

How to Conduct a Content Marketing Audit



CONTENTS

- 1 What Is a Content Marketing Audit?
- 1 Why Is It Important to Conduct A Content Marketing Audit?
- 4 How Often Should You Complete a Content Marketing Audit?
- 4 Conducting Your Content Marketing Audit: From Start to Finish
- 15 Now Let's Put It All Together
- 16 Setting Goals and Following Them Throughout the Year

So, you know you need a content marketing audit, but you don't know where to start. Sound familiar?

We've all been there.

In this guide, I'll walk through exactly how you should approach and carry out your content marketing audit from start to finish ... and for maximum results.

Let's get started!

What Is a Content Marketing Audit?



A content marketing audit is a systematic process in which you document, analyze and draw insights from your current content marketing activities and those of your competitors.

The goal is to understand where you've been and what you're doing before you can figure out where to go next. You need to know which marketing activities are working, which aren't, and what you're missing. This is what an audit helps us accomplish.

Why Is It Important to Conduct A Content Marketing Audit?

Let me answer this question with a question:

If you never audit your content marketing activities, how do you know if they're actually working?

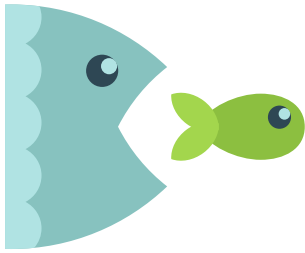
Content marketing isn't cheap. This isn't something we want to guess at. I wouldn't want to spend tons of money on stuff I only THINK is working, would you?

Yep, thought so.

Here are a few more reasons why it's important to perform a content marketing audit:



1. Become Aware of New Competitors Arriving in Your Space.



Businesses dissolve and new ones emerge every single day.

If you're not keeping an eye on what your market rivals are doing, you're essentially just sticking your head in the sand while your competitors are running off into the sunset with your customers.

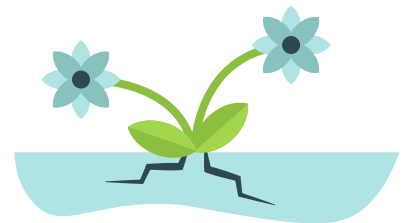
How does that sand taste?

2. Find Opportunities for Improvement (From Weak Spots).

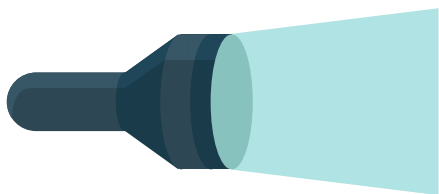
Once you start looking at your marketing activities under a magnifying glass, you're probably going to start noticing that certain areas are underperforming.

This is the good stuff.

An audit forces you to think deeply about which areas you can improve. Sometimes these are simple fixes. Sometimes the changes are bigger. Either way, you're not starting from scratch with a brand new initiative, so results could be achieved faster.



3. Uncover the Stuff That Isn't Working and Ditch It Faster.



If you're auditing your content marketing activities on a regular basis, you're going to find stuff that is flat out not working at all.

Don't worry, it happens to the best of us.

For example, we spent months working on getting a handful of op/ed content out the door, only to receive just a few social shares from each post. After auditing this activity, we decided those results just weren't good enough — so we ditched the campaign.

What's important is this: The faster you can realize something is a big old waste of money, the better. Your boss will thank you, trust me.

4. Find Opportunities for New Activities (From Gaps).

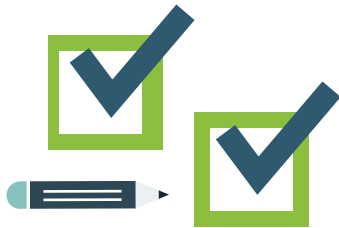
We often discover new things we should be doing by analyzing our competitors.

It's important not just to be aware of your competitors (as noted in point No. 1), but also to be super familiar with what they're actually doing.

Not every single initiative or idea has to be a brand new one you came up with all by yourself. You're awesome, but let's be realistic here. Sometimes our competitors are doing great things that we're not doing yet but might want to test out. We don't have to reinvent the wheel, we just need to modify those activities for our own purposes.



