

# Your Strategy Needs a Content Strategy

A note by the staff of luxury retail strategy agency It's A Working Title LLC

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# “ Riding a bike is one of life’s simple pleasures.”

It’s the freedom to go wherever you want, whenever you want. It’s an endless adventure that starts on your doorstep and never ends. It’s the confidence of knowing you can do anything you put your mind to. It’s the effort of climbing one more hill, and the ecstasy of flying back down. It’s a chance to connect with friends or take time for yourself. It’s many things to many people but it’s never just a ride.

”

This manifesto on a bicycle ride is from luxury cycling gear provider [Rapha](#). You can find this statement from the top navigation bar of the company’s home page under “Life on the Bike.” If you click “About Rapha,” you will see two road cyclists descending after, what one imagines, was a painful but glorious climb in the high mountains. Under the cyclists it reads: “Our Purpose Is To Inspire The World To Live By The Bike.” These brand messages are compelling with a clear call to action and prominently center Rapha as a unique partner on this journey that they have set out for you.

You will continue to see this strong brand point-of-view across Rapha’s other digital engagements with customers. On [Instagram](#), one sees compelling images of exotic and challenging cycling routes. On its [YouTube](#) channel, you see videos that communicate the brand’s message through rides in incredible locations and interviews with cyclists who

have lived the glory through suffering that is so much of road cycling lore. On [Twitter](#), you see invitations to local club rides and other forms of cycling community building.

These coordinated brand story engagements show that Rapha understands content strategy. It understands how to coordinate its brand messaging across platforms in ways that are appropriate, up to date, and geared towards the differentiated expectations that their customers have from different digital channels.

In their HBR essay “[Your Strategy Needs A Story](#),” Martin Reeves, Roeland van Straten, Tim Nolan, and Madeleine Michael incisively point out that a business strategy must be communicated and motivate actions and that, “strategy stories can provide a powerful bridge between arguments and actions, intentions and results, and strategists and implementers.”

A good strategy story must encompass the supply (a firm's activities and assets) and demand (customers' behaviors and locations) sides of a business as well as how supply and demand meet through the dynamics of revenue generation.

This is spot on yet to integrate the supply and demand side pieces, a company's general or storytelling strategy must be grounded in a strong content strategy. Content strategy is an overarching approach for setting out mindful and targeted content that marries your brand's unique raison d'être with its customers in a dynamic way. As our Rapha example shows, in highly competitive field such as sports accessory sales, a good content strategy not only sets a company apart from its competitors, it allows the North Star of a company's brand story to shine through across marketing channels in a way that inspires and creates deep brand loyalty.

Photo courtesy of Rapha



# What is content strategy?

As a field, content strategy is relatively new since it is a direct by-product of digital technology. However, its foundational concepts are old and overlap with the basic tenets of connecting corporate strategy to good writing, visual design, brand storytelling, and marketing.

To quote [Kristina Halvorson](#), content strategy is about the, “creation, publication, and governance of useful, usable content.” The governance strategy for the creation of current and future content is especially important because while it is, of course, essential to needs to hit your business strategy’s key themes and messages and include clear metadata frameworks and content attributes, it is not really a strategy unless the principles governing the use/re-use, production, and cross-channel distribution of content are

not embodied in a strategic framework. This governance framework ensures that (hopefully) good content creation and delivery processes developed today continue to deliver good outcomes in the future even as corporate strategies and staffing change.

To start at the beginning, a good content strategy starts with a solid understanding of your target audience. This involves conducting research to identify their needs, interests, and pain points. Once you have this information, you can create content that addresses their concerns and provides solutions to their problems. A well-thought-out content strategy should also take into account the different stages of the customer journey, from awareness to consideration to decision-making. This allows you to create content that meets the needs of your audience at each stage of the journey.



Never *just* a ride



Photo courtesy of Rapha

Finally, a successful content strategy requires ongoing evaluation and adjustment. This involves tracking metrics such as engagement rates, click-through rates, and conversion rates to determine what is working and what needs to be improved. Based on this data, you can make changes to your content strategy to ensure that it is achieving your business objectives. By regularly monitoring and adjusting your content strategy, you can ensure that your content is always relevant, engaging, and effective in achieving the goals of your business strategy.

# Why Does Your Strategy Need a Content Strategy?

As the essay by Martin et al noted, a good business strategy is only a starting point and to be successful it needs to be communicated and understood. This is true whether we are discussing the internal impact of strategy to guide teams and create a set of shared corporate goals or the external impact to drive attention to your offerings. As the authors note, we respond to stories that teach and inspire and present us with a call to action. Stories allow us to boil down complex problems into simple narrative pieces.

