THE AGE OF
AGILE CONTENT

Transforming a branded content machine into an Agile Content Engine[SM]

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Overview

Content agility is the foundation of what makes a brand's investment in custom content and content marketing the workhorses of authenticity. The Agile Content Engine (ACE)ᔆᴹ is a model of throughput that brings nimbleness to brand journalism. It brings audience-tuned people, processes, platforms and performance together and gets a brand's authentic editorial to market efficiently and effectively.

Brands and their marketing leaders are finding that the complex spectrum of content strategy, content delivery and audience consumption requires just as much thought as the very products and services they are marketing. Bringing a product or service to market is not for the faint of heart. When you get it right, it almost sells itself. The same goes for the art of storytelling and the science of content creation, curation and distribution.

For years, software developers have effectively applied agile processes—flexible planning, adaptive development, early delivery with iterative improvement, and fast and nimble response to change—to quickly deploy products and test them in the real market. That same philosophy applies here.

Just like a fine-tuned product marketing and management program, your content investment has to work end-to-end. The content-to-market journey can get broken fast. Understanding the inherent rigor of content excellence and what is at stake puts the art and science of ACE front and center.

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PACE
Content.Engagement.Results.

ACE is a proprietary content marketing model that organizes people, processes, platforms and performance into an efficient multi-channel content ecosystem that delivers results. ACE helps brands become better at creating and curating content and enhancing content performance. By getting agile with your entire content ecosystem, you will pull customers into the buying cycle faster and with more staying power. How? Your content is tuned to your audience through strategy, content types, timing, distribution and analytics.

By the Numbers

Why marketers who are serious about content investment and content performance can't afford to look at content as "hiring writers":

82% of B2C marketers and 95% of B2B enterprise marketers use content marketing.
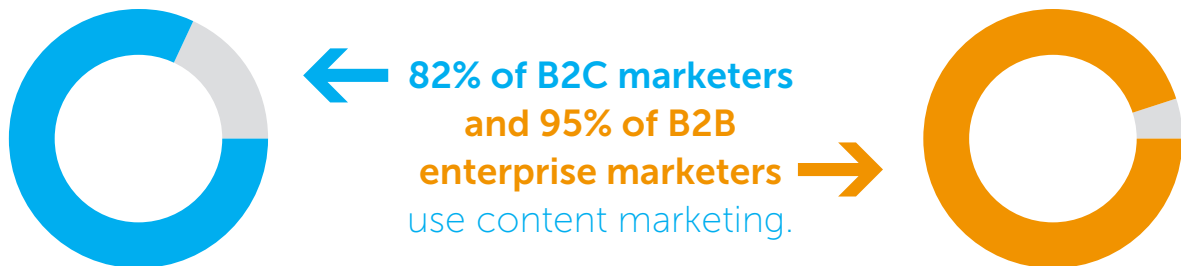
78% of CMOs believe **custom content is the future of the marketing industry.**
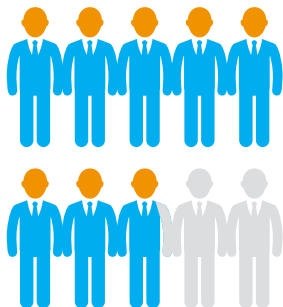
content

Only 12% of companies ignore content in their marketing efforts.

Despite the fact that content is proven to be valuable, **only 32% of marketers believe they're executing an effective strategy.**

Statistics curated from eMarketer and Kapost

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Achieving Content Agility

Is your content team attuned to the methodology of "sprint, run, jog"?
It needs to be.

Orchestrating an editorial process that illuminates your story, or the many-layered stories underneath, requires a newsroom mentality. Lessons learned from the last five years in the content marketing business reflect that the same mistakes are made repeatedly by brands. Those mistakes are typically:

- Inability for a brand or company to generate editorial versus copywriting
- Process gaps and hang-ups
- Being unresponsive to what the audience wants to hear
- Speed of execution, lag time
- Misaligned objectives and measurement
- Breakdowns in strategic content planning and execution
- Inconsistent voice and tone
- Creating more organizational complexity in an effort to tackle content
- Territory battles and silos with different content ideas, themes and purpose

The top priority of any great content effort has to be results. To get results, a content team needs to feel free from politics and prose, and get to the story. They need to learn to sprint, run and jog together. This is both behavior and mindset as well as process and experience. Meaning a team of writers, editors, strategists, creatives and analysts who create liquid content that flows the way you need it to.

