

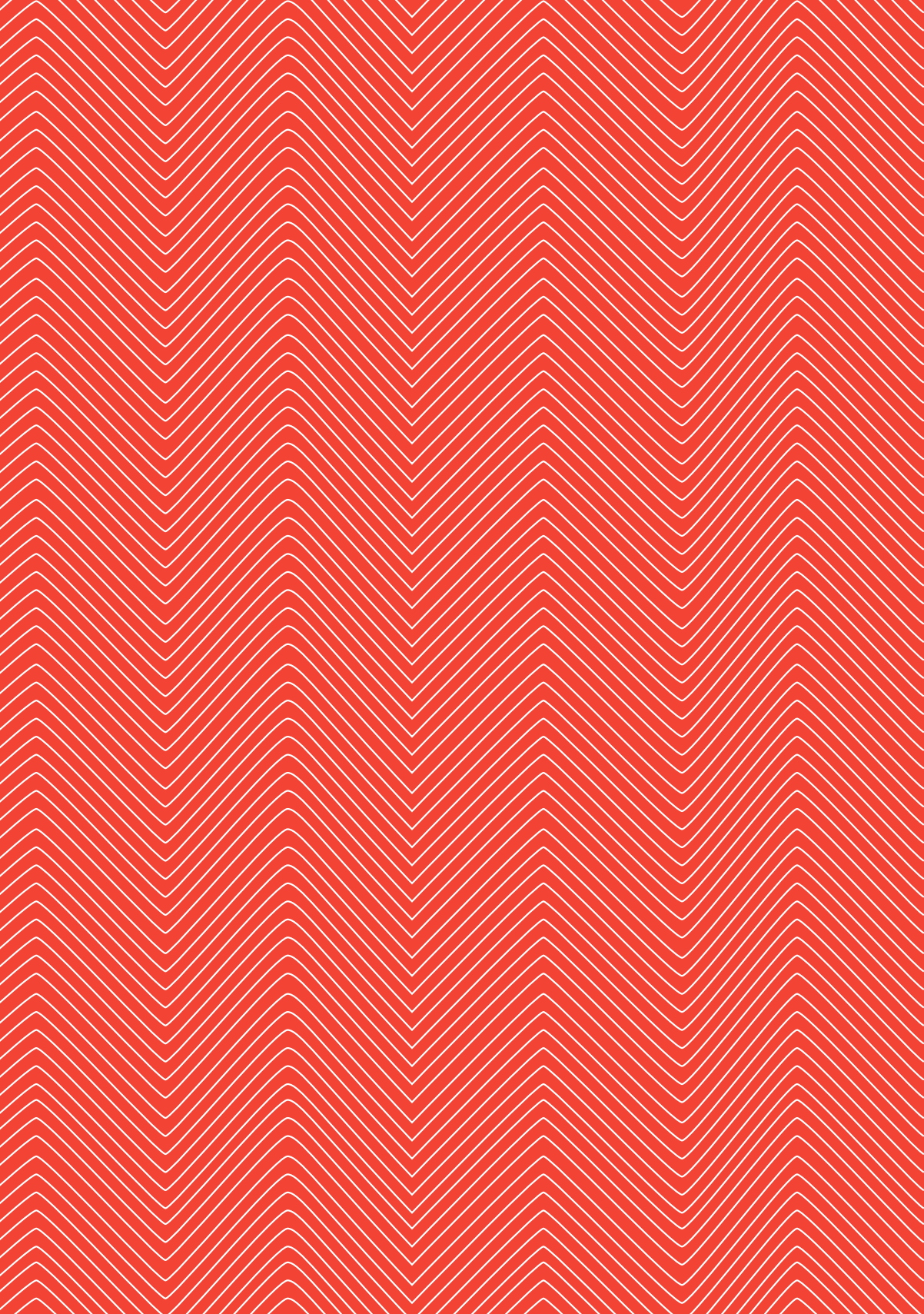
CONTENT STRATEGY GUIDE

Appeal to your target group with rich
content, develop a loyal audience
and strengthen your market position



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1. Making a case for a content strategy

Nowadays many businesses focus on content. After all, content is king, isn't it? Still, sometimes King Content is more like a vagabond: content pops up everywhere but far too often there is no clear vision, plan or concept.

An abundance of content is being offered via a host of channels. Publishing content is really quite simple. There is no shortage of content channels: apps, websites, print magazines, Facebook, blogs, e-books, webinars, mashups, podcasts, virtual learning platforms, videos ...

So how can you be a cut above the rest in this age of information overload? And how does your audience find its way to your content?

In our opinion neither of these is possible without implementing a well-considered content strategy. Without such a strategy chances are you will never build a loyal audience and all your hard work will come to (almost) nothing.

A strategy keeps you from simply surfing along on every hype.

New applications can be amazing. And who knows, the latest form of augmented reality may enable your company to key into the lives of your customers in a fantastic way, but a good content piece can also consist of a simple plan scribbled on a piece of paper, which that takes you from A to B. A strategy will tell you whether you need the former or the latter. Or both.

Despite these benefits, many companies still don't have a content strategy. According to a report published by Lieb, Groopman and Li some time ago, Altimeter stated that 70% of firms were without a content strategy. A recent study (2017) by the International Content Marketing Forum and its Belgian partner CUSTO has shown that fewer than half of companies have a documented content strategy.

Through this guide Cypres aims to share its experience in setting up content strategies to enable you to reflect strategically on your own situation and develop a formula for success geared to your business.

'Without such a strategy chances are you will never build a loyal audience and all your hard work will come to (almost) nothing.'



The strategy of NET-A-PORTER

PORTER is currently one of the most successful examples of the use of content. Fashion company NET-A-PORTER launched its print magazine in February of 2014. Although the magazine is more expensive than Vogue, its circulation of 152,000 per issue already puts it in the same ball park as the world-famous fashion magazine. NET-A-PORTER really did its homework and took a long and hard look at the preferences of its readership by, amongst other things, combining its own in-house data with market intelligence from the magazine world. This proved that, beyond doubt, a print magazine was the best medium – apparently 80% of their target group prefer a print magazine – and taught them where best to sell PORTER. The maiden issue consisted of 300 pages, 72 of which were filled with adverts.

NET-A-PORTER avoided the pitfall of turning PORTER into a catalogue, instead developing a unique editorial proposition revolving around shoppability. In addition, the company opted for a proper integration with online channels. Also, NET-A-PORTER didn't try to appeal to the entire client portfolio, focusing instead on the top 1% of customers, who generate one fifth of the total turnover.

Results soon followed: sales in this target group boomed and we've been told that the number of magazine subscribers increased by a whopping 125%. This success is definitely owed in large part to the quality of the magazine, but well-considered strategic choices provided a solid foundation.

2. Strategy as a choice and as a process

Before we take a closer look at the nature of content strategy, we should first examine the concept of 'strategy'. There are all kinds of view on strategy and concepts such as 'strategy', 'planning' and 'tactics' are often confused. Also, things evolve so quickly nowadays that some companies believe that strategic thinking is obsolete. We believe that, on the contrary, today's fast-paced evolution requires more strategic skills. After all, a good strategy is a framework that helps you make rapid but well-founded tactical and operational decisions.

'Your strategic choices give your company direction and purpose.'

Strategy is choice

Playing to Win: How Strategy Really Works (Lafley/Martin, 2013) contains one of the most basic and transparent definitions of corporate strategy. The authors summarise strategy in a single word: choice. Next, they identify five essential choices any company must make:

- × **What are your winning aspirations?** What do you wish to achieve with your company?
- × **In what area do you want to realise those aspirations?** 'Area' can mean a geographical area, a product category, a market segment, a distribution channel, ...
- × **How can you beat the competition in your chosen field?** This pertains to your value proposition and your competitive advantage.
- × **What capabilities must be in place to get ahead?** What activities should you develop and what competencies do you need to fulfil your aspirations?
- × **What management systems do you deploy?** In other words: what systems do you use to manage your strategy and measure its results?

Of course, tactics is also a question of choice but tactical decisions focus on concrete actions. With strategy it's a matter of fundamental decisions that impact the whole. That is why Lafley and Martin feel that strategy is so much more than mere analysis or planning. Analysis and planning are both individual components of a strategy. For instance, formulating well-founded answers to Lafley and Martin's five strategic questions requires analysis. You have to know your market, understand your customers, be aware of what the competition is up to, etc. But at the heart of a strategy are the choices you make based on your insights.