Yet, for these stories to be effective, you must layer a content strategy on top of them. The content strategy is, at its best, a tissue connecting your corporate strategy to your story. It should provide a roadmap for your content creation, editorial workflow, and distribution efforts. It involves defining

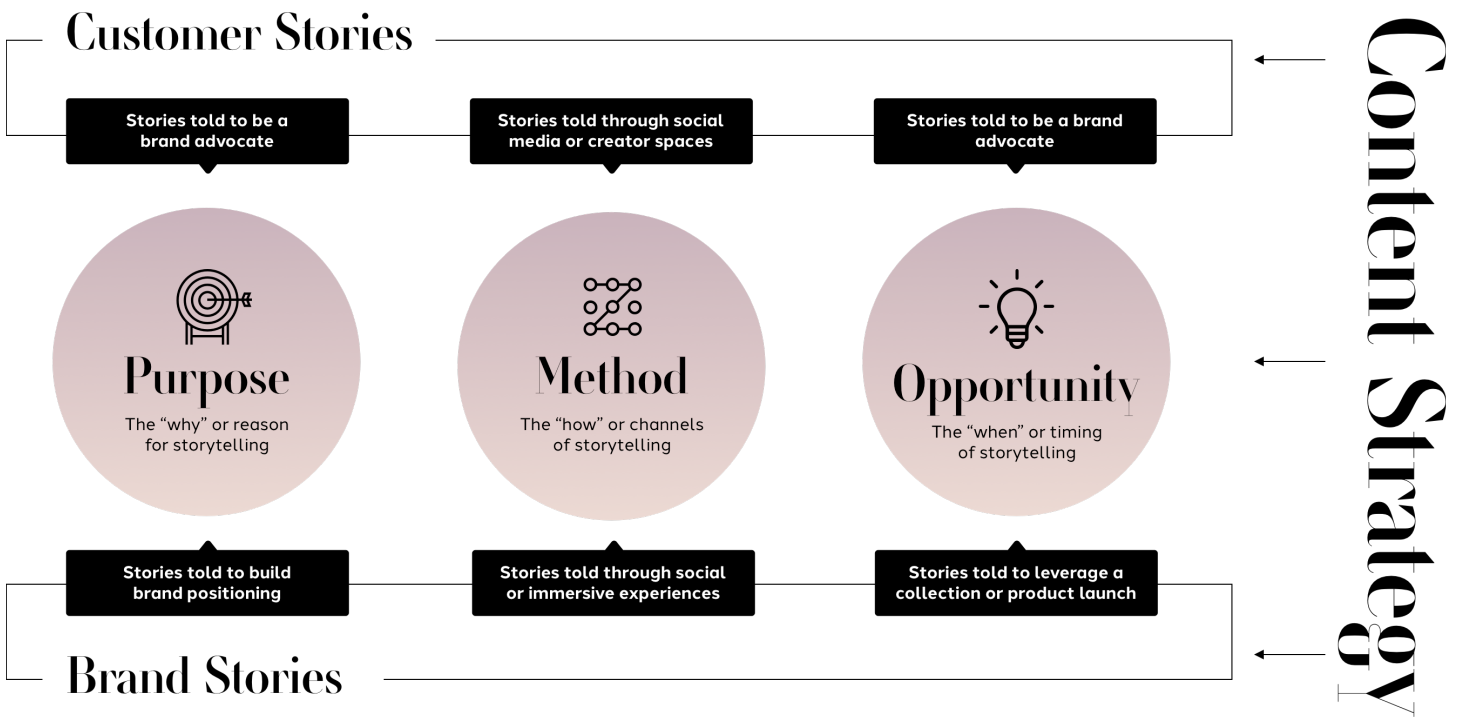
your target audience (internal and external), identifying their needs and interests, and developing content, including stories, that addresses those needs and interests.

A content strategy also helps you ensure that your stories are aligned with your overall business goals. For example, if your business objective is to increase website traffic, your content strategy should focus on creating stories that are optimized for search engines and promote social sharing. After all, what is the utility of great stories if they do not reach your target audience (or your aspiring audiences) in the distribution channels where they are to be found, whether that is in a store, on a particular digital platform, on a corporate intranet site, in the metaverse, or on a video game.



Photo courtesy of Rapha

Finally, a content strategy helps you measure the effectiveness of your brand stories and keeps strategies fresh and aligned with evolving corporate needs. By tracking metrics such as engagement rates, click-through rates, and conversion rates, you can determine what is working and what needs to be improved. This allows you to make data-driven decisions about your content strategy and ensure that it is achieving your business objectives. This results in a feedback loop of learning between your corporate strategy, your company stories, and your content strategy.