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The Sprint, Run, Jog Construct

ACE presents a model in which production cycles and editorial planning are tailored to types of content and time-to-publish. Thus, Pace ensures that three practices, or pillars, of content agility are put into place:

Sprint

Fast-turn, time-critical content and short-form storytelling for breaking news/response to news, competitive response or crisis-mode editorial. Many brands miss the opportunity to support these needs with newsroom-style rapid creation, review and publication throughput. It requires specialized editorial thinking, a command of process and technology, and the conditioning of a sprinter ready for the 100-yard dash of story creation to distribution.

Run

The daily, always-on methodology of planned, timely, disciplined content creation. Typically mid-length, this is the core of a well-thought-out editorial calendar and process that is sensitized to audience responsiveness, current events relevant to the brand, competitive content and channel optimization.

Jog

This is known as the long-lead feature jog, the realm of well-planned editorial that may be monthly, quarterly or even annual in the schedule. This could be content with high production values, a feature series planned way in advance or thought leadership that is timeless. It could also be storylines that take longer to reveal themselves fully, ranging from editorial that comes from long-form research to documentaries and features on the backstories of brands and their customers that take time and investment to accomplish.

ACE in action is a combination of brains and muscle working together—not the pure brawn of a content machine, nor simply getting backlogged and stuck in content strategy execution circles.

Every Engine Has Parts:
Every Engine Needs Fuel

Getting agile with content helps brands accomplish three critical tasks:

1. Control and manage the investment in content
2. Own an effective and efficient end-to-end content execution approach
3. Deliver better content performance

So, why don't more marketing organizations do it? Because running a newsroom and adopting an agile content engine approach is different than the way most marketing organizations are wired to think. When a brand decides to become its own publisher, its own issuer of news, it can take years for the process and parts of the puzzle to mature, and for all the mistakes to reveal themselves.

ACE^{SM} enables a brand to cut through the clutter and noise of stumbling through the process and puts in place the talent, the process and the platform(s) to get the editorial effort running right.