Your strategic choices give your company direction and purpose. Evolving in the direction of that goal requires planning. Planning is part of a strategy but it is not the main thing. The choices you make are and planning is the result of those choices. When you execute your plan you will want to know whether you are going in the right direction. That, too, is also part of a strategy.

Strategy is a process

A good strategy is a cyclical process: you analyse, make choices, plan them, carry them out and verify whether the implementation matches the original plan. A well-known example of a cyclical approach was developed by W. Edwards Deming. You may be familiar with his PDCA model as part of Six Sigma. The PDCA cycle is a quality management instrument that harks back to the scientific method of hypothesis, experimentation and evaluation.

The PDCA cycle distinguishes four individual steps:

- × **Plan.** Analyse your situation and set goals to improve it.
If this involves fundamental improvements relating to a greater whole then we call them strategic.
- × **Do.** Implement the planned improvements.
- × **Check.** Measure the results and determine whether the situation has improved.
- × **Act.** Adjust your strategy based on the measured results.

Our guide aims to combine Lafley and Martin's insights with Deming's cyclical approach and his focus on quality improvement. Our approach considers content strategy as a means of supporting a business strategy and as a part of your marketing and communication strategy (Fig. 1.) This means that we view strategic business, marketing and communication questions through content-coloured glasses. Moreover, adopting a cyclical approach to content like Deming does paves the way for continuous quality improvement.



FIG. 1.
A CONTENT STRATEGY
SUPPORTING THE
BUSINESS STRATEGY

3. Content strategy and content marketing

Before we take an in-depth look at the development of a content strategy we should first discuss content marketing. Content strategy and content marketing are concepts that are often confused, even by established organisations such as the Content Marketing Institute. What is content strategy to some is content marketing to others. That is why it is a good idea to take a moment to examine these terms.

Famous content strategist Ann Rockley distinguishes between front-end and back-end content strategy. Front-end strategy deals with target groups and objectives and how you think content can help you realise the latter. Many would call this content marketing but in this guide we refer to it as the cornerstones of your content strategy. Here you determine the nature of your content, how to deliver it, to whom, where and why. A back-end strategy focuses on creating and delivering content to the right people at the right time. This is content strategy in the strictest sense.

You might also put it like this:

- × **Content marketing strategy** is aimed at creating stories as a means of strengthening the relationship with the brand.
- × **Content strategy** focuses on how to plan these stories and develop a process to deliver them to the right people at the right time using the right channels, in a brand-consistent manner and in the right formats.

This vision of content strategy comes close to the definition coined by the Content Strategy Consortium of the 2009 Information Architecture Summit, and is also included in Kristina Halvorson's *Content Strategy for the Web*.

At the summit, content strategy was defined as follows: 'Content strategy is the practice of planning for the creation, delivery, and governance of useful, usable content.'

We would also link Rockley's distinction between front and back-end content strategy to the key questions by Lafley and Martin cited earlier as well as to Deming's cyclical concept.

A content strategy then consists of:

- 1. Target groups and objectives.** What aspirations of your target group can your content fulfil?
The key question here is how to address the concerns, obstacles, goals and expectations of your customers.
- 2. Themes and touch points.** What are the themes and topics you want to broach? Where do you reach your target group with these topics? You can't cater to everyone everywhere at the same time, so you need to define your area of activity. Red Bull is one of the most famous success stories in terms of content marketing because the company was very clear and precise in delineating its area of activity. Red Bull uses lots of videos featuring (extreme) sports and adventure that are the perfect illustration of the brand's values and positioning and are custom-tailored to the target group.
- 3. Content proposition.** What unique content can you take to market? What added value can your content offer? For instance, Nike has launched several apps to help its customers become better athletes. They are part of an extensive programme called Nike+.
- 4. Content process.** How do you make good content and how do you deliver it to your customers or stakeholders?
This is another question that requires a strategic answer. For instance, do you focus primarily on your own content or do you prefer customers to tell your story?

5. **Content system.** How do you publish content in a dynamic way that is adapted to the context of the user?

If you want to offer custom-tailored content then you need a system to do this for you based on a number of rules and parameters. Nowadays there is no shortage of systems that can help you publish and manage content in a more automated way.

6. **Content evaluation.** How do you measure content so you can upgrade your content strategy?

Only by evaluating your content on a regular basis can you make the proper adjustments.

The answers to these six questions constitute the core of your content strategy. They will help you develop, market and manage content as a unique product like a publisher would.

**'The answers to these six questions
constitute the core of your content strategy.'**

Below we will take an in-depth look at the six aspects we've just outlined.

First we will discuss:

- × target groups and objectives.
- × themes and touch points
- × and the content proposition.

These are the cornerstones of your content strategy. In this phase you will consider your content from the standpoint of your customers and your business. You will also reflect on ways of (better) gearing your content to the evolving needs and interests of your target group but at the same time you will try to determine how you can support your own value proposition, positioning and brand promise.

Subsequently we will concentrate on strategic decisions with regard to the creation, distribution and evaluation of content. This section zooms in on:

- × the content process.
- × the content system.
- × the content evaluation.

