is to understand your customers, and **the best way to understand them is to put yourself in their shoes**.

If you don't have personas to work with, creating an empathy map is even more valuable. In lieu of a developed persona, this exercise will give you insight you wouldn't have otherwise. Use your new knowledge to create better messaging, choose content topics your customers care about, and inform your customer service content.

> *"Great marketers have immense empathy for their audience. They can put themselves in their shoes, live their lives, feel what they feel, go where they go, and respond how they'd respond. That empathy comes out in content that resonates with your audience."*
>
> Rand Fishkin, Wizard of Moz, Moz

Maybe you discovered that your company has been writing about how to use your service, but your customers are thinking about why they should use your service and hearing about all your competitors. Now you know you need to develop content around those concerns.

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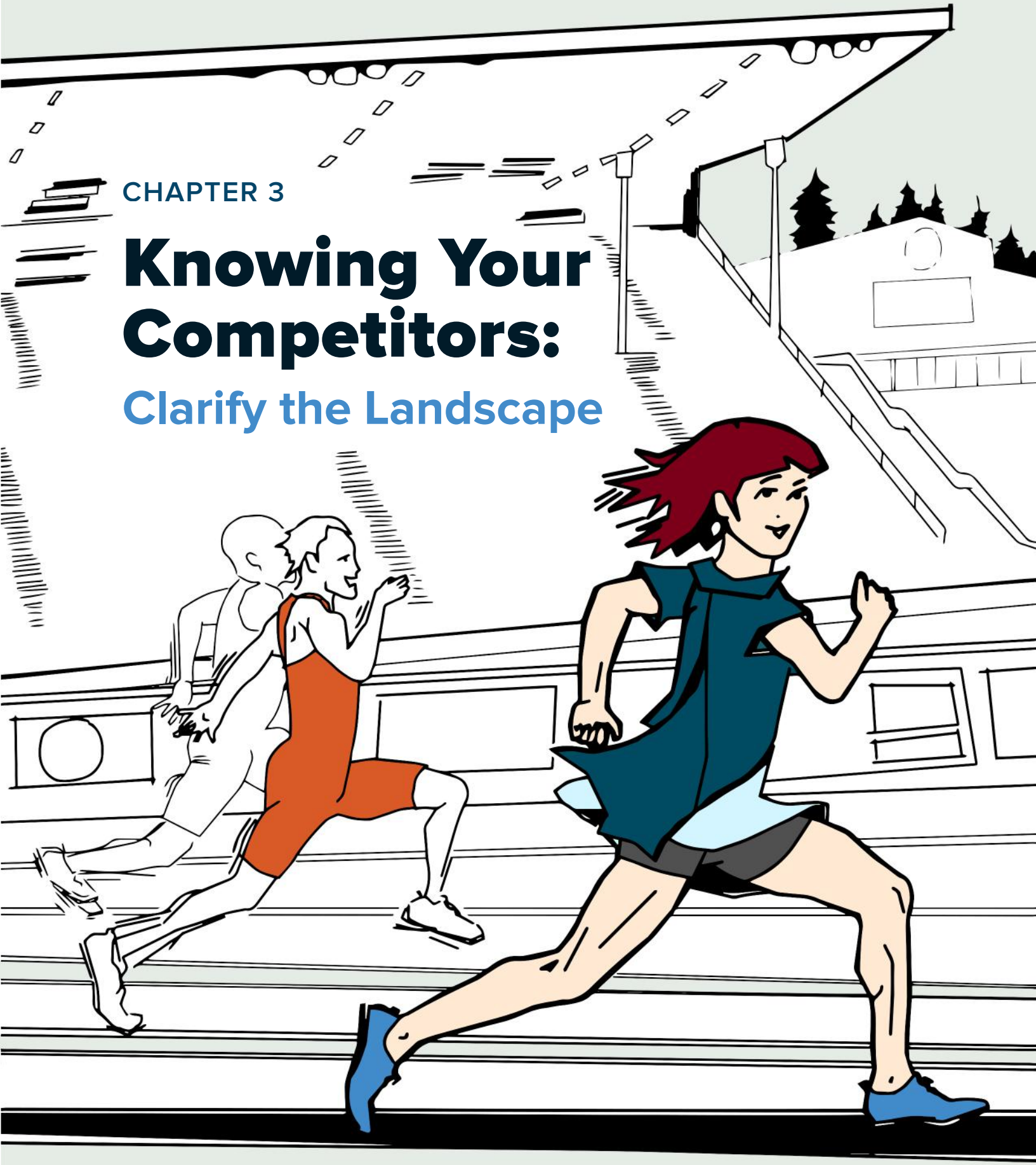
CHAPTER 3

Knowing Your Competitors:

Clarify the Landscape



CHAPTER 3

Knowing Your Competitors:
Clarify the Landscape

A thorough competitive analysis involves looking closely at your main competitors' target markets, market share, marketing strategies, product / service offerings, strengths, weaknesses, and overall strategy. This takes time.

