



THRIVING IN THE DARK AGES OF CONTENT MARKETING

Five top content leaders shed light on
the needs of **modern B2B marketing**



By: Barry Feldman



Featuring: Ann Handley • Robert Rose • Ardath Albee • Scott Abel • Michael Brenner

Content Marketing: It Sounded Like a Bright Idea

For many, these are the dark ages of content marketing.

Before you think about calling it quits, please know this is a metaphor of sorts. I'm not calling for content marketing—now practiced by nearly every B2B enterprise—to deteriorate or slide into an eternal abyss. In fact, I'm bullish on content marketing, optimistic about its future, and see indications that a large faction of practitioners are steadily stepping up their game.

Still, I've tossed “dark ages” into the title of this collection, so I should explain.

In a way, the idea was actually born from the [Kapoost Content Gallery App](#) product, which enables internal teams to consume and share content with buyers. While writing about the introduction of the product and the common problem it solves, I found myself in a conversation with Scott Abel, a.k.a. “The Content Wrangler.” Scott's a leading authority on global intelligent content strategy with strong and insightful ideas regarding how marketers burn money when they fail to manage content as a business asset.

[I interviewed Scott](#) on Kapost's blog about a simple reality in B2B enterprises that amounts to a very big and expensive problem. The main reason valuable content assets are terribly underused by people across the company, especially salespeople, is they don't know the assets exist. They're in the dark.

That's when the idea for this series, and this eBook, emerged. I thought, “What else are B2B enterprises in the dark about? What content-related issues hinder progress and stand in the way of our success?”

For most companies, it was probably just this decade when the light went on. It became brilliantly clear how content marketing offers the potential to become a shining star on the web. The common response was “let it shine,” and the common course of action was to crank out content.

Then came the chaos. More hands in the mix made for more mix-ups, misses, and missteps. Simply stated, content marketing at scale isn't all that simple to execute effectively. The process is to blame. Everyone may indeed know what they're doing, but they don't have the vision required to see what other people are doing—and how they're doing it.

And so I give you *Thriving in the Dark Ages of Content Marketing*, a collection of interviews with five content champions—to help illuminate five pressing issues and shed some much needed light on their solutions.

Table of Contents

Ann Handley	4
<i>Shedding Light on Content Marketing Leadership</i>	
Robert Rose	6
<i>Shedding Light on Planning</i>	
Ardath Albee	9
<i>Shedding Light on Personas</i>	
Scott Abel	12
<i>Shedding Light on Content Management</i>	
Michael Brenner	15
<i>Shedding Light on Measuring ROI</i>	

B2B Marketers Need a New Kind of Chief

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANN HANDLEY ON CONTENT MARKETING LEADERSHIP



Ann Handley co-wrote the book on Content Marketing, Content Rules, and is known as the world's first CCO, or chief content officer. She led the charge at ClickZ and does so today at MarketingProfs. Ann offered her insights about leadership roles and responsibilities in content-minded marketing departments at B2B enterprises.

What's a Chief Content Officer?

Ann: Essentially it's the individual who heads up content on any sort of property, and in my case it's a digital property. But it's not just digital—it's anything a brand produces or publishes to connect with its customers.

Why should a company have a CCO? What's missing when they don't?

Ann: Content is increasingly at the heart of what a company does to attract prospects, grow their audience, and ultimately turn the two camps into customers. So in my mind, you need to have somebody who gets the big picture and is responsible for creating and amplifying content that's at the heart of the organization.

Content is a relationship builder, so you've got to have somebody who really understands the business side of things as well as the marketing side of things.

Are CCO and CMO two different things?

Ann: I think so. I see the CCO and the CMO working together quite a bit, but it will differ depending on the organization. I kind of see the content person as working hand-in-hand with the CMO.

The CCO faces inwardly as well as externally. She or he looks internally at the processes that need to be created and the kind of content that they need. I think of the CMO as having a role that faces more outside the organization.

I think the best CCOs are able to balance the creative mindset along with the business

mindset. If we're thinking about hiring a CCO, if I was going to replace myself for example, I would want somebody who really understands the business case for content, but also appreciates the creative and the craft of content.

Do you think B2B enterprises largely have a void in the CCO area?

Ann: It depends, but generally yes, I think so. Increasingly we're seeing companies think about the content role and hire the necessary skills for it, but we don't see it across the board.

How would you recommend a CCO begin to build a team that will be effective?

Ann: The first thing you need to do is hire a content strategist—unless the CCO is going to function as the content marketing strategist. The strategist will ask the questions like: Why are we doing what we're doing? How are we going to develop this? What are we going to develop?