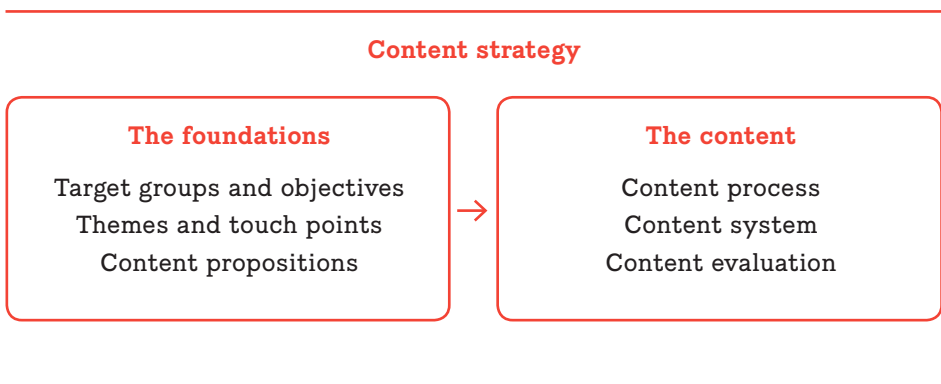
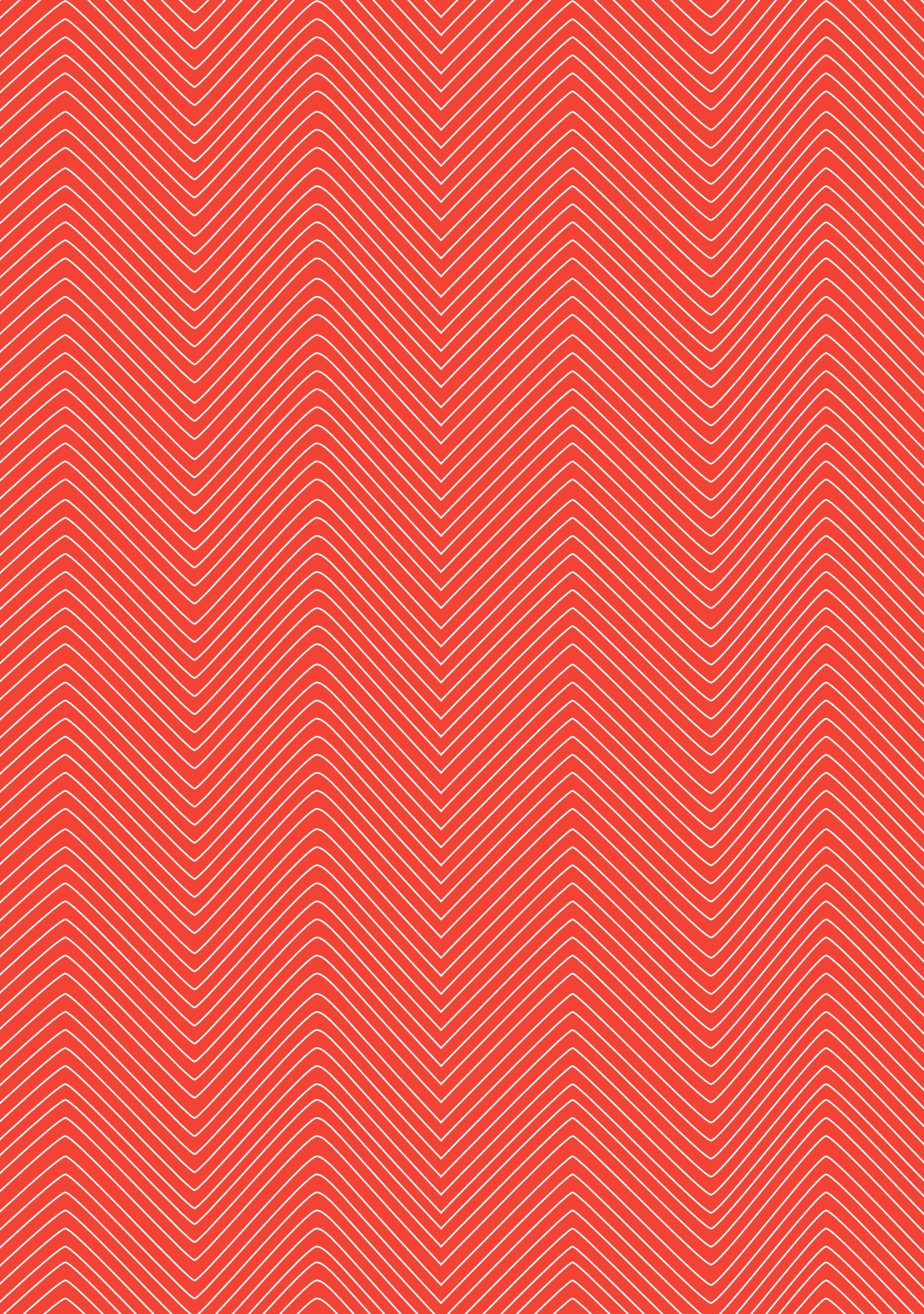
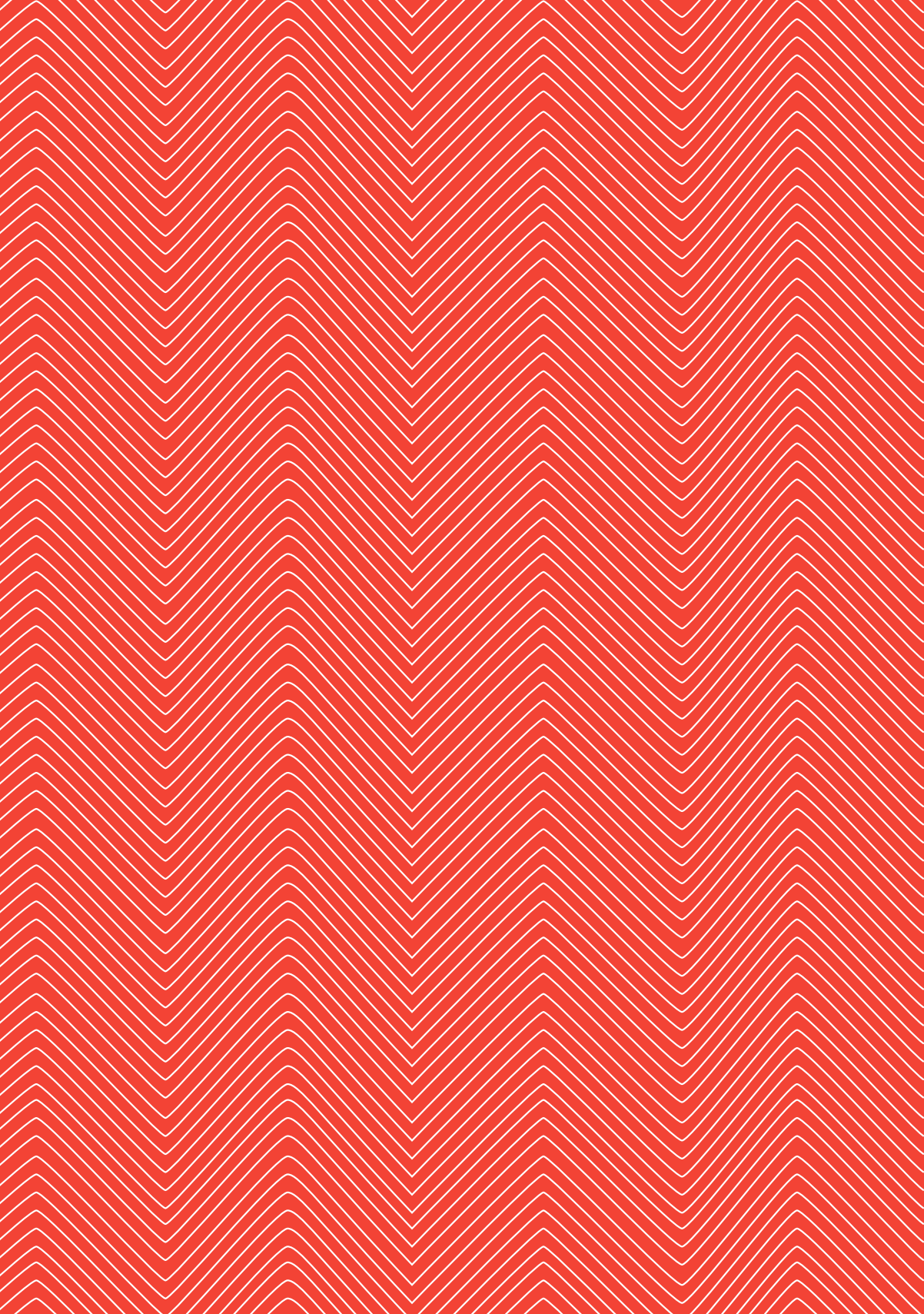


FIG. 2. A CONTENT MATRIX
A complete content strategy has 6 aspects





Part I. The cornerstones

What message do you want to bring across, to whom and how?

This section takes a closer look at three essential aspects of content strategy:

- × **Target groups and objectives.** Who are your customers? What do they want and how can you cater for them?
- × **Themes and touch points.** What are the themes and topics you want to broach and where will you do this?
- × **Content proposition.** What makes your content unique? What added value does your content create for your customer?

Answering these questions requires a transparent business, marketing and communication strategy. For example, it is hard to decide on topics and themes when you haven't properly defined your own market segment and have no clear insight into the make-up of your target group.

Before you get started on a content strategy you have to determine your corporate vision, mission and objectives. You know your market, your distribution channels and your product portfolio. And you are familiar with your value proposition, your competitive advantage and your brand identity. You may want to take another look at the strategic key questions formulated by Lafley and Martin and, if necessary, organise meetings and conduct research to arrive at an unambiguous answer to these questions. You need these answers because your content strategy is based on your business strategy (see page 10) and is aimed at supporting it.

'Your content strategy is based on your business strategy and is aimed at supporting it.'

1. Target groups and objectives.

Who are your customers? What do they want and how can you cater for their wishes?

We cannot stress enough that the success of your content strategy depends primarily on your insight into your target group. If you don't know what interests your target group, it is impossible to make the right content. Ordinarily you already know quite a bit about your customers. This is not the time or place to elaborate on all the techniques and methods that are available to collect more details on your target group. The traditional methods are surveys, interviews and focus groups. However, two aspects that are largely neglected by all of these methods are the customers' emotions and experiences. Persona empathy mapping brings them to the surface and creates a lively synthesis of all the customer information at your disposal.

Persona empathy mapping is a technique adopted from the world of UX (user experience) design. Two books have made this method very popular are '*Gamestorming: A Playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers and Changemakers*' and '*Business Model Generation*'. They are included in the list of references at the back of this guide.

The decision to use empathy mapping to describe a certain target group in detail is usually based on quantitative information. This information will tell you, for example, that your product is mainly popular amongst well-educated, athletic women in the 25-35 age bracket. You can then use an empathy map to try and establish a clearer picture of their living environment, views and ideas. This doesn't necessarily take research. You try to empathise with the customer. Hence the name empathy mapping: this technique calls on your capacity to empathise.

'If you don't know what interests your target group, it is impossible to make the right content.'

The goal is to create a fictitious but lifelike individual who symbolises part of or your entire target group. Such a model is called a persona. It's good to have more than one persona – say, three or four – but not so many that they become muddled or too niche.

So how do you go about it?