Competitive Analysis

> *Similar to a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis, a competitive analysis is a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of your competitors to get a clear picture of how your own company's performance compares. You can do this for only your direct competitors, or for indirect competitors, depending on your priorities.*

However, you can do a quick competitive analysis by checking out how your competitors (three is a good number) are performing on the SERPs and social media, as well as taking a good look at their websites. The next three exercises will help you put together a snapshot of what you're up against so you can identify your differentiators and opportunities.

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Keyword Ranking

Let's start with search results. Choose your top three keywords. Enter these, one by one, in a Google search (be sure to do this in incognito mode). Note in the table below the position in which you show up, as well as where your competitors appear. For instance, if you're the fourth organic result (remember to skip the ads) for the term "SSD cloud hosting," put a 4 under your name.

Keyword	You	Competitor 1	2	3
Example: PPC advertising	*1*	*2*	*8*	*16*

Now you know how well you're doing compared to your competitors in search. Homing in on the core of your content efforts by looking at the terms most important to your audience cuts out distraction from typical keyword tracking that sometimes produces an overwhelming amount of data.

You might discover you need to focus more on one of most important concepts to your audience and your business, or perhaps it's time to update your keywords entirely (nothing in marketing strategy is set-it-and-forget-it).

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Ranking is important, but we've seen businesses get too caught up in a numbers game and forget that engagement with their brand and their site content is as important. They forget that **ranking and SEO are about more than targeting the right keywords**. They're also about how useful the content you publish is and how much people engage with it.

Google is notoriously oblique about the specific ranking factors they consider, but SEO experts theorize that dwell time—the time that elapses between a user clicking on your site and going back to the search results page—is likely in the mix. There's no way to see dwell time metrics in Google Analytics (GA). That doesn't mean Google doesn't look at the numbers.

Ranking matters. So does engagement. Your website analytics help you measure engagement. You're likely using some metrics from GA for the KPIs you set in the first exercise. The other place your audience engages with your brand—if you're doing it right—is on social media. Let's take a look at how you and your competitors are performing there.

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Social Media Stats

In this exercise, you'll compare how often people respond to your social media activity with how often they respond to your competitors on the primary channels: Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. If one of these channels isn't relevant to you, skip it. Visit each competitor's Facebook, Twitter, and Linkedin pages. Look at the activity on each.

Facebook: What's the average engagement (this includes reactions, comments, and shares) for the 10 most recent posts? How about clicks?

Twitter: How many average retweets for the 10 most recent tweets? How about likes?

LinkedIn: What is the average engagement (likes, comments, and shares) on their 10 most recent posts? Do they post full articles to the site? How often do they update?

Remember to take averages, not just the total numbers.

Metric	You	Competitor 1	2	3
Facebook engagement				
Facebook clicks				
Twitter retweets				
Twitter likes				
LinkedIn engagement				
LinkedIn: full articles shared?				
LinkedIn: update frequency?				

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The ***Social Media Stats*** exercise will help you understand how well you do on social media compared to your competitors, but it won't tell you why.

Consider:

When you publish.
Maybe your audience is on Facebook in the evening but you publish updates in the morning.

What you publish.
Is it interesting, or is it a company update? (No one cares about your company updates other than the people who work for your company.)

The overall reputation of your company.
If your brand isn't considered trustworthy, people are less likely to engage on social. If it is, they're more likely.

These numbers are only as important as you need them to be. Different brands value social media in different ways. If you have a visual product, Pinterest may matter more than any of these three. If you're a B2B, LinkedIn is probably your focus. If you're developing your customer service, Twitter may be of particular interest to you.

Now you've looked at search engine performance and engagement on social media. The Social Media Stats exercise focused on numbers, but don't discount a thoughtful comment or two from prospective or current customers. These can be as valuable as dozens of shares with no personal touch.

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If you find that your competitors consistently do better than you on social media, it's time to ask yourself some questions:

- What's my goal with this channel?
- What does my audience want to do when they use this channel?
- Is my audience even on the same channel(s) I invest time in?
- Am I using CTAs?
- Am I pushing my brand offerings, or am I talking about interesting ideas?