How about the fuel? ACE also turns the idiom of "create once, publish everywhere" on its heels. Why? Because it really does not work. That train of thought was promoted by various content marketing books to make marketers believe you can spend less on content, cut corners and create a single piece of content, like a white paper, and simply distribute it everywhere, any channel.
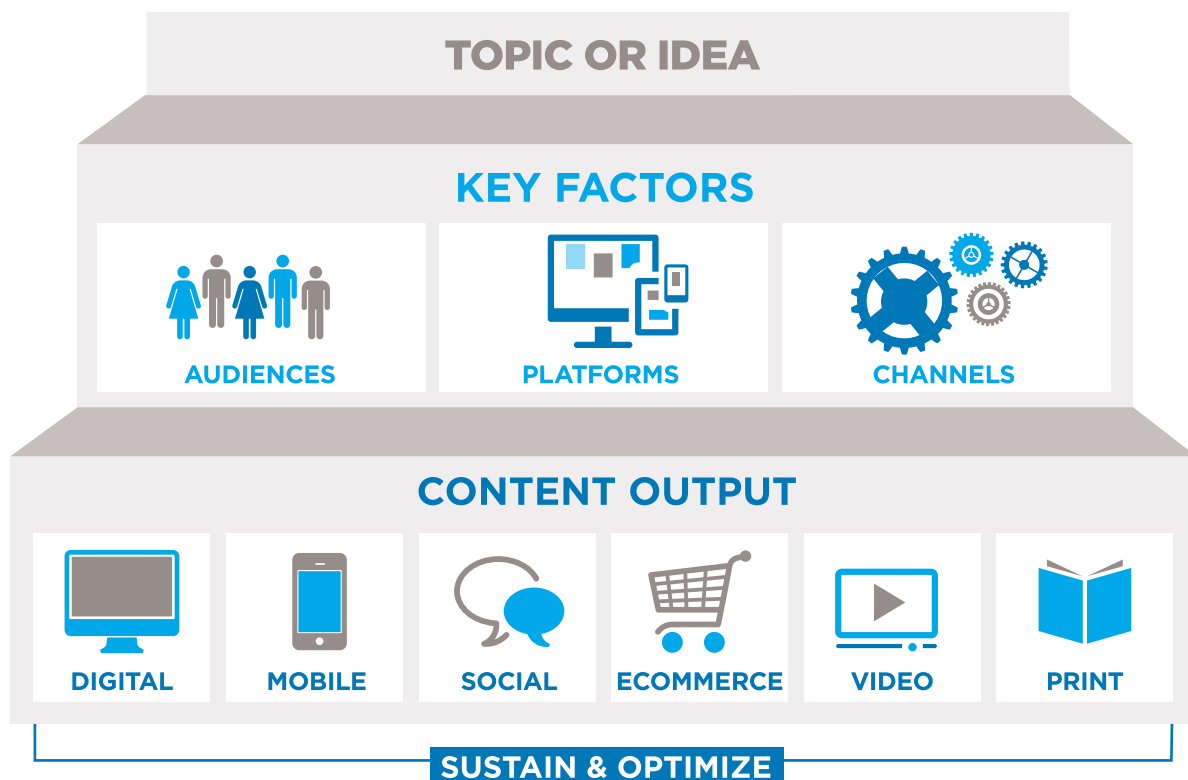
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To illustrate the point, one might consider a news agency like CNN. When a story is developed, a reporter is sent, and likely a camera man/crew. The story is reported on once, and the format, length, depth and method of distribution are adapted based on the channel and/or segment of audience. In fact the same "report" on one story may have different story lead-ins for different placement and even social sharing.

ACE puts in place ROPE℠, which Pace developed from the expertise of finding the story and to "report once, publishing everywhere."

TOPIC OR IDEA

KEY FACTORS

AUDIENCES　　**PLATFORMS**　　**CHANNELS**

CONTENT OUTPUT

DIGITAL　**MOBILE**　**SOCIAL**　**ECOMMERCE**　**VIDEO**　**PRINT**

SUSTAIN & OPTIMIZE

ROPE empowers channel owners. Your team members in charge of various internal and external channels should be experts in what performs well on that channel. He or she knows best how to plan, edit and deliver a story and a message on that channel, which may be totally different than how the channel owner in charge of your other channels would tell a story. Length, publishing cadence, content type (images vs. video or text) all matter, and channel owners know what their audiences like.

In short, creating once can cause editorial failure across diverse audiences and channels, whereas crafting appropriate versions of a story that is reported on once centrally is a ticket to success.

The result is better content performance, which means the content investment gets a better payoff.

The Strategic Approach to Content

Oftentimes content strategy is a well-meaning effort that leaves actionable and executable planning off the table, becoming only directional. The ACE approach presents a unique production process that employs digital strategy, content strategy and deep rigor around editorial planning and content excellence. In fact, some may see ACE as a content center of excellence in and of itself. Getting the parts of ACE right that span people, process, platform(s) and performance is critical.