Let's call your persona Marge. Give her a suitable place of residence, age, training, job, family, hobbies, etc. Let's say that Marge is 30 and lives in Brussels, she has a partner but no children, she holds a law degree, works as a business consultant and plays volleyball. To make everything even more realistic you should also find a photo of someone you feel might look like Marge.

And then you should look for the answer to these six questions about Marge:

- × **What does she feel and think?** What occupies her mind? What are her worries, needs and desires?
- × **What does she see?** Who are her friends? What is her environment like? What media does she use?
- × **What does she hear?** What do her friends and family say?
- × What does her boss say?
- × **What does Marge herself say?** How does she interact with other people? How does she behave in public?
- × **What are her fears, frustrations and obstacles in life?**
- × **What are her needs and measures of success?**

It is important to take a strategic content approach to this UX technique of empathy mapping. This means that the customer persona we create must certainly include the nature of the content he/she is interested in as well as the media he/she uses. If you have created personas in the past – for example while developing a transactional website – it is a good idea to reassess them from a content point of view.

Another method you can use to acquire a more profound insight into target groups is ethnographic research. This involves immersing yourself in the world of your target group as an observing participant. For instance, a bicycle manufacturer can conduct an ethnographic survey amongst cycling clubs, or a computer game manufacturer can do the same with gaming communities. Mystery shopping might be viewed as a basic type of ethnography: for a short while you step into the shoes of your target group to gain a better understanding of what they feel and experience.

Empathy mapping

Empathy mapping is done with a template like the one shown in Fig. 3. Every section of the 'map' represents a different aspect of the persona you've created and corresponds with the questions listed above. Use Post-its to complete the map, doing this with a random group of people, preferably from various departments of your organisation or company. In other words, do not establish an empathy map with only marketers; instead also involve sales, support, maintenance, reception ... Client-facing employees are excellent candidates to take part in an empathy mapping session. Including them will ensure a much more accurate and detailed result.

Once you have built some experience with empathy mapping, a motivated group will only need an hour or two to produce useful results.

Also keep in mind that empathy maps are not necessarily static: over time you can refine the results and make them more concrete. For example, if you've interviewed a number of customers then you can always adjust your empathy map to add any new insights you have acquired.

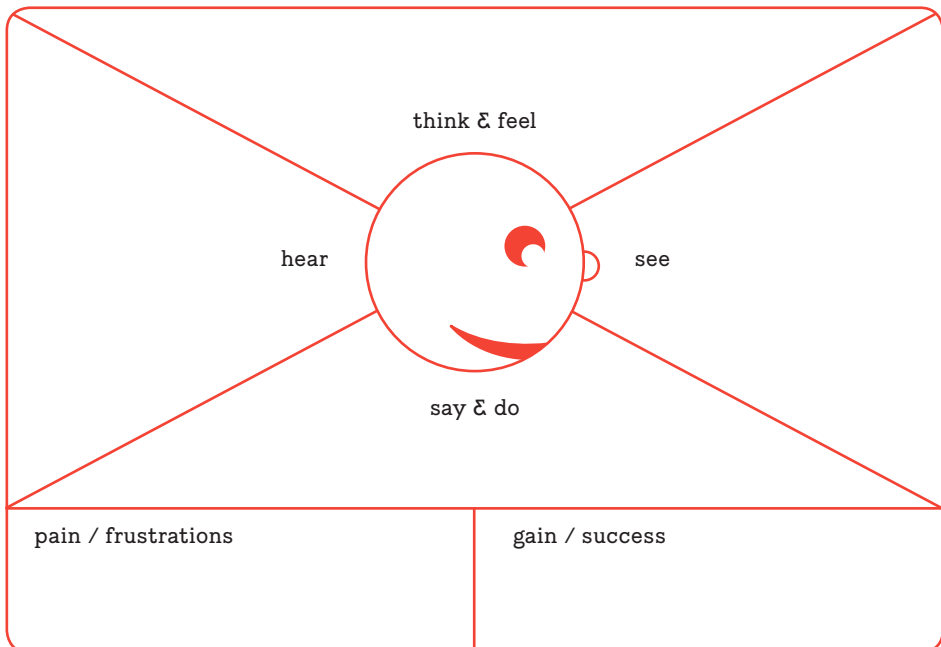


FIG. 3. THE EMPATHY MAP

2. Themes and touch points

What are the themes and topics you want to broach and where will you do this?

In addition to empathy mapping we frequently deploy two other UX design techniques: customer journey mapping and customer experience mapping.

Customer journey mapping

Originally a customer journey map in UX design described the desired trajectory of a visitor to a website. Today marketers also use journey mapping to describe the journey towards a purchase. This journey usually includes stages such as ‘discover’, ‘examine’, ‘choose’, ‘buy’, ‘receive’, ‘use’ and ‘recommend’. In both cases you get a description of the stages a customer goes through in an ideal case scenario.

How do you establish such a customer journey map? If you work in, say, the travel industry, your goal might be: ‘Marge wants to go on a city break.’ ‘Wants to go on a city break’ is the objective and ‘Marge’ is the persona you created earlier. So now you need to find out what stages she normally goes through to achieve her goal and how she interacts with your company in the process.

The stages she goes through might look something like this:

- × discover destinations
- × select a city
- × select a mode of transport
- × book a city break
- × prepare for the city break
- × experience the city break
- × return home from the city break.

‘Today marketers also use journey mapping to describe the journey towards a purchase.’

Let's say you are a travel agency. Once the 'discover destinations', 'select a city', and 'select a mode of transport' phases are over, you want Marge to book her trip with your agency and share positive feedback on her experiences with your agency when she gets back – for instance, on social media. The latter can be stimulated by providing adequate assistance in stages such as 'prepare for the city break' and 'experience the city break'.

Customer experience mapping

Instead of outlining the desired behaviour, customer experience mapping documents the actual interaction. An experience map would detail what your customers liked and did not like about their city breaks. In other words, a customer experience map indicates which touch points you are capitalising on and which ones remain unexploited or underexploited.

For instance, experience mapping may reveal that you totally neglect customers once they have booked a trip, which costs you loads of repeat business. Experience mapping quickly reveals which stages were properly covered and which were not. Incidentally, an experience map doesn't necessarily focus on product sales. A museum can also generate a visitor experience map, or a hospital can make a patient experience map.

At Cypres, we mainly use customer experience mapping to determine the role content plays in every stage of the customer journey and how content might improve the customer experience in each of those stages. This means we employ experience mapping to map out and evaluate the existing content per touch point. By 'content' we don't necessarily mean a specific format such as a flyer or leaflet. We are referring to actual content: the topics and themes you will present to a customer at a certain stage.

Example: the patient experience journey

Now let's take a look at a concrete example to illustrate how experience mapping helps to establish a content strategy.

One day a man is told he has to be admitted to hospital to undergo treatment. This is Step 1 in his patient experience. In this phase, the patient most likely wants to know what exactly is wrong with him and what

treatment he will have to undergo. Primarily he will be looking for more detailed medical information and he will want to talk to his doctor(s). As the admission date draws near, he will also be looking for practical information: Where do I check in? What do I bring? What arrangements will I have to make at work? and so on.

When he arrives at the hospital the patient needs still more information. What appointments do I have to keep? Can I use my mobile in the hospital? What are visiting hours? In the morning he may be curious about what's on the menu for lunch and how late he can buy snacks from the hospital's food outlets.

Every phase brings different needs in terms of content, and the touch points that provide that content are often different as well. All of these things can be mapped out with an experience map. The map gives an overview of the content patients need at a certain time and place. It also indicates where you are able to meet these needs and where your performance is lacking.

From customer journey and experience to content matrix and content calendar

How do you distill a concrete content plan from a customer journey and an experience map? The four steps are described below.

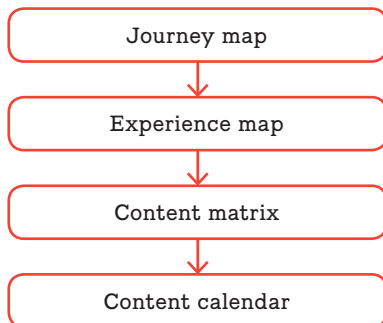


FIG. 4. FROM CUSTOMER JOURNEY TO CONTENT CALENDAR

Experience map, content matrix and content calendar

Step 1: The customer journey

Just as with empathy mapping, you fill out a template (Fig. 5) as a group, with Post-its. The template looks like a large spreadsheet on which the top row lists the stages a customer ideally goes through in a certain situation (the customer journey). The left-hand column displays the locations of interaction, the so-called touch points.