5. Figure Out What Is Working and Double Down.



This is especially important if you've got control over your budget.

While it's important to figure out what's not working and what you're missing, you should also look at what is working and decide whether or not you want to double down on that — AKA spend more.

Often, scaling up an existing activity can be a quick path to scaling its results.

6. Understand How the Market Has Changed and If/How You Should Adjust.

If you're selling strawberry ice cream but the market actually prefers chocolate now — would you adjust your product offerings and how you'd market them? Probably, yes.



What about if your customers prefer a campaign-based partnership as opposed to a subscription model?

By understanding the changes in what your market wants, you can better address the needs of your customers and customers-to-be.

How Often Should You Complete a Content Marketing Audit?

A marketing audit done once and only once won't do much for your business in the long term. As I noted above, things change (customers, markets, competitors).

Every industry is different, but I'm guessing "slow-moving" and "never-changing" are not words you'd use to describe yours. If they are, then lucky you! You can complete your single one-time-only content marketing audit and then never do another one again.



But for the rest of us ...

At the very least, you should be auditing your marketing activities once per year. Ideally, aim to do an abridged quick-and-dirty version of your audit once per quarter and a really thorough audit annually.

I repeat, every business is different, so think about the best time(s) to do yours. It should probably fall somewhere around budgeting season.

Conducting Your Content Marketing Audit: From Start to Finish



OK, yes! The part you've been waiting for. How to do the thing.

First Comes Documentation ...

First things first, open up a big ol' Google sheet and get ready to start documenting.

Here's a template to copy if you want a head start (you're welcome).

You're going to want to include everything you can think of in this document. Everything your marketing team is doing. This will eventually become the finalized audit and it'll be the document you reference throughout the year to keep track of the progress you're making (and pinpoint the places where you're stuck).

I've pre-populated some examples into the sheet to get you started:

Activity	Category	Importance	Primary Impact	Secondary Impact	Description
EXAMPLE: Product landing page SEO	SEO	***	1. Revenue	Reach, exposure	Following set of diagnosis rules to determine how to get product landing page keywords to rank in a meaningful position.
EXAMPLE: Newsletter	Email	***	2. Nurture	Brand, customer, internal	Weekly newsletter containing latest assets/blogs we want to share with our audience.
EXAMPLE: Link Building	SEO	***	3. SEO	Reach, exposure	Developing a strategy for building links both paid, organically and through sustainable outreach.
EXAMPLE: Social Ads	Paid	*	4. Reach	Brand	Mostly ads targeted towards Facebook users from lookalike audiences.
EXAMPLE: Brand Narrative and mission statement	Website assets	***	5. Brand/Industry leadership	Brand	Brand document - narrative, story, values, mission statement.

You'll want to document:

- The content you're creating.
- The campaigns you're running.
- The channels you're marketing on.
- **Extra credit:** The budget for each marketing activity.

No activity is too small. Throw it in there!

Follow the template and fill in the blanks.

Here's an explanation of each column of the audit template:

Category: This is how you will organize the type of work. Which area of marketing does it cover? (Hint: these will be unique to your business).

Some examples: Email, SEO, Paid, Website, Live Interactions, Audio/Visual, Blog, Internal Marketing, Sales Enablement.

Importance: How important is this activity to your business? If you stopped doing this activity today, would all hell break loose or would things even out on their own? Score 1-3 (or high, medium, low) accordingly.

Primary impact: What is the primary goal of this marketing activity? Is it organic traffic? Is it marketing qualified leads? How about reach? Or sales enablement?

Shouldn't I list "Revenue" as the primary impact for every single marketing activity? Yes, all activities should eventually tie back to revenue, but only choose Revenue as the primary impact if it's the most closely tied to actual revenue. EO, Paid, Website, Live Interactions, Audio/Visual, Blog, Internal Marketing, Sales Enablement.

Secondary impact: Most marketing activities don't just have one single purpose, they have multiple benefits toward your marketing efforts. List the second-most important impact here.