Each part of ACE can be seen as a practice unto itself, and the magic happens when you make them work together. The key components:

Digital Strategy
Planning, platform, content promotion and expression of your brand

Content Strategy
Audience, voice, tone, the story(ies) you have to tell, technology, distribution and desired outcomes

Editorial Planning
Cadence and short- to long-term schedules, themes and storylines, sources, reporting, cross-channel plans
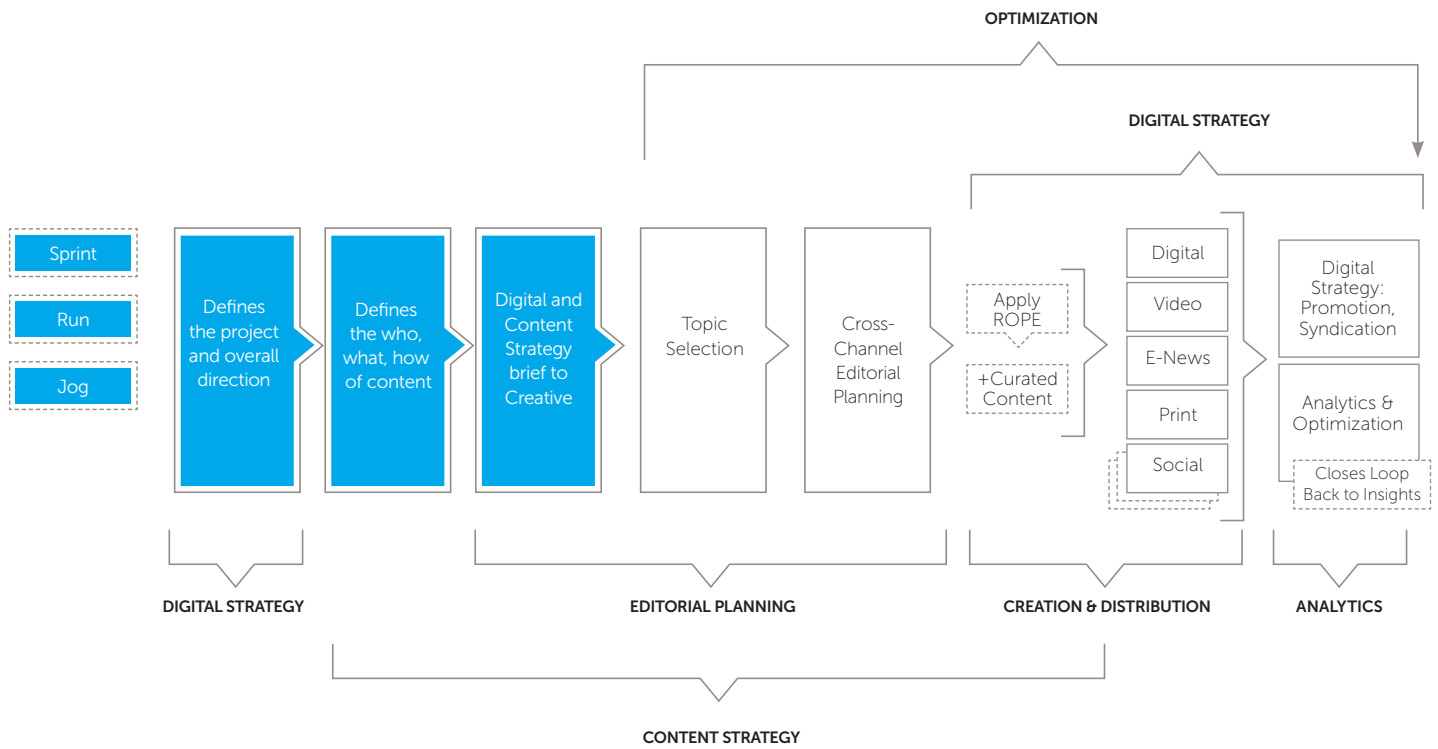
Content Creation
Reporting, writing, editing, curation, syndication, creative/visual, multimedia, social, stakeholder reviews

Content Measurement
Distribution, reach, resonance, content types and attributes, feedback loops, analytics, audience sentiment, key performance indicators (KPIs)

OPTIMIZATION

DIGITAL STRATEGY

| Sprint |
| Run |
| Jog |

| Defines the project and overall direction | Defines the who, what, how of content | Digital and Content Strategy brief to Creative | Topic Selection | Cross-Channel Editorial Planning | Apply ROPE / +Curated Content | Digital / Video / E-News / Print / Social | Digital Strategy: Promotion, Syndication / Analytics & Optimization / Closes Loop Back to Insights |

DIGITAL STRATEGY   EDITORIAL PLANNING   CREATION & DISTRIBUTION   ANALYTICS

CONTENT STRATEGY

Bringing It All Together

The steps to setting up ACE help solve several big problems. Not only is the agile content methodology implemented, and a content/digital strategy created, but it also helps to solve some of the complexities and questions that marketers face across their companies when it comes to content. Chiefly, it delivers answers to how do I make my content more effective and create it more efficiently? How do I get more from my content across every channel?