It may be you need to update your approach to social media.

There's a qualitative element to competitive analysis, too. The way a site feels to users goes a long way in establishing credibility and usefulness. In this next exercise you'll evaluate your competitors' sites and your own from the perspective of a user.

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Website Performance

It's important to look at the competition's sites. It's as important to look at your own. Chances are, you don't spend a ton of time on your company's website. If that's true, you're missing a big opportunity to understand how your brand presents itself to potential customers.

Use the same three competitors you chose for the ***Keyword Ranking*** exercise. Spend half an hour on each site, and note the following:

- How long did the site take to load? (Use Pingdom's free tool to check this.)
- What's the main navigation at the top of the page?
- Pick a goal, such as contacting customer service. How easy is it to complete? How many clicks did it take?
- What are they offering that you aren't?
- What are they offering that you are, too?
- Are their prices higher or lower than yours?
- What are the main messages and tones they're using?
- Beyond the main product / services pages, what kind of content do they have?

Once you're done with your competitors' sites, answer these questions for your own site. Don't just fill in your answers based on what you expect. Take the time to look at your site through new eyes. Note what you find for each site in the chart on the following page, like this example:

Competitor 1: *Example Site*
• Load time 1.21 s. faster than 86% of tested sites *• Mobile-first design* *• Big banner advertising upcoming event, then banner showing featured article* *• To contact: one click in side nav takes me to contact form page, 6 fields in form* *• Slide-in box in bottom right corner asking me what topics I want them to write about—this is cool* *• Really hard to figure out what services they offer – they seem to be positioning themselves as an educational site* *• Mild scare / urgency approach to copy on site*

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Competitor 1:
Competitor 2:
Competitor 3:
Your Site:

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Now that you've done these three exercises, you have a decent snapshot of how you stand up to your competitors. Combined with your KPIs and your persona insights, you can use this information to focus your marketing efforts.

> *"Too often, feeling intimidated becomes our excuse not to be awesome."*
>
> Scott Stratten, President, UnMarketing

For instance, if you know a key portion of your audience gets their news from social sites, but your competitors are doing better on Facebook and LinkedIn, you know you need to devote resources to boosting your presence and engagement there. If you're looking to increase web conversions, comparing how smooth the navigation is on your competitor sites to your own might give you something new to work on. Are you trying to become known for a specific subject or product? Pay attention to how often you post about the topic on social media and how much you write about it on your site.

Keep in mind, this analysis is not about imitating competitors. It's about finding out where they have an edge and what they're not doing (or doing wrong) and finding ways to take that edge away and start providing the content most relevant to your particular niche in your field.

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CHAPTER 4

Knowing Yourself:

Company Voice & Tone

CHAPTER 4

Knowing Yourself:
Company Voice & Tone

If you already have voice and tone guidelines, great! But many people come to us wanting to do content without this essential piece. Some people even think it's fine to skip over entirely, but take it from us: it's not. When clients have been producing content without voice and tone guidelines, they arrive at a point when they realize their content is not focused enough, or not on-brand enough, and accept the inevitable need.

The first two exercises in this chapter will help you pinpoint your company's voice and preferred tones. When doing the ***Brand Voice Madlibs*** and the ***Tone of Voice Dimension*** exercises, keep in mind that your choices are a reflection of both how you think your brand communicates now and how you want it to communicate in the future. Sometimes these guidelines are aspirational. That's okay.

Once you've done those, you'll be ready to fill out the provided template with example sentences to complete voice guidelines everyone creating content for your company can use.

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Brand Voice Madlibs

The sentences below reflect both the experience audiences have of your brand and the intention your company has in presenting your brand.

You'll first choose 13 words, then go through a couple of steps to cut them down to the most important concepts. Start by filling in the blanks:

My brand makes people feel _____.
Example: excited

If a loyal customer described my brand in one word, it would be _____.
Example: reliable

If a potential customer described my brand in one word, it would be _____.
Example: professional

Interacting with my brand encourages people to _____.
Example: take charge

Two words that describe the mission and purpose of my brand are: _____ and _____. Look at your company mission and vision statements, if you have them, to choose these words.
Example: empower and redefine

Right now, my brand is _____, _____, and _____.
Example: fun, simple, and experimental

I want my brand to be _____, _____, and _____.
Example: sharp, daring, and clever

I don't want my brand to be _____.
Example: rigid

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Next, copy the first 12 words onto note cards (1 word per card). Compare them against the 13th word to see if any are similar. If they are, remove them from the stack.