Description: Describe what this marketing activity is. Understand that you probably won't be the only person looking at this marketing audit, so it's best to elaborate for other stakeholders who only have a high-level view of the day-to-day operations of the marketing team.

Owner	Decision	Action Items	Status
Molly	High priority to focus as much attention as possible on.	-Work out how to do this. -Discuss with team. -Implement.	Not started
Lauren	Launch new layout, develop and report against KPIs monthly.	-Launch new design. -Develop and report against KPIs	In progress
Jeff	Investigate link outreach activities.	-Set a meeting to discuss link outreach options.	In progress
Lauren	Expand into LinkedIn, report back.	-Present and determine budget allocation. -Research LinkedIn ad strategy.	In progress
Dom	Plan kickoff meeting with marketing team. Possibly Friday session.	-Interview Tom -Draft copy -Publish and distribute	In progress

Decision: Leave blank for now. This will be where you document what's been discussed or determined about the specific marketing activity. For example, are you cutting the budget immediately? Or are you expanding on the channel and need to do some research before upping your budget in this area? These things will come later once you've finished your audit.

Action items: Can be left blank for now. Here you'll list specific items that need to be completed related to the decision you've made about the activity. As with the Decision column, you can leave this section blank for now.

Status: This column is useful for tracking changes to strategies or activities, or pending pilots for new campaigns. Leave blank, write "in progress" or "not started" as applicable. Often the information in this column will apply to what's been decided once you've completed your audit, so it's fine to leave blank for now.

All done? Nice work!

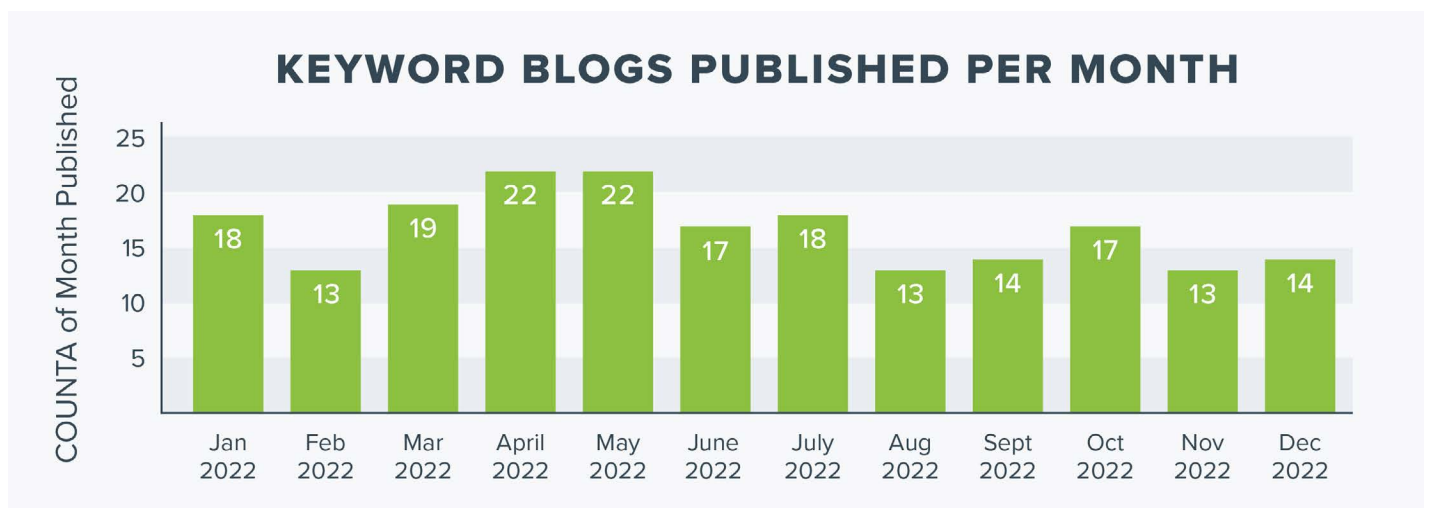
You now have a big long list of every single marketing activity you (and/or your team) is currently doing. This is great. This is the most tedious, challenging and difficult part of the whole thing, so give yourself a pat on the back if you've made it this far.