And content strategy is not merely a technical detail to be worked out by UX or back-end development teams. Like your corporate stories, it needs the buy-in of strategists and others across an organization. This is important as content strategy can result in path dependency where decisions made on a strategy now can guide behaviors in the future. So decisions on the purpose of a brand story and how well it is or is not achieving its goals requires wide buy-in at the start or content auditing stage of the process. Similarly, decisions on who can write stories and how they are updated need to be broadly communicated so that stories are kept fresh and in step with evolutions in the underlying corporate strategy.

Looking back at our example at the start of the essay, Rapha exemplifies how a brand can use content strategy to support a brand story that is emotive and creates brand loyalty. For Rapha, content strategy helps scaffold a “live by the bike” narrative and underpins the brand’s values: (i) love the sport; (ii) think for yourself; (iii) suffer, and (iv) inspire others. In an interview conducted for this piece, Rapha’s Head of Marketing for North America, Brandon Camarda noted:

**“Rapha is a purpose-led brand rooted in our passion for riding and sharing that with the world. Our content strategy is what enables us to visually bring that purpose to life and root everything we do in the human experience of cycling. To lead all of our efforts with a content-first approach, we bring the experience of riding a bike to the front of our initiatives, reminding both the customer and ourselves of what we are really focused on and why we exist.”**

For any brand, whether luxury or otherwise, the ability to craft good brand stories consistently depends on an explicit content strategy. If corporate strategy is ultimately about giving its stakeholders a constant reminder of why they exist, building the DNA of the company into a content strategy will guide this process consistently across all channels of employee and customer engagement.



# How do you create a content strategy that supports your corporate strategy and brand stories?

Like all strategies, creating a content strategy begins with being mindful of the way that you use your internal resources to engage with customers. Content strategy is unique from other forms of strategy in that it must involve integrating high-level strategy with marketing, UX, and CX functions. At least at the start, you need to bring together corporate strategy functions with tactical functions and ensure that the strategy encompasses both front-end areas of client engagement with the back-end technical departments that support the various channels by which your audience is reached. This is especially important if you reach your audience through multiple channels as having separate strategies for IRL engagement,

web2 digital engagement (e.g., social media), and even web2.5 to web3 outreach (e.g., immersive digital experiences or various co-creating platforms) will waste resources at best and likely result in the splintering of corporate strategy and brand stories into ways that are diluting.

Content strategies can be as diverse as the organizations using them, but there are seven steps that are essential:

## **Step 1: Define Your Objectives.**

Before creating a content strategy, it's essential to determine the goals you want to achieve. The content strategy must be connected to your broader corporate strategy and the brand stories that you want to tell. Your objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Some of the objectives of a content strategy may include increasing website traffic, generating leads, improving brand awareness, establishing thought leadership, or increasing engagement on social media.

## **Step 2: Understand Your Target Audience.**

It is crucial to understand their needs, interests, pain points, and the type of content they prefer. You can gather this information through surveys, interviews, or social media listening. Once you have a clear understanding of your audience, you can tailor your content to meet their needs.

## **Step 3: Conduct a Content Audit**

A content audit is an analysis of your existing content. It helps you identify the content that performs well, the gaps, and the opportunities. Also, organizations often do not know where all of their content is located or have a full picture of what the content distributed across various channels communicates. By conducting a content audit, you can determine which content formats, topics, and channels resonate with your audience. You can also identify areas where you need to improve your content, such as search engine optimization (SEO), readability, or visual design.

## **Step 4: Develop a Content Plan**

A content plan is a roadmap that outlines the types of content you will create, when and where you will publish it, and how you will promote it. Your content plan should align with your objectives, target audience, and content audit. It should also take into account the content formats that work best for your audience and the channels they prefer. Your content plan should include a content calendar, which shows the publishing schedule for each piece of content.

## **Step 5: Create and Publish Your Content.**

Once you have a content plan, you can start creating your content. Your content should be relevant, valuable, and engaging to your target audience. It should also align with your brand values and tone of voice. When publishing your content, you should optimize it for SEO, use engaging visuals, and add calls-to-action (CTAs) to encourage your audience to take action.