Look at all your note cards and group similar words, either by meaning, or by what area of your business they describe. Create three groups. Once you have your groups, choose the word that most embodies the meaning of that group. (Or find a synonym that does it better. Powerthesaurus.org is your friend.) Now you have three words you can use to describe your brand. Next we'll consider how you create personality.

Notes

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EXERCISE 7

SHEET 1 OF 1

Tone of Voice Dimensions

Identifying tones you can use in different types of content gives you a three-dimensional personality in every channel. For instance, maybe you're casual on social media but respectful in your customer service content. Tone applies to all the content you publish, everywhere you publish it, not just your site content.

For each of the four dimensions below, mark your brand somewhere between the two poles.

To make this as accurate as possible, don't just sit down and take a guess. Read through content you've produced for different channels—your product or services pages, your educational / resource content, emails you send to your customers. Talk to your colleagues, especially the marketing and sales teams. Do your best to catalog what's already there and choose your location on each dimension based on that and on how you hope to sound.

Funny — Serious

Formal — Casual

Respectful — Irreverent

Enthusiastic — Matter-of-fact

Considering tone adds more nuance to your content. You'll combine the voice words you chose and the tones you identified in the next exercise.

This exercise is based on work by Nielsen Norman Group on tone of voice words.

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Voice Guidelines

Now that you have three words to describe your brand and four dimensions with which to think about your tone, complete this template by creating example text (good and bad) for each of the concepts.

This works best if you find examples of existing content on your site, in a newsletter, or somewhere else that need to be improved upon. Next to "Voice," write one of your three voice words. When writing your good example text, choose one or more of the tones you identified in the previous exercise.

Voice: *Daring*		
This	Not This	Why
You're going to hurt your PPC performance by optimizing too much, too fast.	*I'm going to tell you something that's a little counterintuitive: you may be hurting your AdWords or general PPC performance by optimizing all the time.*	*Don't hint or hedge, just say it. You know it's going to be a surprising statement, but you start strong. (This is more on the casual and matter-of-fact end than the formal and enthusiastic end.)*

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Voice:		
This	Not This	Why

Voice:		
This	Not This	Why

Voice:		
This	Not This	Why

Compile your voice words, tone dimensions, and the examples in this template into a simple document and give it to anyone creating written content for your brand.

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Brand voice is one of the best ways to differentiate yourself from competitors and build connections with your audiences. On social, having a distinct voice will get you more attention. On your website, your voice makes all the difference between being a business entity and a bunch of people who care about the same thing: your product. Consumers don't want to buy from the business entity, they want to buy from the people.

> *"In a sea of mediocre content, a brave tone can be a big differentiator."*
>
> Ann Handley

Customers also want to know what to expect. If you're formal about your product in descriptive content and casual in customer service content, they may not trust your customer service. If you're sometimes irreverent and sometimes respectful in your social media posts, readers may not associate what you post with one brand. There goes your brand awareness.

Consistency is everything. Being consistent establishes your brand identity, supports brand awareness, and increases trust consumers have in your company.

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CHAPTER 5

Vetting Ideas:

Ideation & Prioritizing

CHAPTER 5

Vetting Ideas:
Ideation & Prioritizing

It's time to start coming up with content.

In the ***Choosing Your KPIs*** exercise, you identified what you want to achieve with your content.

In the ***Empathy Map*** exercise, you figured out what your audience cares about.

In the ***Keyword Ranking***, ***Social Media Stats***, and ***Website Performance*** exercises, you looked at what your competitors are doing better or worse and started to think about how you differentiate yourself.

In the last three exercises on voice and tone (***Brand Voice Madlibs***, ***Tone of Voice Dimension***, and ***Voice Guidelines***), you described how you want to sound in your content.

Each of these exercises helps you choose what to write about, so if you skipped any, go back and do them.

The work you've done so far has set you up to come up with good ideas. The next few exercises will walk you through a creative approach to find and prioritize topics so you use your resources on what will best serve your audience and your business goals.

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Group Brainstorming Warm-up

An exercise, you say? Isn't brainstorming just throwing out all the ideas that come to you? Yes, it is. But the best brainstorms happen in groups, and performance anxiety also happens in groups. Successful group brainstorming requires:

Trust.
Sharing what might be a crazy idea is scary for adults.

Equal footing.
Everyone's thoughts are equally important. Job titles have nothing to do with creativity.

Encouragement
Maintain trust by offering words of encouragement in response.

Respect.
Pay attention to everyone's ideas to maintain trust and encouragement.