Types of Content Being Published

Content is the central focus of any marketing campaign. Without content, you have a list of ideas, goals and strategies, but no fuel to take you where you want to go.

Content powers your marketing campaigns, so you're sure as heck going to want to know which types of content work best, and which you may want to cut from your budget.

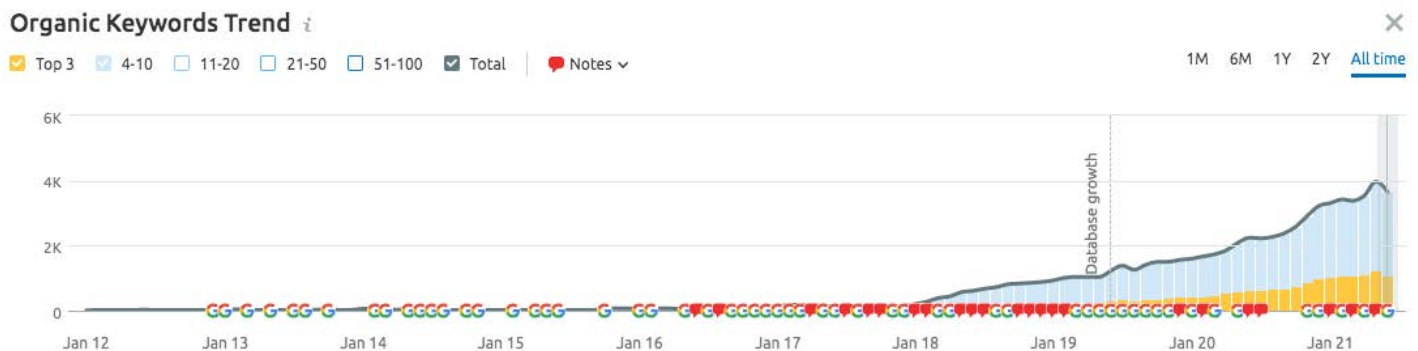
Here's an example of what this might look like. Here, we're looking at the number of keyword-targeted blogs published each month for an entire year.



Now, quantity and frequency are just one piece of the puzzle. You'll also need to combine this analysis with results generated from this content.

For example, how many Page 1 keyword rankings did these blogs get us?

Check your favorite SEO tool for this type of information. Here's an example of what this might look like, from Semrush:

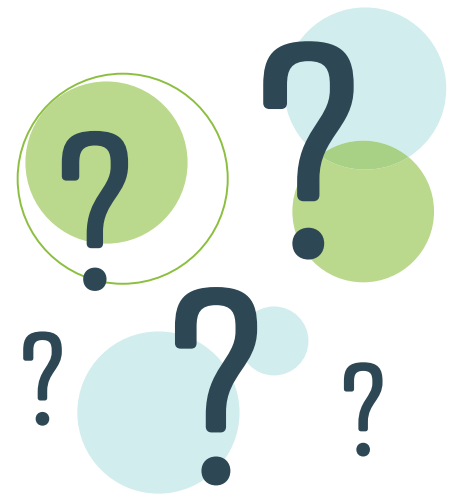


According to this data, it's safe to say that the keyword-targeted blogs we're publishing each month are doing what they are supposed to do.

Questions to ask after completing this type of analysis:

- Do we continue with the same quantity and frequency or do we scale up or down?
- If we make changes to this strategy, how might we expect our results to change? (And can we forecast those changes?)

Repeat this process for each of the different types of content you publish. You'll be amazed by the insights you'll glean.



Then Comes Competitive Analysis ...

Once you've documented your marketing activities and analyzed the types of content you're publishing, it's time to shift your focus to your competitors. Choose at least 3 competitors for your audit.

The key here is to have a variety of competitors (business, organic, big and small, etc.).

- A **business competitor** is a company that you have direct market competition with. For example, when a prospect is deciding between your brand and one of your competitors, these are the types of competitors they're looking at primarily.
- A **digital competitor** is a brand that you compete with in organic search. You're both targeting and ranking for a large amount of the same organic keywords. This means you are competing with this brand in terms of how searchers are finding you.