It all starts with discovery and then the business case. The best way to go into the process of considering ACE and becoming your own newsroom encompasses five key steps that help you bake the plan, inclusive of the very content strategy that needs execution:

DISCOVERY **ANALYSIS** **CONCEPT** **EXECUTION** **GOVERNANCE/ EVALUATION**
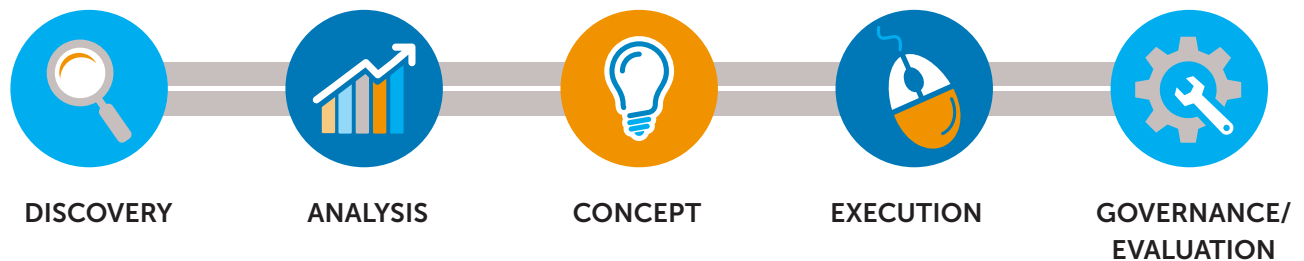
Key Considerations

It's difficult to be agile if you evaluate every aspect in pieces and parts. Remember, this is an engine, so the integrated operation and the big-picture investment in content excellence is essential, and the engine is designed with your objectives and financials in mind.

The set-up and ongoing steady-state nature of an agile content engine requires equal consideration to process, people, platform and performance. The temptation is to isolate costs versus looking at the whole picture and whole benefit. Questions emerge quickly. Is my talent costing me too much and should I trade down in those costs to spend more on technology? What is the right balance? What technology do I use with this model? Where does the process design come from?

The good thing is, these questions can be answered. The results of ACE pay off the investment in many ways. In some cases a brand may not be able to afford not to adopt ACE. Spending money on content is the same business-case thinking that goes into product or service investment or funding. Content behaves like a product and a service —it is tangible, it adds value, it is consumable and shareable and can create its own type of affinity or brand attachment.
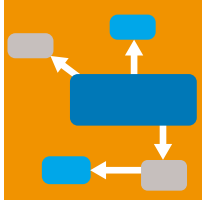
Therefore, the ACE model helps you identify:

The people you need

Outsourced model or hybrid (blended with your team), it is staffed and operated with a publisher's mindset and a content marketer's eye.

The processes you need

The model employs tried-and-true processes that work and generate results. The operating model has a system and parameters as well as operating principles that can be plugged into any organization. The necessary interfaces with people and technology are considered and designed to promote fluid content.
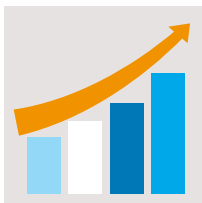
The platform you need

A suite of recommended technology for content management, workflow and distribution can be put in place, and a custom evaluation can be conducted for any brand's needs. The model allows for a plug-and-play, turnkey technology approach, or using and improving upon what you have.

