DATA-DRIVEN MARKETING CONTENT

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

LEE WILSON

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Praise for *Data-driven Marketing Content: A Practical Guide*

Lee has been my go-to guy for search marketing advice for almost five years now, and I don't see that changing any time soon. He has an encyclopaedic knowledge of search engine optimisation (SEO), is obsessed with detail and knows exactly how to explain his innovative techniques – and the benefits of them – clearly and concisely.

(**Graeme Parton** – *Freelance Copywriter and Journalist*)

I had the absolute pleasure of working with Lee in his capacity as Head of SEO at a leading search agency. His passion for delivering content driven search and digital strategies is second to none, as is his passion for creating content that works, sells and delivers value. If you're struggling to make content work for your business or clients, read this book. Better still, talk to Lee.

(**John McMurray-Williams** – *Sales Director – Innovate Creative*)

I have been working with Lee for nearly 10 years in the field of SEO at a leading search marketing agency. During that time I've seen Lee, as Head of SEO, build a successful specialist search team and deliver winning SEO strategies across many clients. The knowledge and experience he has to offer is overwhelming, and there is much, seasoned digital marketers or new, can learn from him.

(**Dave Colgate** – *Senior SEO Specialist – Vertical Leap*)

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This book is dedicated to the four people who never fail to motivate, inspire and drive me towards all achievements in life: my wife Ayako, daughter Sophia, and parents Cynthia and Douglas.
This is also written for and dedicated to the memory of family members lost over the past few years.

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Author Biography

Lee Wilson (BA Hons) has worked in digital marketing, delivering thousands of integrated content and marketing campaigns since 2003, after he successfully graduated from Winchester University, England, UK, with honours in Business Management and Communications.

Lee is a Certified Web Applications Developer through the Open University (Cert WAD), individually Google Analytics (GA) qualified and has Search Engine Marketing Professional qualifications (SEMPO) relevant to the authoring of this book.

For the past number of years, Lee Wilson has been employed as Head of Enterprise SEO for a top 10 UK Search and Digital marketing agency (Vertical Leap). During that time, he has worked on and led huge numbers of data-driven campaigns within search marketing, digital and content niches, spanning leading global brands, start-ups, SMEs, plus new entrepreneurial ventures.

Prior to working in the agency side of marketing, Lee Wilson was employed in-house for over seven years as the marketing head and leader of direct and digital marketing departments. Lee took the step towards setting up and running his own digital content and marketing business in 2008.

Personally, Lee is a passionate author (his first solely authored book was published in 2016 – *Tactical SEO: The Theory and Practice of Search Marketing*), has vast experience and insights covering many marketing specialist areas and has been mentally ideating and developing this body of work into this business guide since working on his first few websites back at the start of the 2000s when his interest in this realm was sparked.

As an industry expert, Lee Wilson can be seen providing expert opinion and content contribution to many influential websites and businesses including being regularly cited on; *Search Engine Journal*, State of Digital, plus a host of other media sites and mainstream publications.

Outside of content, marketing and writing, Lee derives inspiration from his wife, young daughter, mum and dad, plus close friends who inspire him every day, bringing lots of light and love into his life.

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Foreword

When I first started leading digital content and marketing teams in the early 2000s, I quickly acquired a passion for sharing practical advice, expertise and helping others through my experiences.

This has driven me to communicate and distribute my expertise spanning many of the most popular business, search, digital and marketing sites on the Internet.

Over the past 15+ years working in the marketing industry within senior positions, I've had the privilege of driving many hundreds (likely thousands) of integrated marketing projects, cross-channel marketing/content campaigns, ongoing projects and long-term retainer bodies of work.

I have worked with some of the largest international businesses, brand new start-up companies and hundreds of small- to medium-sized businesses (SMBs), all bringing new challenges and opportunities to explore marketing content approaches to deliver increased results.

The most common thread spanning all of this time collaborating with businesses regardless of scale, historical performance or budget, is that business, marketing and wider user content can always deliver more.