Depending on your business goals, you may choose to strictly include business competitors in this part of the audit. But I'd recommend a variety of each, especially since your digital competitors could be taking valuable clicks away from your brand. And this way, you have your bases covered when you start analyzing your data.

Here are some typical ways to analyze your competitors. It's also a good idea to include your brand in this analysis, so you have a clear visual picture of how you stack up.

1. Domain Authority This is a proprietary metric developed by Moz which helps us predict how likely a domain will rank in search when compared with other domains.

In short, Domain Authority = Website Strength.

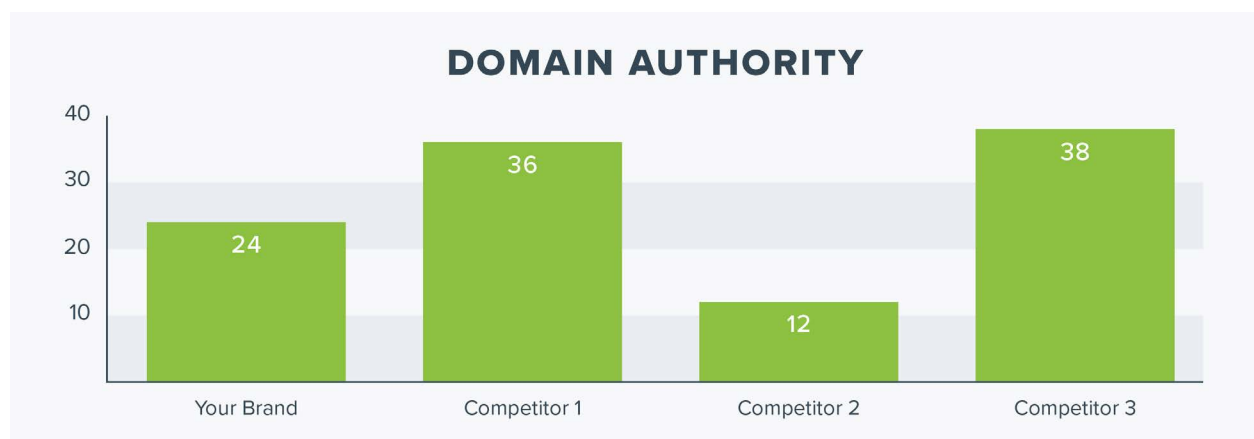
There are many factors that go into this score, which ranges from 0-100: From the age of your domain to the quality of your backlinks to the content you publish.

It all matters.

There isn't one set way to go about increasing your score. The best thing you can do is focus on **1) having a top-notch website user experience (UX)** for both humans and Google's search engine crawlers, and **2) publishing the very best content** on the web for your industry.

Your Domain Authority score should increase over time if you master these two main areas.

If you're looking for more help with Domain Authority, check out this guide we created: [Why Did My Domain Authority Go Down? And Other Top Domain Authority Questions Answered.](#)



