

Phase 1 consists of detailing the content vision and identifying all the strategic questions we need to answer. Some questions might already be answered (for example, “What’s the partnering plan?” or, “Who has to sign off on this?”) Phase 1 also includes aligning around high-level business strategy, goals and metrics.

Activities of phase 1 include:

- Analysis of current usage – who’s reading or watching your web site, blog, newsletters, and social media. Where are we today?
- Discussions with customers and potential customers (especially those not using your content and/or not customers yet).
- Interviews with executives, managers and employees.
- Wading through a lot of data on current site usage (and/or interviewing people who are already wading through that data).
- Planning/expanding a high-impact editorial calendar based on current and future interests/needs of the most important customers.
- Broad consideration of non-editorial features
 - Community
 - Social media
 - Interactive tools
 - Content forms, including video, audio and written.
- Identifying goals for internal and external marketing of all content.

Typical phase 1 questions:

- Who is the audience (broad focus)?
 - Are they customers?
 - Are they potentials?
- What do they know about our business now?
- What ultimate outcome do we want from their engagement with our content?
- What metrics will tell us that we’re succeeding?
 - Traffic data
 - Action taken (join, trade, buy)
 - Demonstrable increases in sales of products or assets under management
 - Publicity value (consider current and updated metrics)
- What are the hard and soft limitations from the company – what *can’t* you do?
- What are the goals of a visitor’s interaction with the site or other content venues, for example:
 - Directed action (do this...)
 - Inspired action (go to my account)
 - Interactive time on site (using a tool)
 - Join, trade, buy
 - “Send to a friend” Retweet, link, etc.
 - Link to this page
- How do these actions relate to the business goals?
- What does “interactive” mean to the audience?

At the end of phase 1 you have a vision and a set of the critical questions that have to be answered in order to plan the execution phase(s). These questions tend to raise possibilities. You also have identified task areas that have to be built into the early technical and business infrastructure. For example, what proprietary data need to be modeled and gathered; what internal business partners or resources can be leveraged.

Phase 2 consists of getting all the answers to the questions generated by phase 1. There are activities and more questions. These questions create choices, the answers to which result in a strategic plan.

Activities include:

- Audience segmentation
 - Segment by asset size or type, online behavior, life stage, goals, etc.
 - How does each group behave online?
 - Which are priority segments?
- Marketing/Sales strategies separately and together with other touch points.
 - Coordinating this is typically one of the thorniest institutional challenges.
 - It can be done in phases (e.g. at least let's have the collateral look the same)
- SEO strategies
- Mobile strategy
- Operational requirements
- What are your short-term goals for publishing?
- What's the current content management system?
- What are the current costs?
- Describe products and services
- Identify internal business partners
 - Capabilities
 - Requirements
 - Commitment and restraints (legal and institutional)
- Detail 1- and 3-year goals (financial, publicity, etc.)
- Timeline
- Budget
- Identify concurrent milestones in development and marketing
- Department and individual dashboards
- Build/buy/partner strategy

Typical phase 2 questions:

- How do customers want certain content and services delivered?
- Where are they getting them now?
- What's redundant?
- Are we taking customers from competitors or creating entire new markets?
- How can content help expand our "share of wallet"?

- What markets might we create that don't currently exist?
- What products and services do these markets want?
- How will those be delivered?
- How might content interact with individual account data such as customer dashboards?
- How could content be created from aggregated account data, aggregated financial information, and/or aggregated behavior?
- What are the legal, ethical or business risks of this?
- Do we currently have capabilities to deliver? Do we need to develop them? What's the ideal staffing, organizational structure?
- Is this international, domestic or both?
- How does this work with the business partners?
- Does outsourcing have a role?
- What are the criteria for build/buy/partner decisions?
- What's the community-of-influencers strategy?
 - On site (user-generated content)
 - Off site (blogs, partner site for activities like research)
- What's the SEO strategy?
 - Technical search engine optimization
 - Encouraging cross-linking

At the end of phase 2 you have a full-scale strategic plan, with includes, excludes, goals, timelines, ways and means. You don't have to wait until everything's complete before getting under way, but you do have to know the critical dependencies to avoid redundant work or scope creep in the interactive planning.

Phase 3 consists of executing on the plan, with or without me.

- Editorial management
- Technical development management
- Marketing management
- Site growth management
 - Use case modeling
 - Interactive design
 - User testing
 - Private/public betas
 - Feedback loops
 - ROI dashboards
 - Traffic path/behavior analysis (when do they leave? When do they go to their accounts? What happens when people come from their accounts to the site?)