In 2016, I created my first solely authored book which has now launched into international audiences (*Tactical SEO: The Theory and Practice of Search Marketing*), and ever since then have been planning to complete this guide, helping businesses and practitioners generate business and marketing content that works.

This book empowers content professionals, marketing teams and practitioners of all industries to take gut feel out of the content creation process and replace it with something much more powerful and effective – data-driven insight.

Throughout this guide, you will be provided with everything you need to take your marketing content to a higher level of contribution towards attaining and exceeding your business goals and objectives.

This guide will improve and grow your data ecosystem to empower more meaningful marketing content creation. You will also be able to identify, understand and strengthen your business marketing content to make every word you produce contribute more towards your aims and company aspirations.

Practical expertise is apportioned spanning the key marketing channels, enabling you to target new and existing users regardless of medium or industry with effective content. Added to this, everything is fuelled by data and expertise.

Common marketing content barriers are explored, plus tips are shared to help you overcome the challenges being faced by most companies, plus you can see

how to efficiently evaluate your content progress, set the right benchmarks for your business goals, as well as report on your future content successes.

If you want to solidify your content success, gain ground on the top competing businesses within your market and create unique marketing content differentiation, this book is for you.

Acknowledgements

Throughout my career I have had the opportunity to be mentored directly and through standards setting by truly inspiring business leaders, entrepreneurs and key staff in all levels of organisations.

Upon reflection, a great deal of insight has come from my peers and the people I have had the privilege of managing directly.

At the time of creating this business guide, I took the decision not to name specific people in these acknowledgements, as by doing so I will be omitting direct thanks and appreciation to many others, who without their knowledge, approach and expertise I would not be in the position of creating and sharing this practical content guide today.

Without doubt, most of the knowledge I've gleaned over the years has been as a direct result of discussion (active and passive involvement), and perhaps the most valuable contribution has been made from working in passionate, open and inclusive business cultures.

When a company culture places positive emphasis on knowledge sharing and all staff and service progression, this creates an open and trusted environment stemming creativity, expression and experimentation – all key component parts of effective and continuous improvement.

Thinking back, this business guide began when I worked on my first few websites at the start of the millennium and has been built on with each and every relevant experience since.

By reading this practical data-driven marketing content guide, you will gain a distilled, real-world understanding and fast-tracked insights into the lessons I have learnt, plus the successes achieved over many years in content, digital and marketing senior roles.

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Chapter 1

Introducing Data-driven Content

There is more information being collected today than at any other stage during human existence. As you might expect, a substantial amount of this data can be used for enhancing your existing marketing content, plus creating new marketing material that works harder, plus contributing more towards your professional and business goals.

This wealth of new data poses a substantial threat and untapped opportunity for individuals, practitioners and businesses alike, when it comes ideating and producing effective business and marketing content, as well as keeping in touch of the growing online and offline competition.

To put new data growth into context, every minute Google completes 3.6 million searches, 103 billion spam emails are sent and 69 thousand hours of video is streamed on Netflix, and that's just the beginning.

Based on IBM data, 90% of all data available to us today were created in the past two years; this equates to 2.5 quintillion bytes of data created every day, demonstrating the rapid changes in data availability, and the business opportunity to leverage this wealth of ever-increasing data for new insights, actions and a competitive company advantage.

Data-driven Content

Data-driven Marketing Content: A Practical Guide empowers you to identify, understand and act on ever-changing data to make meaning from the deep data dilemma.

Everyone can have access to data-driven insights, which can turn mundane, thinner value content into purposeful, positioned marketing materials created with the user in mind, and is able to deliver results regardless of medium, marketing channel or intended audience.

Businesses and practitioners in all industries are at a point where they know there is a need to understand and use data more effectively to create result-based content, but the informational barriers to entry are often high.

For companies to succeed, they need to act fast and confident that the practical and strategic marketing content decisions they make, combined with the resource they deploy, are going to deliver end results faster and more frequently.

This is where *Data-driven Marketing Content: A Practical Guide* helps.