The performance you need

Every period and pixel counts when you are investing in content. What ACE has consistently proven is that more money is lost with internal content production inefficiency and lack of content consumption, even if the volume feels right. ACE is focused on content optimization as well as production and distribution. There is a set of measurement principles that work for looking at audience insights, feedback and sentiments, content proliferation, resonance and digital presence. The model incorporates the performance measures the brand needs as well as the tools to ensure the program is working.

With the organizing principles of ACE, clients have seen results up to:*

92% lift in site visits when content present on the digital experience
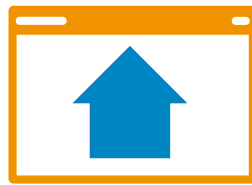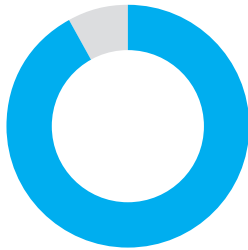
200%+ lift in organic traffic, as content gained in search traction

Nearly 50% reduction in customer churn

3 to 5x lift in purchase rate when encountering content in the purchase path

* Metrics and results vary by client and industry

Six Critical Success Factors
For Implementing ACE℠

Creating and delivering against the ACE model has a number of critical success factors and dependencies that allow ACE to meet its mission with any brand.

The mission of ACE is to create an end-to-end engine of content that is fine-tuned to audience needs through a newsroom culture. It helps brands know who they are talking to, how to talk to them and if it is working. In short, ACE helps content fire on all cylinders with efficiency and effectiveness at the helm. Spending more money on content is not the answer; spending it right to get payoff from the content investment, the time and the energy is what ACE does.

Here are six success factors to keep in mind when considering the ACE model:

1. Changing and evolving mindsets in the enterprise around content through strategy, alignment and putting newsroom practices into action
2. Centralizing the end-to-end creation, curation, distribution and analysis of content
3. Leveraging a fresh set of eyes and specialized knowledge of authentic editorial, a journalist's eye, unique publishing and editorial processes and a fast-paced, multi-layered and tenacious approach to content

4. Understanding how to choose, leverage and integrate content technologies, from planning to in-market performance of your program
5. Discovering and delivering upon what your audience wants to hear and how they want to hear it through a sprint, run, jog approach
6. Mastering the "report once, publish everywhere" (ROPE) system of content excellence

Conclusion

The pressure is on to compete not only with high-quality products and services, but also with winning content that propels your brand's story into the market and adds value for your audience. Producing content mechanically in high volume like a machine commoditizes content, and probably works against your purpose. Using the ACE model helps you attain agility with multiple tracks and channels of content. The question may not be can you afford to spend what you're spending on content, but can you afford to do it in a less efficient and effective way than may be happening. The answer may be blending the mindsets of a publisher and a marketer, putting your audience first, creating the end-to-end content, production and distribution that maximizes return, and executing your content with the same rigor of quality that you do with your products and services. Pace's Agile Content Engine is the answer.

About the Author

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Gordon has more than 23 years of marketing and sales leadership, ranging from re-engineering well-known brands and product portfolios to illuminating stories about a company's products and services. At Pace, his role is to help existing clients develop winning content programs and to ensure new clients reach their strategic objectives. Prior to joining Pace, Gordon served as President of D Custom. His agency and client experience covers brands such as The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, Hawaiian Airlines, Sabre Airline Solutions, HP, Dell, Rosenbluth-American Express, Teradata, Nestle Purina, Fossil, Ryan, Insigniam and Intuit. Gordon graduated from Appalachian State University with a degree in Media Communications and Journalism. He has traveled to 40+ countries and has lived in Charlotte; Washington, D.C.; Honolulu; Dallas and now Greensboro.

About Pace

Pace is North America's leading independent content agency, specializing in multichannel branded content solutions that fuel loyalty, CRM, marketing, digital and social programs for many of the world's largest brands. We have a staff of more than 330 professionals who are located in four offices across the U.S. – Greensboro, N.C.; New York, N.Y.; Dallas, T.X.; San Antonio, T.X; and Rogers, Ark. We help our clients navigate through the complex marketing landscape to develop programs that suit their needs to deliver targeted outcomes.

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