We generally use three main stages – before, during and after – which can be broken down into more stages depending on the situation. This way all possible situations are covered. As for touch points, both online and offline ones are given.

ONLINE	BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
Website			
Email			
Facebook			
...			
OFFLINE	BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
Reception desk			
Event			
Personal meetings			
...			

FIG. 5. A SIMPLE TEMPLATE FOR CONTENT EXPERIENCE MAPPING

You fill in the customer journey phases at the top and all your touch points on the left.

The other boxes are for the content you offer and your customers' positive or negative experiences with that content

Step 2: The customer experience

Customer experience mapping is a reality check. The aim is to establish what the ideal customer journey looks like in reality. For every stage and touch point on the journey map, the content that is being offered is listed, as well as how customers have experienced this content – e.g. 'hard to find', 'incomplete', 'should have received this sooner', 'adding a picture would make this much clearer', etc. In other words, you determine to what extent your content contributes to a positive or negative experience. Base your approach on what you know (or think you know), column after column. In preparation you can also go through any surveys or

other forms of research into customer experience you may have commissioned. Afterwards you can verify whether certain assumptions are still accurate. The map can be refined or adjusted at any time by including web analysis data, call centre reports, satisfaction surveys, focus groups and interviews, testimonials, social media and so on.

Step 3: The content matrix

It is a good idea to bring together information from your experience map by creating a single table known as a content matrix (Fig. 6). Once again, you start from a simple spreadsheet. This time the far left-hand column contains the various stages of a journey and the top row lists all your personas (your audience). The other boxes are for you to describe your content and say when and where it is available. You can also indicate the relationship between the various boxes so that your content matrix also renders your 'link and conversion strategy' – how different content elements can be linked to each other in a concrete manner (e.g. on the web via hyperlinks), thereby 'converting' customers from one stage of their journey to the next.

	Persona 1	Persona 2	Persona 3
Discover			
Explore			
Learn			
Analyse			
Purchase			
Optimise			

FIG. 6. A CONTENT MATRIX

You will find the personas and journey stages in the left-hand column.

The other boxes are for your content and possibly the touch points where the content is published and the content's lifecycle.

Step 4: The content calendar

A content matrix is a sound basis for establishing a content calendar with the dates on which you produce, publish or review content. A content calendar places all relevant moments in chronological order to give a clear overview of what will be happening on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. Depending on your needs you can use a simple spreadsheet or a dedicated tool like DivvyHQ.

3. Content proposition: your unique angle

What makes your content unique?
What is the added value of
your content for your customer?

If you've established a content matrix, then you know

- × **what you want to share:** these are your topics
- × **where you want to do this:** these are your touch points or channels
- × **whom you want to share it with:** these are your target groups
- × **why you want to share:** these are your customers' objectives.

You can compile this information in a simple statement that summarises the who, what and why of your content. Adding an angle to this information gives you a content proposition. A content proposition helps you keep your content on-brand because it illustrates how all your expressions of content are related to your company's value proposition, your business position and your brand promise.

Here are a few examples of simple propositions:

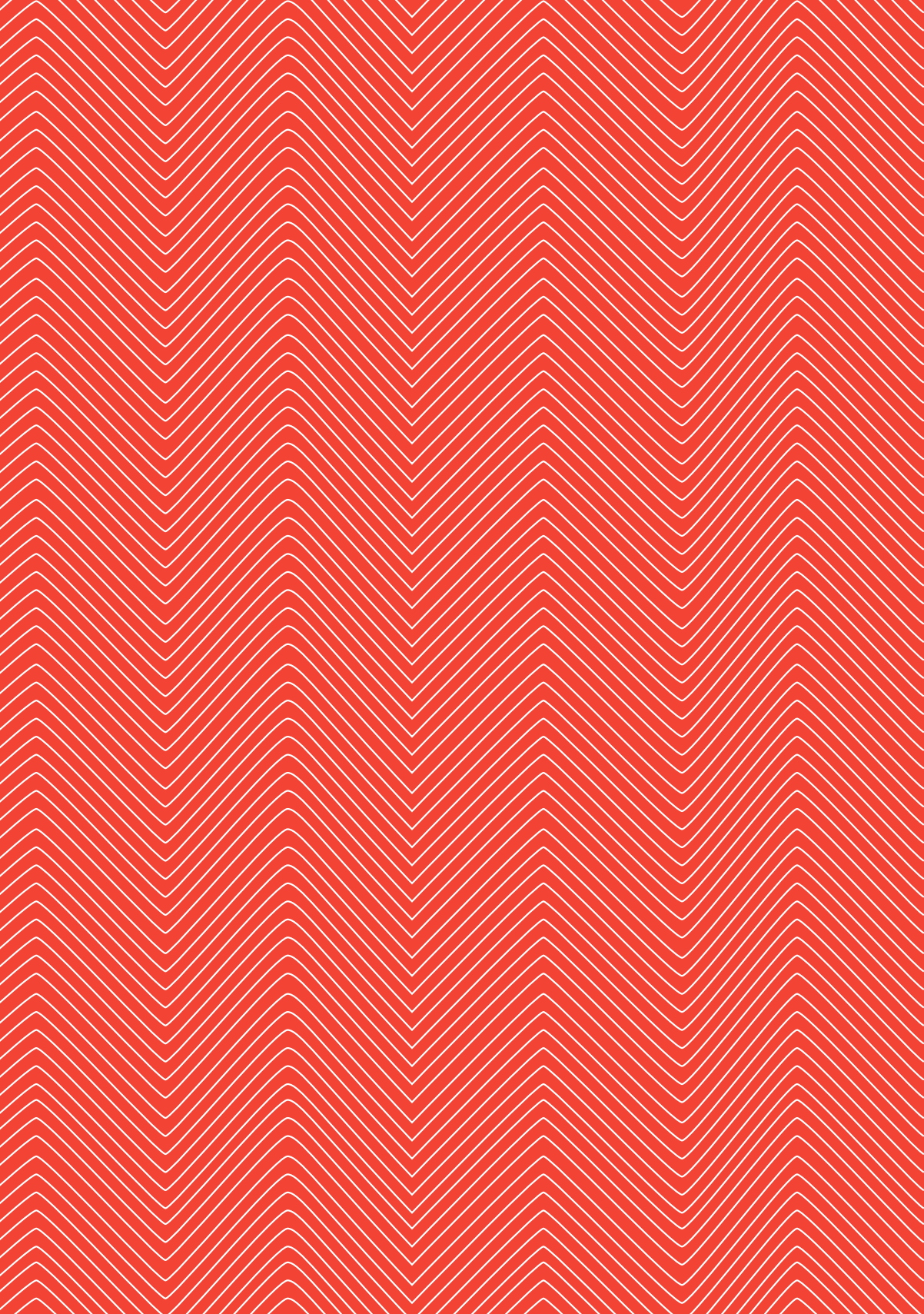
- × Clear and accessible [angle] advice [content] for non-professional investors [target group] to generate a higher return on their investments [value or 'why'].
- × Useful addresses and tips to help budget travellers travel even cheaper.
- × The very latest technological trends for managers who wish to work faster and more efficiently.
- × Practical tips and exercises for busy two-income families living in the city to help them stay fit and healthy.
- × Inspiring examples for digital designers who want to get more out of their computers and software.

At Cypres, we like to work with content propositions because they ensure consistency. A company stands for something and that should be obvious from your content proposition. It makes your content authentic: it carries your unique signature and it projects your identity and values.

A good content proposition ensures internal consistency and sets you apart from the competition. Thinking in terms of content strategy means thinking of content as a product and therefore of how you can distinguish your product from the multitude of content products available on the market. A content proposition describes the functional, emotional, social, economic and/or symbolic value of your content for the customer:

- × **Functional value.** People often search for content in a very targeted and functional way, for instance when looking up practical information such as an address or a telephone number. They also often search for content to learn a practical skill in a short time span, such as ‘How do I connect my printer to my wifi network?’. All content that provides people with a better, faster or easier solution to a problem is functional in nature.
- × **Emotional value.** People enjoy content that relaxes, entertains, moves, surprises, delights... For some companies and brands such content is absolutely essential, for others this is much less the case.
- × **Economic value.** Content that helps people save time or money has an economic value. Think of an investment newsletter that helps you maximise your return, or a list of tips to help you drive more economically, which saves fuel costs.
- × **Social value.** When people hear or read the same stories, they almost automatically become part of the same world and, as a result, they develop the same social identity. Shared content is by definition social in nature.
- × **Symbolic value.** Content can grant someone a certain status or reinforce that status. Access to expert advice, personal advice or helpdesk assistance is often linked to customer status.