This book explores the data-driven content opportunity, shares practical tips and expertise generated over thousands of business and marketing content projects and empowers you to make more successful content choices.

As you use this guide you will find chapter summaries, important term definitions and practical tips and advice, helping you to delve further into material that interests you the most, remove informational barriers sooner and digest information faster.

The Data-driven Content Process

The data-driven content process to follow when developing a repeatable system for marketing content creation that works can be effectively segmented into five stages:

(1) **Needs:** data discovery, opportunity and consolidating needs
(2) **Collection:** data collection, assessment and labelling
(3) **Processing:** data processing, storage and distribution
(4) **Management:** data managing, integrity and usefulness
(5) **Refinement:** data refinement, analysis and insights

Over the next few sections, we provide visualisations of this process in action, plus each segment previously referred to is discussed in greater detail.

Needs: Data Discovery, Opportunity and Consolidating Needs

The needs stage of the data-driven content process centres on the end user goals, objectives and desired outcomes from the data.

By putting clearly defined business data needs in place and matching these with solution-orientated outcomes and objectives, it becomes possible to outline expectations and describe practically what a successful data-led project looks like.

This 'needs phase' determines the attention of the collection stage.

Collection: Data Collection, Assessment and Labelling

Only once business data needs have been identified and agreed, can the collection stage begin.

Whilst it is likely you have a number of data discovery points in place already, it is necessary to take a step back from what's already present and contemplate what can potentially become available to fulfil your business data requirements. This provides a more comprehensive data collection body of work and expected improved foundation for future insights derived.

In most cases you will have silos of disparate business intelligence and data, which will require collecting into a single place. This assists you in the recombination of separate data points and sources for added and unique gains.

Once the data collection is at a required level of completion, you will need to review its accuracy, usefulness and compatibility for purpose. This can be a fairly succinct process and likely fairly subjective.

Practical Tip. As a quick tip, it is worth encouraging wider teams, staff and stakeholder involvement at this time. It is much easier to modify and add to data sets now rather than retrospectively.

When combining data sets and gathering information in a single database, you need to label everything. Labelling data is about making data meaningful and informative. Sharing suggested labels, and gathering wider team input through crowdsourcing feedback is critical for future usability and insights.

Processing: Data Processing, Storage and Distribution

As you may have noticed, the steps within the data-driven content process tend to overlap and integrate between phases.

The data processing phase considers the usefulness of the information derived from the data.

This functional step takes raw data and transforms them into processed information which is effectively stored for repeat use and distributed to the end users.

With each step of the process, you need to reflect on the successful application of the completed phase, re-evaluate whether it has delivered on all of the priority areas and needs identified then confirm this with stakeholders and end users.

You will want to limit assumed positive outcomes as much as possible while you progress to encourage data integrity later on.

Management: Data Managing, Integrity and Usefulness

Organising and managing your data is concerned with ensuring the data you have meet the current, changing and ongoing needs or your organisation.

Fundamental characteristics of this body of work include the ongoing maintenance of the data, the integrity of it and making sure it is fit for purpose.

Data management and assessed usefulness of work can often sit more effectively with key staff who are also end users of the data. This is primarily due to the fact that it will be their changing needs and outputs that are fundamentally dependant on the data usefulness.

Data integrity will usually be reliant upon the development and IT teams, accountable for data collection and processing; however, a feedback loop needs to be in place for any user to improve the value and usefulness from the data by reporting back to relevant departments: bugs, refinement, improvements and ideas.

The more that the wider company is included at the early stages of data-driven content, the easier it is to expedite the process and include these type of approaches within wider company departments and the business culture as a whole.

Refinement: Data Refinement, Analysis and Insights

The end goal of data refinement is the development of an integrated data source, which has successfully combined previous separate and dispersed data sets into a final product ready for new use.

Part of this stage involves creating commonality between the data points and the removal of vulnerabilities so that the data have a shared purpose and usefulness for gleaming fresh insight and analysis from.

It can be beneficial to consider this final part of the data-driven content process as an outcome, which refines data potential into information ready for analysis, insights and actions.