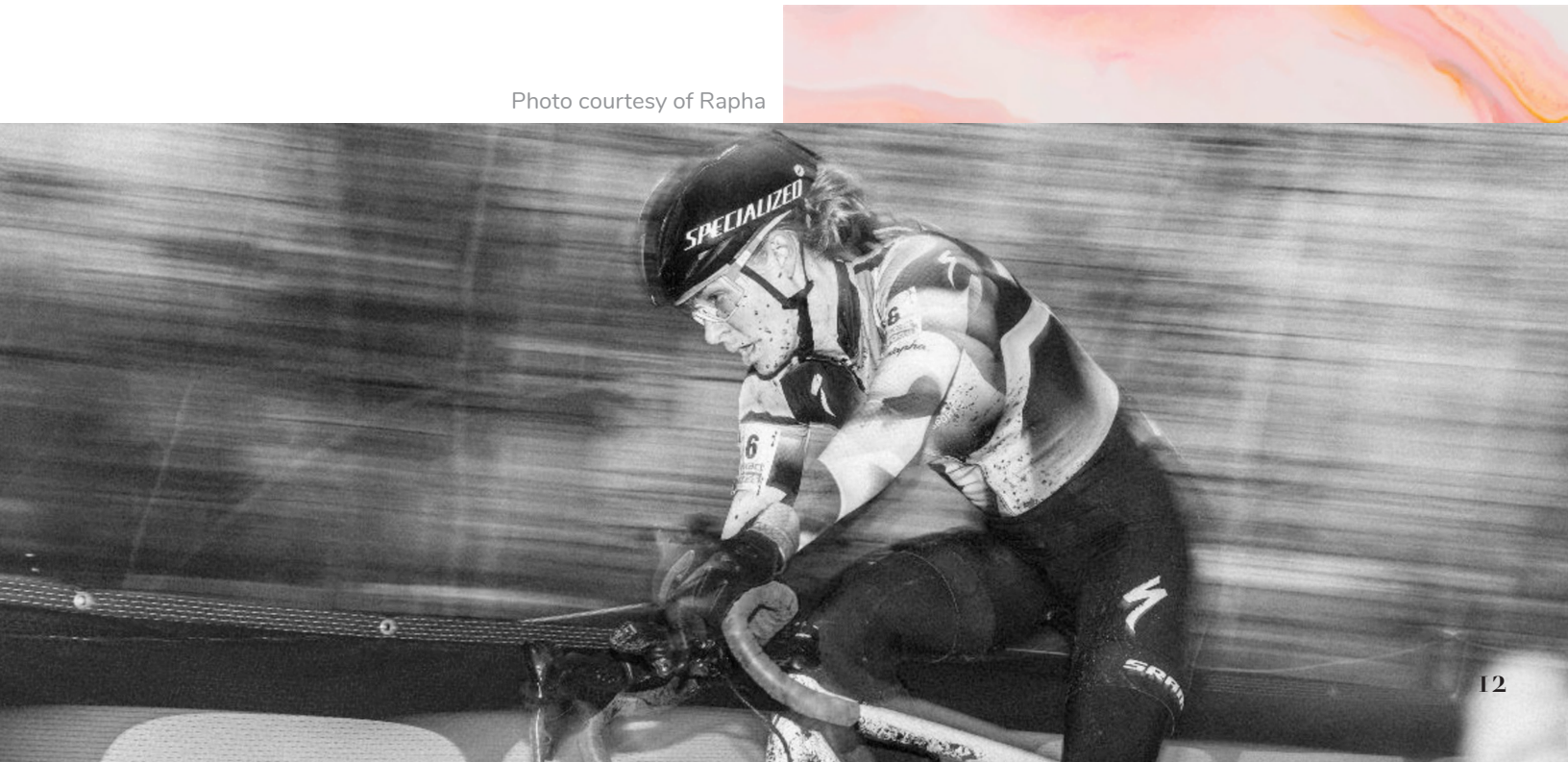
## **Step 6: Measure Your Results.**

Measuring the results of your content strategy is crucial to understanding its impact and making improvements. You can track metrics such as website traffic, engagement, leads generated, and conversions. By analyzing your results, you can identify what works and what doesn't and adjust your content plan accordingly.

## Step 7. Create a Content Governance Plan

A content strategy governance plan is a framework that provides guidelines and processes for managing content creation, distribution, and governance across an organization. It includes defining roles and responsibilities, creating standards for content quality and consistency, establishing workflows for content creation and review, and ensuring compliance with legal, regulatory, and ethical requirements. The goal of a content strategy governance plan is to ensure that content is created and managed effectively and efficiently to achieve business objectives while mitigating risks associated with content creation and distribution. This step is essential to ensure that good content strategy practices are codified and become part of your company's rules for creating brand stories for various channels. A content governance plan is what can make good content strategy part of your company's DNA.

Photo courtesy of Rapha





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