Depending on the situation you may want to place more or less emphasis on a certain value. For instance, part of your website may offer content that is of high functional value, another part may have great emotional value whereas a third part combines the two.



Part II. Content

How do you develop, distribute and evaluate content?

A content matrix, such as the one featured earlier in the first part of this guide, puts you well on the way to making and delivering content to the right people at the right time. In this section we will explore this in more detail by concentrating on three aspects:

- × **The content process.** How do you make good content and deliver it to your customer?
- × **The content system.** How do you publish content in a dynamic way that is adapted to the context of the user?
- × **The content evaluation.** How do you measure content so you can upgrade your content strategy?

We will not be focusing on the practical side of the production, distribution, management and evaluation of content. Instead, we wish to draw your attention to a number of strategic aspects of creation, distribution and evaluation.

1. Content process: creation and planning

How do you make good content and deliver it to your customer?

By content process we mean the entire journey from searching and producing content to editing and reviewing it.

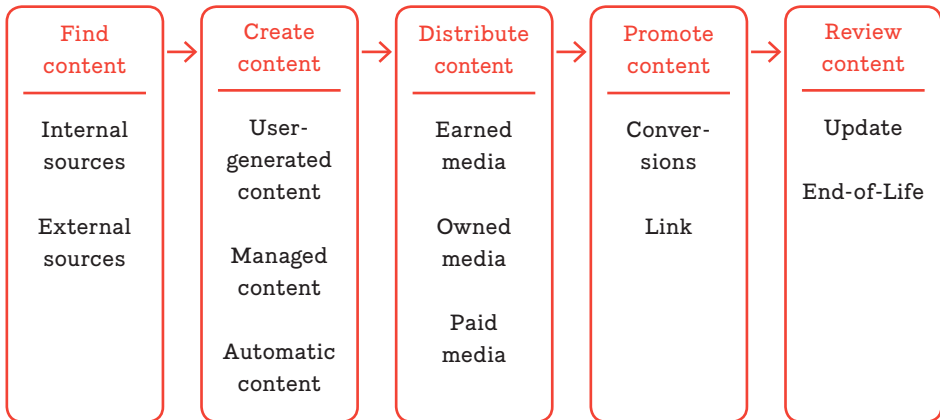


FIG. 7. FROM FINDING CONTENT TO REVIEWING IT

Setting up that process means you have to make a number of strategic choices, such as:

- × **Where does your content come from?**

In other words, what are your sources? As a company you probably have a mountain of knowledge and unique experience you can bring to bear. Capitalising on the know-how of your staff can be an important strategic choice –for instance when you’re trying to claim thought leadership.

Still, nowadays it is often a lot more convincing to have people from outside your company tell your story. In this case, your own customers are the first source you want to tap into. In

addition, comments from external experts in the field may boost your credibility. As you can see choosing sources is a strategic decision that is linked to brand positioning and image. That is why developing a network of internal and external sources is a crucial part of your content strategy.

× Who will make your content?

We distinguish between user-generated content (UGC), managed content and automated content.

With user-generated content you basically let your sources have their say without intervening in any way. What you lose in terms of control is gained in credibility.

Managed content is delivered by your communication department or an editorial team: your own blog posts, articles, videos, etc.

Both customers and staff can share their opinion here but this is done within a context that is fully under your control.

Finally, automated content comes from computer applications e.g. a calendar with official leave days and user statistics.

Whether and how you use user-generated content, managed content and automated content are strategic choices that affects the way in which you present yourself as a brand or as a company.

× How do you distribute your content?

Usually we distinguish between earned, owned and paid media.

Paid is what you pay for - such as advertisements.

Owned refers to media you own, such as your own website or newsletter.

Earned is something that must be deserved: this is positive or negative content on your business that is posted on social media by outsiders. This is often microcontent – e.g. on Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn – that is frequently created on a smartphone.

Initially content strategists focused mainly on owned media in general and on company websites in particular. At the time, content strategy dealt primarily with the practical organisation

of content, or website taxonomy if you will. Today, content strategy tries to gear all available earned, owned and paid media to each other: we have adopted an omnichannel strategy. One of the questions this raises is how to shape owned content in such a way that it is easily shared and liked on social media channels.

× **How do you promote content?**

Earlier in this guide we mentioned that content strategy regards content as a product. This implies that we also reflect strategically on how we want to promote that product. You can have the most amazing website but if no one knows it exists it's back to square one. That is why search engine optimisation (SEO) and advertising (SEA) must be key components of your overall content strategy.

× **How do you manage the content life cycle?**

Just like any other product, content has a life cycle and your aim is to maximise its value throughout. This means content is reused and revised but also discarded at the end of its life cycle. A content calendar is used to set dates for creating or publishing new content and revising or removing existing content.

'Search engine optimisation (SEO) and advertising (SEA) must be key components of your overall content strategy.'

2. Content system: the need for automation

How do you publish content in a dynamic way that is adapted to the context of the user?

A content strategy takes account of the context people are in when they consume content.” One example is the news, which can be adapted to the situation. In the morning, when the user is on the way to work, you can share headlines and facts users can read on their smartphones. In the evening, after work, people can read the longer articles at their leisure, for instance on their tablet.

There are other options. Now that more and more people always have their smartphone with them, it is possible to identify them in a physical location and contact them online. You can then offer specific information based on their location.

At Schiphol airport in Amsterdam, travellers can automatically receive details of the gate for their next flight. This information is shared with them on their arrival. The principle is called geo-targeting. The information you are offering can also be geared to a host of other data, such as users’ browsing behaviour and their smartphone type.

In order to offer content based on contextual information, such content must be structured in a specific way. Content must be broken up into small packets, making it easy to combine at a later time based on user data. In this context, Ann Rockley uses the term ‘intelligent content’; expressions such as ‘nimble content’ (Rachel Lovinger) or ‘adaptive content’ (Zack Brand) mean approximately the same thing. For more details on these concepts, we refer you to Karen McGrane’s primer on the subject *‘Adapting Ourselves to Adaptive Content’*, and Rachel Lovinger’s book *‘Nimble’*.

Read Sara Wachter-Boettcher’s *‘Content Everywhere: Strategy and Structure for Future-Ready Content’* for a thorough introduction to this subject matter.

It's worth delving into contextual information, because nowadays there are so many different channels that it is rarely a good idea to make separate content for each channel. It is expensive and time-consuming and on top of this you run the risk of creating discrepancies between the content on your various channels.

The more multichannel your approach, the bigger the need for content that is not confined to a fixed format. You need a source - a content management system - enabling you to gear your content to the user's situation in real time. To make the system work, you need content models, metadata and rules that are applied to your content. A content model gives an overview of content types (interviews, testimonials, instruction videos ...), content components (headlines, streamers ...) and attributes (text length, target group, channels ...) All these elements are subsequently applied in an automated system to deliver custom-tailored content to the user. This is how intelligent content comes into being.

The strategic base is established when you create your customer experience maps because they show how people go from one situation to another and what content they will need there.

'Nowadays there are so many different channels that it is rarely a good idea to make separate content for each one.'

3. Content evaluation: checking and adjusting

How do you measure content so you can upgrade your content strategy?

You can only improve your content in a targeted way when you know how your audience handles your content. This means you have to ascertain how each of your touch points is performing and how the relevant parts of your content are received there; you need to do this for every segment of your target group. This is a complex subject that we cannot possibly discuss in detail here but we can briefly describe the four classic criteria: reach, engagement, sentiment and conversion. You can only improve your content in a focused way when you know how your audience handles your content.

Reach tells you how popular certain content is: how many visitors a web page attracts, how many people watch a video, how many people read your magazine, etc. Google Analytics is often used to monitor the number of visitors to a website. As versatile as a Swiss army knife, this tool's many possibilities make it worth exploring. There are also other instruments that measure reach. For instance, print range is often measured through a survey that uses the Specific Issue Readership (SIR) method, in which a pollster shows magazines to respondents and checks whether they remember them.