Laughter.
Good ideas come from silly ideas, more often than you might think. Brainstorms are supposed to be fun.

To get everyone in the right mindset before the brainstorm, start with a mental warm-up called 185 when you're all in the room together.

There's a traditional joke structure that goes like this:

185 [blanks] walk into a bar and the bartender says, "Sorry, we don't serve [blanks] here." So the [blanks] say, "[punchline.]"

Example:
185 ducks walk into a bar and the bartender says "Sorry, we don't serve ducks here." So the ducks say "Awww... but we promise to pay our bills."

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Pick a topic, or three, and then ask people to try to make this joke using one of your topics.

For instance, in a brainstorm for a guitar manufacturer, the topic might be guitars. A joke might be:

185 guitars walk into a bar and the bartender says “Sorry, we don’t serve guitars here.” So the guitars say, “Well, thanks for not stringing us along.”

Don’t put people on the spot–ask everyone to raise their hand whenever they have a joke prepared. Switch up topics when there’s a lull. You might think it’s cheesy, but it sets a light mood for the session and encourages lateral thinking.

After you’ve heard some good jokes, onto the actual brainstorm! There’s no exercise for this. It’s as simple as encouraging everyone to call out any ideas they have and recording all the ideas. We like to write them on a whiteboard as they come up; sometimes an existing idea will spark a new one.

Don’t judge any ideas during the brainstorm, just write them down. Save organizing and vetting for later.

Notes

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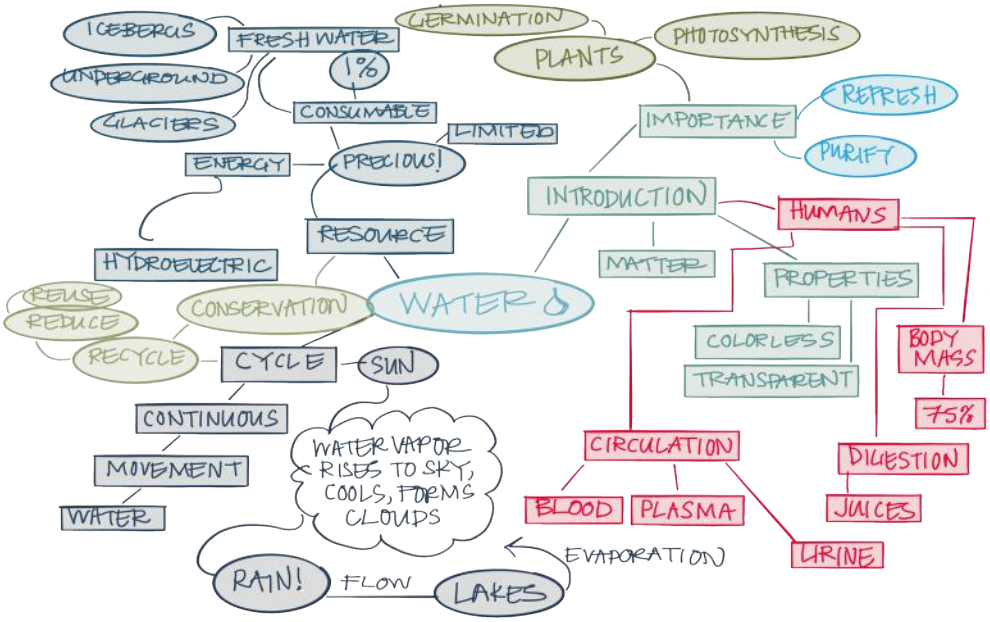
Individual Brainstorms: Mindmapping

When you brainstorm on your own, it's easy to get stuck or to get off track. Try mindmapping. This process involves starting with one central idea and making branches of concepts or topics off it (and off these new topics, and so on). It's a brain dump with simple structure. Rather than just writing a list of ideas, use this format to bring some order to your thoughts.

Mindmapping can help you get more specific in your thinking. If I'm thinking about insurance, what types of insurance? Health, life, property. Does property insurance come into play in more than one area? And so on.

This is an example of a mindmap.



Guiding yourself through the concepts that make up your ideas is a good way to discover new ideas, to refine what you have, and to make connections you might not have seen in a list.

There are plenty of online tools for this, but once again, we recommend going old school with a whiteboard or large sheet of paper and some markers. Color-coding is not necessary, but if you're visually inclined you might want to use it.