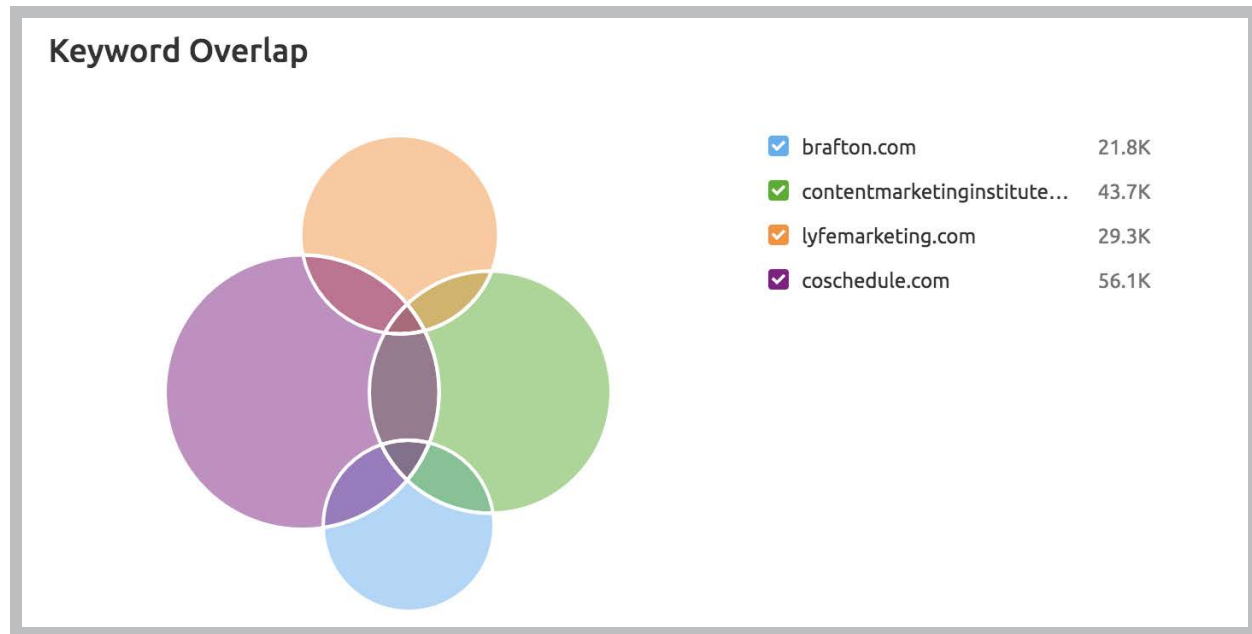
In this example, we can see that this imaginary brand outranks 1 of its competitors in Domain Authority, but not the other 2. This means that if all 4 websites target the same keyword, competitors 1 and 3 are more likely to rank on the first page for that term.

Comparing your Domain Authority to your competitors gives you a better idea of what results you can expect from your organic search strategy, and in which cases you might want to walk away from a target keyword.

2. Share of Search Landscape Another way to analyze your competitors is by reviewing the share of search landscape. The logic behind this comparison metric is that the more keywords you rank for = the more often you show up in search = the more people who find your brand.

In short, more ranking keywords = a bigger share of the search landscape.

Here's an example of what this looks like:



Note: This is a very high-level view of the total keyword ownership of each of your competitors. It's missing a lot of qualitative data — like the types of keywords, how valuable those keywords are at driving real commercial results for your business and so on.

That said, it's still a really good way to see the competition at a glance. If anything, it will get the conversation started around doing more with your organic strategy. Especially when you show your boss that your bubble is teeny tiny compared to the rest of your competitors.

If you're looking to dig deeper, there are a number of SEO tools out there — Semrush, Ahrefs, Ubersuggest, etc. — that will let you pull the actual organic keywords a website is ranking for (any website, not just your own).

This will help you do some truly in-depth analysis to see which keywords your competitors are ranking for to determine their strengths and weaknesses and to find any gaps which you can exploit.

(That's a guide for another day.)

3. Content Mix You've already completed a super in-depth analysis of your own content, including the types of content you're publishing and the frequency. Now, it's time to see what your competitors are up to.

This exercise will be somewhat less headache-inducing but will give you important insights into how your competitors' content strategies look in practice.

I love this portion of the analysis because you don't need a fancy tool to complete it. It's a manual process. You are literally going to visit each of your competitors' sites and count the total number of assets they have published.

Get your calculator up and running!

Since this is a manual process, it doesn't have to be perfect, but try your best to pull as much of this information as possible. It will take some time. The insights will be worth it.

Here's an example of what the end result of this analysis might look like:



The content types in this example can change depending on what you find on each site, but in general, they are organized by top of funnel, mid-funnel and bottom of funnel content. Why? Because publishing content that targets each section of the sales funnel is a sign of a thorough content marketing strategy.

And thorough = good.

In this example, we can see that competitor 1 (dark gray) has a killer bottom-of-funnel content strategy but doesn't post blogs too frequently each month. Competitor 3 posts many blogs per month. And you (in green) aren't publishing nearly as much content in any area. Might be time to increase content production to compete!