The Data-driven Content Process Chart

Fig. 1.1 gives you the visual representation of the data-driven content process in action.

Overcoming the Big Data Gulf

The quandary that this rapid influx of data is causing is that the super brands are able to invest heavily into turning these data into meaningful insight and immediate next actions; however, this is creating an ever-increasing gulf with the remaining 99% of businesses.

This big data gulf is no more present anywhere else than when it comes to creating effective business and marketing content that delivers on its objectives. The gap is more noticeable online, and this is reflected in this guide, but it is not exclusively so.

If you want to create digital marketing content that works, reflects the changing needs of your audience, and delivers results regardless of device and channel, **big data is the competitive advantage you are not yet maximising.**

It's important to mention at this time that data-driven content is not only about marketing content but also a changing approach towards creating any purposeful business content online or offline.

Big Data

Big data is a term most businesses and marketing professionals will have heard frequently over the past few years, with growing momentum and buzzword popularity since 2015. As you might expect, the term 'big data' can mean many things to various people; however, for the purposes of this book:

'Big data refers to large data sets that can be analysed, interrogated and processed in order to provide new meaning, value and understanding.'

Big data can be structured and unstructured, qualitative and quantitative, and is all encompassing.

A key characteristic to keep in mind with big data is the combination of 'high-volume' data accessibility and the potential to deliver increased data-driven advantages and insights (primarily to businesses).

Needs:
The initial stage requires identifying,
prioritising and setting/agreeing the
business needs and focus areas.

Discovery   Opportunity   Consolidating

Collection:
The second stage requires effective
data gathering, confirmation of
requirements and data qualification.

Collection   Assessment   Labelling

Processing:
Completing a series of operations
on the data to make it more meaningful
and ready for use.

Processing   Storage   Distribution

Fig. 1.1.   The Data-driven Content Process Chart.

Management:
Organising the data and assessing
data validity and usefulness for
purpose.

Managing   Integrity   Usefulness

Refinement:
The initial stage requires identifying,
prioritising and setting/agreeing the
business needs and focus areas.

Refinement   Analysis   Insights
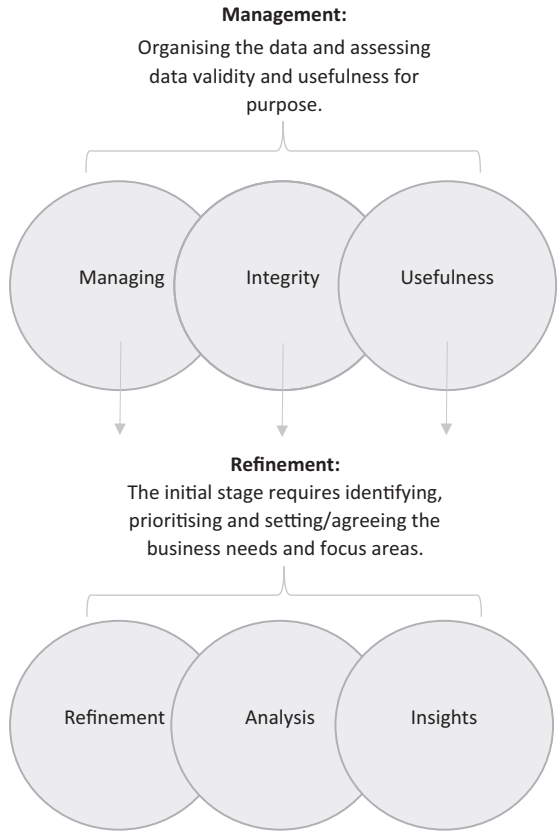
Fig. 1.1.   (Continued).

Another point to acknowledge is that big data is less about isolated quantities of data, rather an added focus on what you are able to do with the data to make better strategic and tactical decision-making.

The end goal being making more out of every piece of content you create, whether this is for marketing purposes or broader company needs.

The Fundamentals of Big Data

There are four fundamental characteristics to take note of with regard to big data, commonly referred to as 'The Four V's'.