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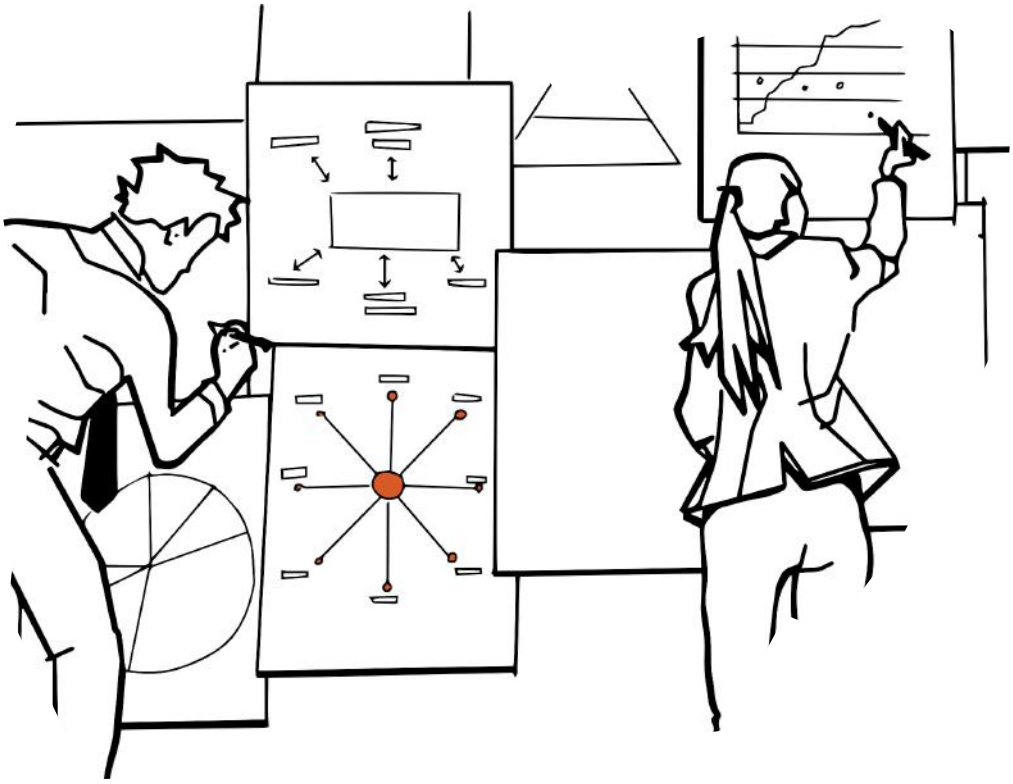
Now that you've had a chance to collect ideas from your colleagues or generate your own, you're ready to start evaluating those ideas. The next two worksheets will help you organize and prioritize topics so you can make sure you're writing something your audience wants to read and create what's most important.



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Vetting

Whether the topics come from your brainstorm or your online research, you need to develop them. First, evaluate your list. Throw out ideas that are too off the wall. Look for similar ideas and choose one. Then cross-reference with any research you've done and combine.

Add your potential topics to this worksheet. For each topic, ask yourself why you want to create content about it and who cares about this topic. If you can't answer these questions, toss it out.

Ideation Worksheet		
Potential Topic	Motivation	Audience
What does PPC have to do with SEO?	*Explain how our services support each other.*	*Companies wanting to do integrated marketing*

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You have good ideas. But just because an idea is good doesn't mean it's worth pursuing or that it's high priority. If you tackle all your good ideas in random order, you're sure to miss something important. In the next worksheet, you'll decide where to focus.

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Prioritization

Now that you have vetted ideas from the ideation worksheet, it's time to figure out which ones to pursue.

Start adding your finalized topics to this worksheet. Rate each one using four criteria–relevant, timely, unique, and ease of creating–on a scale of 0-2.

0 = No / Hard 1 = Somewhat / Medium 2 = Definitely / Easy

Don't limit yourself to three topics, of course. Fill out as many as you need. Remember content formats and business goals as you do this. For instance, if one piece of content is a video and you know you're working on expanding your YouTube channel, you might prioritize a piece of video content even if it only gets a middling score because of ease of creating.

When you have final scores for all the topics, you can start discarding and planning. Remember that the highest possible scores are 8 (to your business) and 6 (to your audience) as you decide which topics to do first, which to add to the queue, and which to toss out.