However, reach is a rather rudimentary parameter. While reach says something about the size of your audience, it reveals nothing of how your content is received. What do people do when they visit your website? Click on a link? Post a reaction? Retweet a post? These are all forms of **engagement** that you want to measure so you can refine your content strategy. On social media all kinds of tools are available to measure engagement e.g. Pixelfarm (Facebook engagement) and Conversocial (Twitter engagement).

Measuring interactions is a good idea but it says nothing about how people experience them. This is key information for your experience maps and, as a result, also for your content strategy. Measuring positive and negative reactions – **sentiment analysis** – is very useful for creating an overall picture of your brand's reputation as well as for identifying specific problems and opportunities.

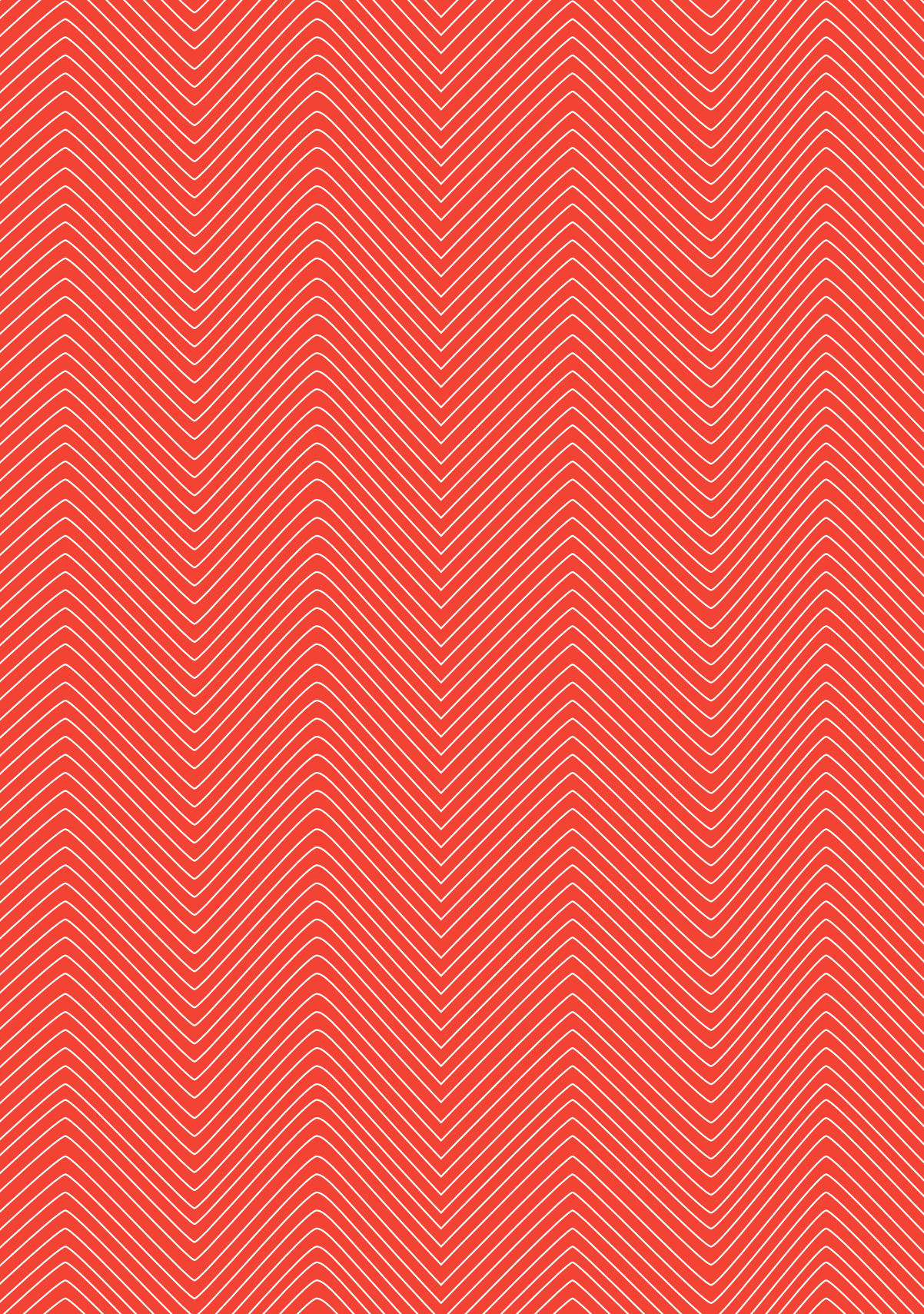
Nowadays a variety of online tools are available for sentiment analysis. Examples include Buzzcapture, Meltwater and SentiOne. They map the number of positive, negative and neutral reactions. The technology is recent so it is best to thoroughly test its possibilities and results beforehand. Incidentally, classic research methods such as focus groups are still suitable for polling positive and negative reactions.

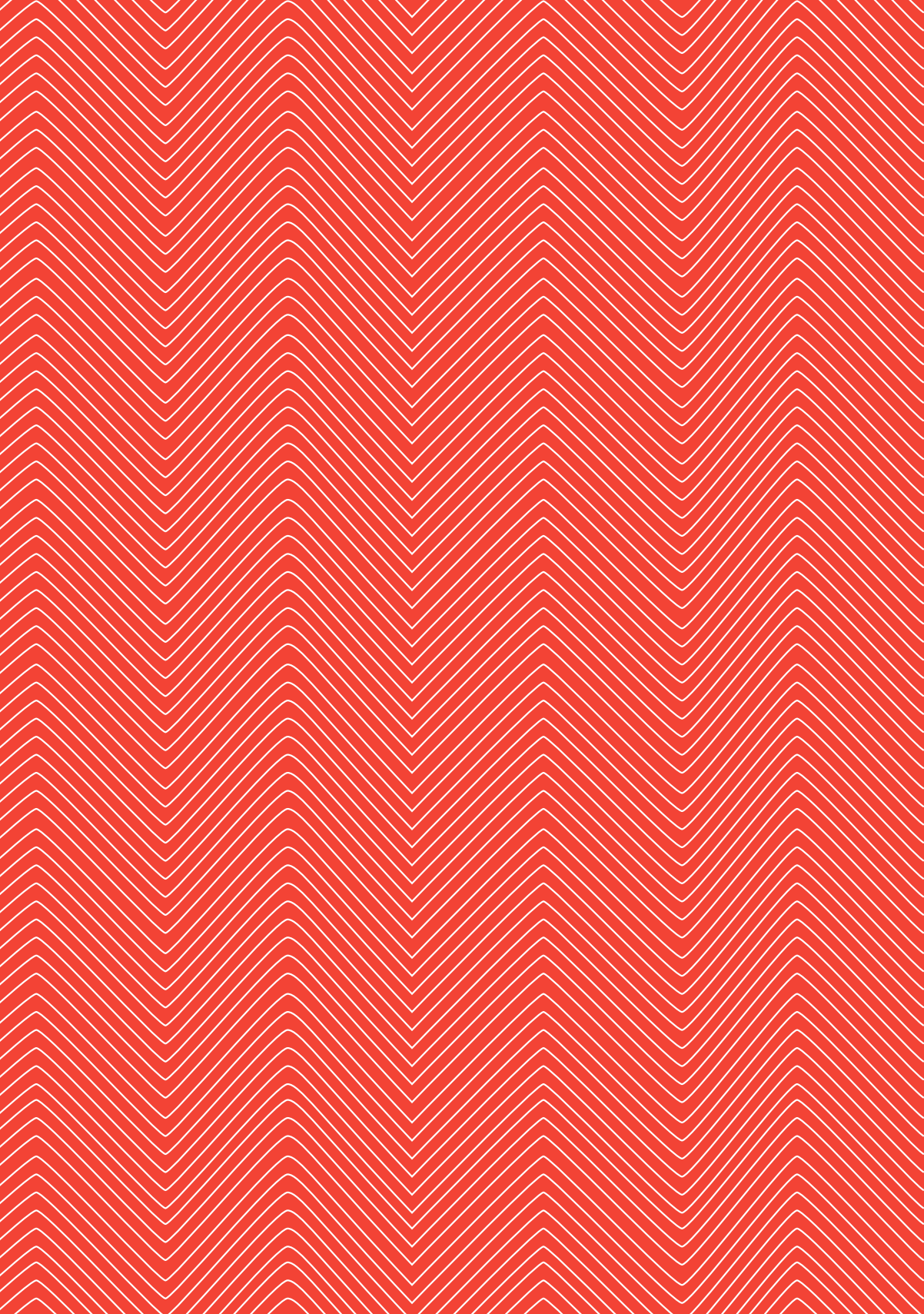
Another classic criterion is **conversion**. Some marketers define conversion as when a prospect who becomes an actual customer. At Cypres, however, we take a broader view. For us, conversion takes place whenever a customer takes another step in the journey i.e. whenever the customer jumps from one stage to the next. Downloading a whitepaper or clicking on a link is primarily a form of interaction but if that interaction takes someone to the next stage of the journey we also call it a conversion.