4. Market Influence The final portion of this competitive analysis goes beyond the confines of your (and your competitors') website(s).

We're going to explore your market influence as compared to your competitors.

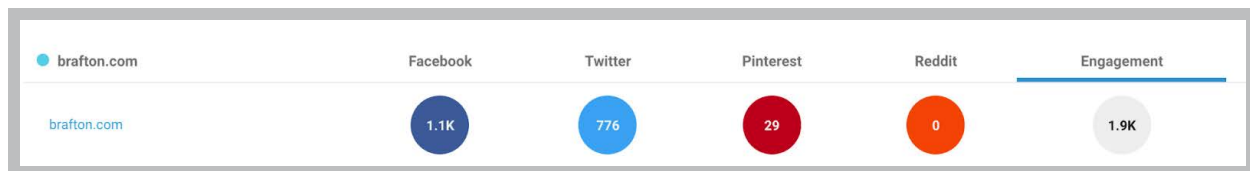
Now, market influence is an extremely broad concept and it can mean many things to a business. In the context of digital marketing, we'll answer questions like:

1. How often is my brand showing up on social media compared to my competitors?
2. How often is my brand name being searched for compared to my competitors?

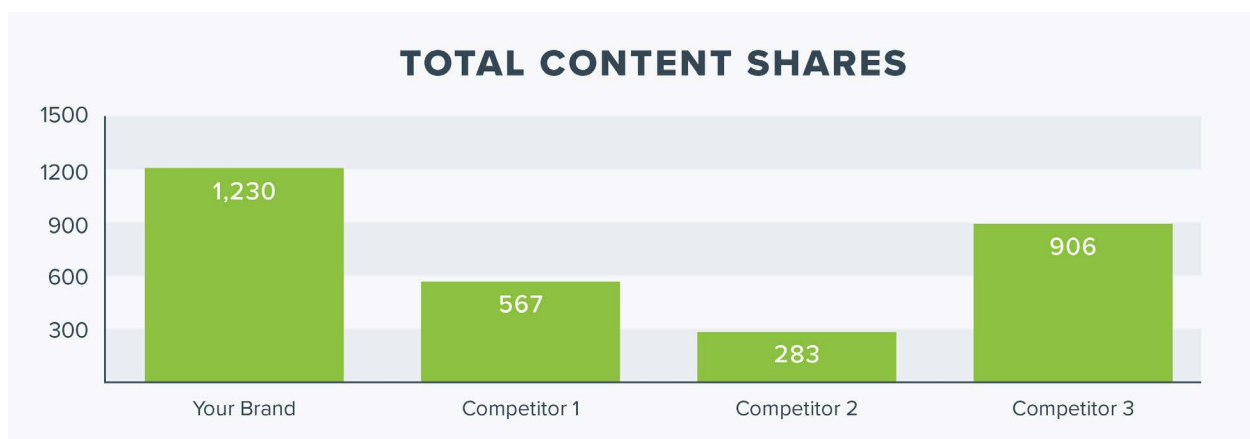
In the interest of holding your interest for the remainder of this guide, I'll stick to these two main channels (search and social), but just know that there are many (so many) different ways you can measure your brand's influence in the marketplace.

Let's look at social first.

At Brafton, we use a handy tool called BuzzSumo which aggregates all social share data in one place. Even better, it lets us pull the same information for competing brands.



Check out this example we created based on our findings from BuzzSumo:



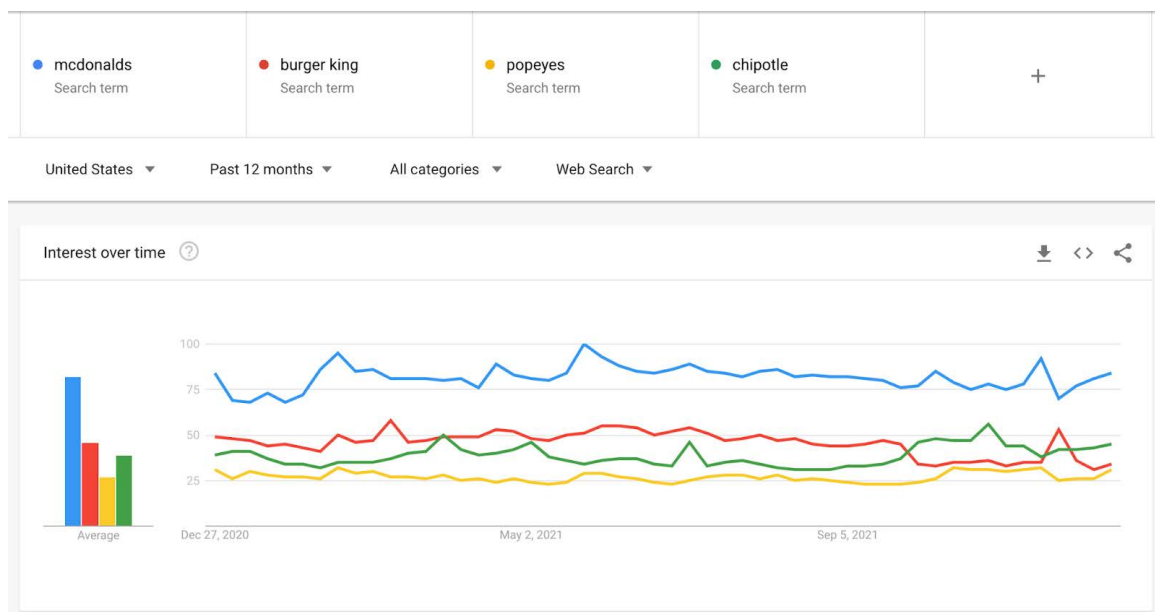
This gives us a nice overview of how often a brand's content has been shared — across all the big social platforms — over a specific period of time.

We can see in this example, competitor 1 has the most content shares of all. Good for them. Competitor 3 is lagging behind. Boo for them.

Keep in mind that what this doesn't show us is the quality of shares and types of engagement (likes, comments, etc.) the content has received. For that information, you'll have to dig deeper into your social media management tools.

Next, let's look at search.

I love using Google Trends data to analyze how a brand has been searched for over time. You can filter by specific countries and regions, specific industries and devices. You can go back in time as far as 2004 if you really want to. And it's free!



Here we're looking at how various fast food chain brands have trended in search over the last 12 months (from December 2020 to December 2021). McDonald's takes the cake for the most searched brand name over the last year, but look how Chipotle is starting to creep up ahead of Burger King. Watch out!

This bird's eye view of your market influence in search is incredibly valuable for understanding the type of impact your marketing campaigns can make in your specific niche.

Now Let's Put It All Together

At the end of your content marketing audit, you should be able to answer these questions with confidence:

1. What am I currently doing?

- a. (And for larger teams: Who is doing what?)

2. What's working?

- a. Which activities should we scale up for next year?

3. What isn't working?

- a. Which activities should we kill, and which should we amend?

4. What are my competitors doing well?

- a. Which of their ideas do we want to try out?

5. What are my competitors NOT doing?

- a. Where are the gaps?
- b. Would it be beneficial to our marketing efforts to fill those gaps?

Now it's time to bring these questions (and answers! and ideas!) to your boss and the other stakeholders on the team. This audit is a great jumping off point for the conversations and planning sessions that need to happen in order to truly improve your marketing strategy.

But don't just stop there ...

Setting Goals and Following Them Throughout the Year

Go back to your audit sheet and fill in the rest of the sections we left blank earlier. Document the **decisions** you've made around each marketing activity and the **action items** that need to happen. For larger marketing teams, make sure to note the project lead — so it's crystal clear who is doing what.

You can also use the **Status** column as a way to track your progress throughout the year. Sometimes it's not always reasonable to start every initiative all at once and you need a staggered approach. This is why it's useful to track status.

And finally, don't forget to set new **goals** for new and existing marketing initiatives included in your strategy. Here's a handy guide for [determining your marketing goals](#).

The most important part of this process is that you'll end up with a well-documented, agreed-upon strategy to keep you and your team on track and accountable as you move forward.

Good luck.



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