You may find other sources citing 'value' as a fifth 'V', but this is a self-explanatory and an assumed feature, plus other reference points have been seen incorporating visualisation, viscosity and virality into the mix for other fundamental expansion.

The primary (Four V's) for big data which are described in greater depth next are:

(1) Volume
(2) Variety
(3) Velocity
(4) Veracity

More About the 'Four V's'

Volume can be seen as the fundamental criteria attributed to big data. Without scale you have data, but not the level of information required to derive any degree of competitive advantage or insight outside of the traditional informational expectations.

Variety is what makes big data all encompassing. There are thousands of mainstream data collation and access points (Google, Bing, YouTube, Google Analytics, Google Search Console, Facebook, Twitter, to name but a few); a visible characterisation of big data includes recombining these disparate data sets to support fresh (new) value. There are no rules with data variety, a Facebook feed, social media share, webinar, video transcript, and anything else you can think of, may have some level of data merit for future use.

Velocity refers to the rate and regularity of data requiring processing combined with the functionality of streaming that data. Modern televisions, computers, car sensors and any application or device that can send and receive data (consider the Internet of Things) contribute to velocity.

Veracity is the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data. You will have heard the saying 'garbage in, garbage out (GIGO)', this cannot be more overstated in importance when it comes to considering big data. If your data are not accurate or credible, everything you gather from them will be unreliable and flawed.

Business Insights and Value

Business insights (and ultimately actionable value) are the principal end goals for data driving any element of your business or marketing approach.

The building blocks and foundation for generating business insights and value are almost always people and technology. You should consider these two areas as the basis from which everything else is built upon.

The Business Insights and Value Stack

The Business Insights and Value Stack (Fig. 1.2) are something uniquely created for this guide. This stack comprises the five building blocks that are built (stacked) upon people and technology foundations.

The five stackable items are:

(1) **Data:** Needs, Collection, Processing, Management and Refinement
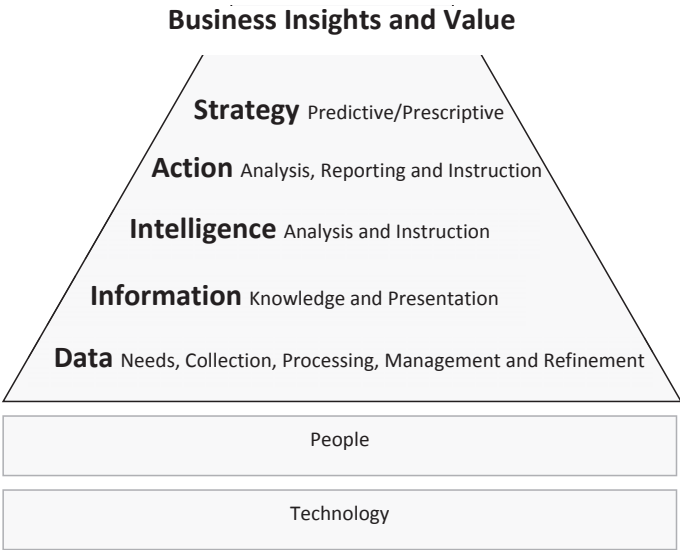(2) **Information:** Knowledge and Presentation

Business Insights and Value

Fig. 1.2. The Business Insights and Value Stack Chart.

(3) **Intelligence:** Analysis and Instruction
(4) **Action:** Analysis, Reporting and Instruction
(5) **Strategy:** Predictive/Prescriptive

Each of these stackable component parts build chronologically from the bottom upwards. Every step of the process is actively contributing towards the same objective area and end goal.

Data

We have covered the data item in some detail within 'The Data-driven Content Process' previously, including definitions for data needs, collection, processing, management and refinement.

For the contexts of this book, the term 'data' is chiefly represented as larger data sets and more specifically 'big data'.

As a reminder, big data refers to large data sets that can be analysed, interrogated and processed in order to provide new meaning, value and understanding.

Information

Data provided have a requirement to convey facts and details arranged and presented to encourage additional learning and logical understanding of the information contained.