The conversion rate expresses the ratio between the total number of visitors on a website and the percentage of visitors who take action. If 10,000 visitors view your site on a specific day and 20 of them download your white paper, then your conversion rate is $20/10000 = 0.002\%$. You can also measure the conversion rate among the participants in a seminar, the visitors to an exhibition stand and so on.

You probably combine several channels to achieve a conversions, such as organic search, paid search, email and banners. If this is the case, ascribing the conversion to the last channel used before the conversion creates a distorted picture. What you need is accurate channel attribution.

With **channel attribution** you can determine how interactions on multiple channels contributed to a specific conversion. Google can tell you more about this principle. When referring to it, the company uses the term *multichannel funnels*.





In closing ...

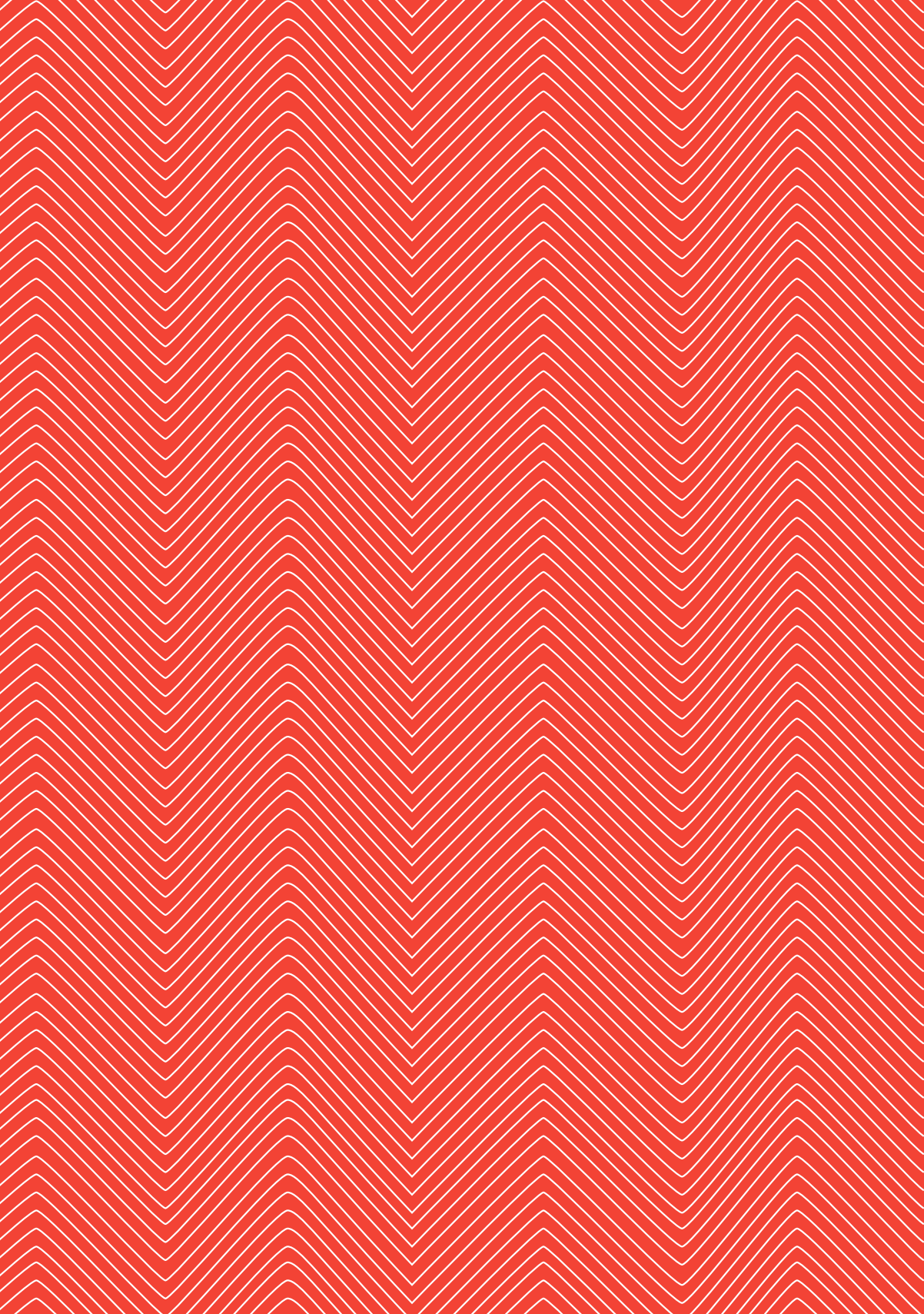
Content strategy is a complex subject matter and it is still evolving. If you have read the entire guide, you will realise that a good content strategist must be well-versed in various disciplines ranging from business strategy to psychology and customer experience. That is why Digital Surgeons founder Peter Sena argues that the marketer of the future is part anthropologist, part technology freak and a full-time listener.

Moreover, experienced content strategists are at home in both quantitative and qualitative research. They can also bridge the gap between analysis and creative execution and between players from different teams: project managers, information architects, marketers and communication managers.

In addition, they must also be intimately familiar with all touch points. Not only is that a big ask, it may even be too much for one person. That is why it may be a good idea to create two functions: one for a content marketer and one for a content strategist. That brings us back to the discussion from the start of this guide: how meaningful is it to distinguish between content marketing and content strategy?

Today, the content marketer and content strategist are, in fact, often one and the same person. This may change in the future as content gains even more importance. Or perhaps this will all blow over and tomorrow content marketing and content strategy will be obsolete? It is definitely possible that these terms will disappear or become less important. Still, we are convinced that strong content will always make a difference. Strong stories have always appealed to people and got them moving. That will never change.

'It may be a good idea to create two functions: one for a content marketer and one for a content strategist.'



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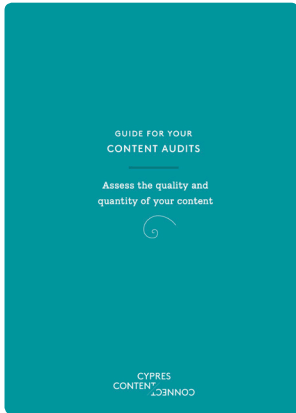
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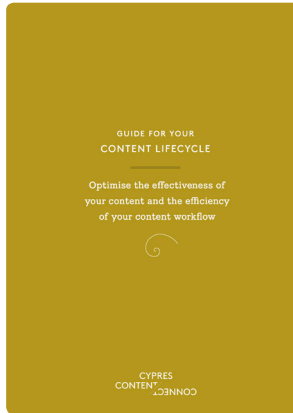
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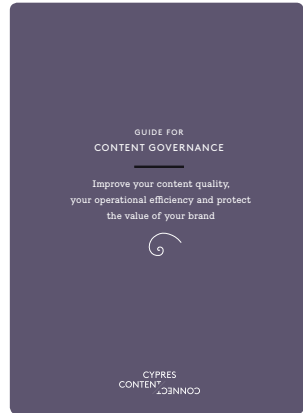
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Vaartstraat 131, 3000 Leuven, België – T +32.16.29.77.37 – F +32.16.31.71.89
contact@cypres.com – www.cypres.com – [@cypresagency](https://www.instagram.com/cypresagency)

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Cypres plans, creates and manages cross-media content for your customers, employees and other stakeholders. Our baseline is 'Content to connect', because we believe that information your audience perceives as valuable can build and strengthen your relationship with your audience.

Discover how we create strong content for you and your stakeholders.

The **Content Room** is Cypres' open knowledge centre and creative lab where we think about and experiment with new ways of creating, using and distributing content.

Local and international specialists talk about all aspects of content and content publishing. These discussed topics include content strategy, content governance, social content and content co-creation.

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