Prioritization Worksheet			
Topic	Evaluation		
	Criteria	**To Business**	**To Audience**
"What does PPC have to do with SEO?"	Relevant	*2*	*2*
	Timely	*0*	*1*
	Unique	*1*	*1*
	Ease of creating	*2*	*n/a*
	Totals	*5*	*4*

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Prioritization Worksheet			
Topic	Evaluation **Criteria**	**To Business**	**To Audience**
1.	Relevant		
	Timely		
	Unique		
	Ease of creating		
	Totals		
2.	Relevant		
	Timely		
	Unique		
	Ease of creating		
	Totals		
3.	Relevant		
	Timely		
	Unique		
	Ease of creating		
	Totals		

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Now you have a list of ideas that are not only good, but are valuable to your audience and support your business goals. As you create content, remember that form follows function, or format follows story. Don't decide to make a video and then come up with a message for it. Choose your format —text, audio, video, image—based on the story you're trying to share.

> *"We need to create a business strategy for our content. That means saying no to many channels and content types, and focus on where we can build an asset, an audience, over time."*
>
> Joe Pulizzi, Founder, Content Marketing Institute and Author, Content, Inc.

It's important enough that I'll say it again: If you did these exercises without first doing the earlier ones, start over. You may want to jump right to coming up with ideas and creating content, but (I think) you're reading this ebook because you understand that connecting with your audience through content requires more than ideas you're excited about. You need to identify what actions you want your readers to take, think from your audience's perspective, know how to use your content to differentiate from your competitors, and communicate with a distinct and consistent brand voice.

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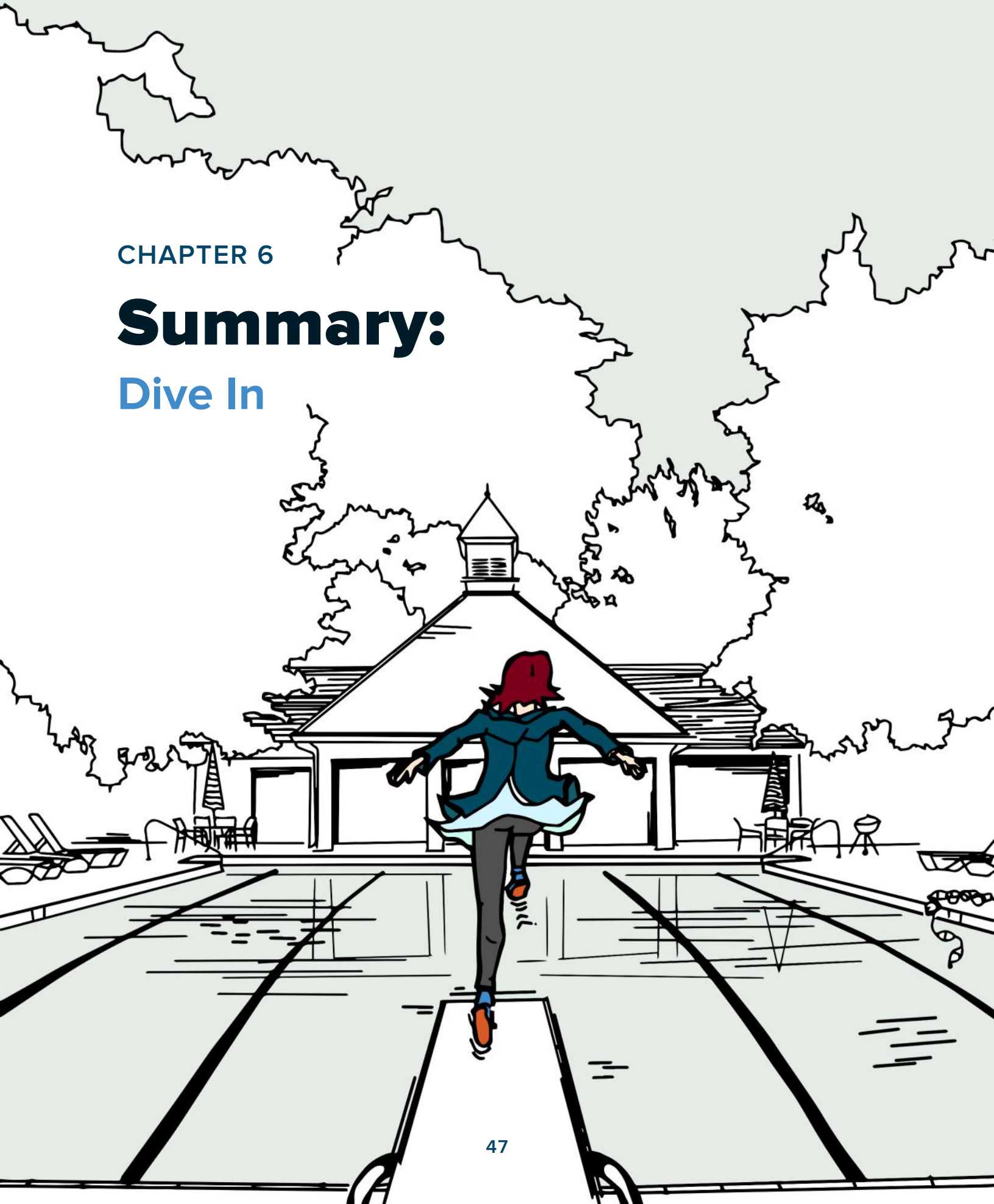
CHAPTER 6

Summary:

Dive In



CHAPTER 6

Summary:

Dive In

Let's review. A full content strategy might include these stages:

- Defining goals (Chapter 1)
- User research
- Persona development (Chapter 2)
- SWOT analysis
- Competitive analysis (Chapter 3)
- Content inventory
- Content audit
- Content modeling
- Brand, voice, and tone guidelines (Chapter 4)
- Content creation (Chapter 5)
- Editorial calendaring

With this ebook, you have tools and techniques to start on the critical work in each stage. Although it's just a start, you'll absolutely be able to step up your content game with the info you get from these exercises.

Understanding your goals—well, that's universal. Everything you do from here on out will be improved by the clarity you got in "Chapter 1: Identifying Success." For similar reasons, the work you did in "Chapter 3: Knowing Your Competitors" to understand your competitors will help you get real about what they're doing better than you, what you can do better than them, and how to persuade your audience to choose you over them.

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The persona development you did in Chapter 2 will break you out of the dangerous habit of simply assuming you deeply understand your audience. It will help you talk to your audience about their hopes, fears, concerns, and desires. People are self-centered (I don't use this word negatively). When what you have to say is all about them and you've taken the time to make it thoughtful, insightful, and accurate, they'll pay attention.

Working through the brand voice and content creation exercises in Chapters 4 and 5 prepares you to give your writers (or yourself) projects you know are worth the time. They'll have a standard to write to and will know what you want from their work. You'll have a standard to evaluate the work against. Everyone wins.

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Where Do I Go From Here?

These practices will unquestionably boost the quality of the content you put on your website, your social channels, and anywhere else. But they just scratch the surface of what you can do to make content that galvanizes your audience and keeps people coming back. The more complex pieces of content strategy can't be handled with simple exercises completed in a day. To give your company the best chance of success, use the momentum you got from this ebook to create a well-researched and comprehensive content strategy.

The **competitive analysis** work you started in this book becomes more robust when you expand it to include as much data about your company's and your competitors' performance as you can collect. **Competitive analysis** (specifically for content) is part of a larger process called **SWOT analysis**. There is no simple exercise for this. It involves taking a close look at your business performance, internal resources, the primary needs of and changes in the marketplace to define the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) for your company.

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Persona development can be done on the fly, like we did here, but it's more valuable when it follows robust user research. And you can't do user research on your own. You need to talk to your users in two or more mediums so you have real information, not an idealized picture you painted in a closed conference room. This might include user surveys provided on your site and via email, face-to-face audience interviews, heatmapping, and various usability tests such as card sorts.

And then there's the content audit beast. People outside the content bubble fear or loathe them. Many of us in the content bubble find them intensely satisfying (at least, I do). An inventory leads to an audit. The inventory is the quantitative data. You can pull this together with a tool. The audit is the qualitative analysis. Someone who knows your company goals and audience has to do this manually, and it takes a chunk of time. But it's time well spent. An audit tells you what you have, how well it does what you want it to do, what you don't have, what you need to make, and how you're connecting it all.

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Content modeling gets into those connections. How do you structure discrete pieces of content and the pathways between them? What pieces of content go into a campaign? What content types do you need, and what elements will each one have? How do you want to reuse your content? How will you help users navigate through your site? Content modeling answers these questions and establishes a plan. Sometimes we skip it, but if you're starting out with content, overhauling your content production, launching a new website, or doing a redesign, you need this.

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Make Content That Galvanizes

Content strategy is simple, and not. My mentor likens content strategists to therapists: the work requires a lot of listening and information gathering, looking for patterns, making connections, and creating a plan for the future.

At Portent, we start this process with a **content assessment**. The assessment isn't a report; it's a teaching tool. Information-gathering, pattern-finding, and connection-making culminate in a plan for the future that we use to teach you how to start and keep making the content that galvanizes.

Want to talk with an expert about creating content that connects?

Get in touch.

Or, learn more about Portent's content services.

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