So really that person has a broader view of what kind of content makes sense for the organization. Very often, that is the job of the chief content officer, but if it's a super-large team—and the CCO is just taking a big-picture view of everything—then I think that's a task at the heart of what the CCO must do as number one.

Number two would be bring in an editorial director—somebody who can take the plan and implement it. You could call this role a million different things depending on your organization, but in my mind it's more of a doer than a strategist.

Then you need people like content producers and creators: the writers, producers, podcast hosts, videographers, all that kind of stuff.

What can a B2B enterprise do to plan and execute more collaboratively?

Ann: I think an easy, user-friendly kind of platform can really help keep everybody on the same page—whether it's specifically for content management, like Kapost, or even if it's something like Basecamp. We use Basecamp at MarketingProfs just for project management and to keep everybody literally on the same page. So I think the communication tools you use, especially with a distributed team, is really key.

[*Find the full interview here.*](#)
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Planning Problems May be Where Your Content Crumbles

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT ROSE ON PLANNING



Robert Rose co-wrote Managing Content Marketing. He is the chief strategy advisor at Content Marketing Institute and senior contributing consultant at Digital Clarity Group. Robert spoke with me about the challenges of content planning across the enterprise.

Is the absence of a documented strategy the biggest problem in content marketing?

Robert: It's a huge problem. It's interesting to me that the amount of content we create as a business today just continues to increase exponentially and we still haven't discovered we don't have a strategic function for it in the business.

Content is kind of everybody's job and nobody's job. Everybody's responsible for content in some fashion, but nobody's really responsible for it at the strategic level where it could help differentiate the company.

The businesses that we see that are having some level of success (and quite frankly, reducing the amount of content while increasing its impact) are those that are taking the time to do strategic planning for (1) why content should exist in the first place and (2) how it will be managed, optimized, and measured in order to move the needle for the business.

I sense most enterprises that do have planning processes rely heavily on email and spreadsheets. Doesn't the use of such generic tools create problems?

Robert: Yes. As content has increased, so too has the number of the parts of the organization that are creating content. So the tools are siloed.

In many cases, people are using something as simple and basic as email and Excel spreadsheets. Sometimes it means they're trying to force more collaborative editorial calendaring

types of processes into giant enterprise CMS systems or digital asset management systems where the workflows are historically and traditionally more governance-based.

So with more departments joining the party and more locations becoming part of the puzzle, does the problem get increasingly ugly?

Robert: As you start adding in different product groups, regional offices, functional elements—basically, as the enterprise gets larger—the process becomes more complex. As you add more complexity to it the goal has to become, “how do we simplify it to the point where we’re not over-engineering something to the extent that it gets in the way of us being faster and more agile in the way that we manage the content?”

There’s no one right way to skin this cat where your business has one process to rule them all and you centralize everything.

It can be hard to quantify the costs of process inefficiency. In fact, it may even be hard to recognize you have problems. Do you think the symptoms actually present themselves? How?

Robert: There are usually two indicators. First, with deluge of content, everybody feels the pain of not being able to keep up with all the different channels they need to feed.

I’ve talked to so many businesses that tell me the sheer quantity of content they have to deal with prevents them from taking a thoughtful approach to how good it is. The questions mount: Is this really meaningful for a consumer? Is it going to move the needle from a persuasion standpoint?

They tell me we just can’t spend the time to try and understand these challenges because we’re just trying to keep up with publishing it all.

The second problem, which is probably even worse, is the processes become so gated that it takes forever to get a piece of content through the workflow process. I was working with a company that took two and half weeks to get a tweet live. If it takes that long to get something out on social media, there’s a decline in the value of any channel that goes hand in hand with this problem, which correlates to how long it actually takes to get a piece of content out there.

At a certain point, those lines cross and you have to ask, “Why are we even bothering?”

If you're counseling a company with these issues, where do you begin? Where do you suggest they turn for answers?

Robert: I think you look inward first. It's a classic challenge where the first thing you have to do is admit you have a problem.

I think too many times we buy technology purely based on the ability for it to do something we don't believe we have the capability to do today. Instead we need to understand the process we're really trying to optimize.

One of the things I'll often ask a CEO or director of marketing is, "What if you just stopped every bit of content production you're doing today? Everything. Who would be mad? Where would the disappointment be? Would your email subscribers be upset? Would your social audiences suddenly wonder, "Where's my Facebook post?" Would people be going, "Where's the latest white paper?"

The answer tends to be: "No one will be upset except us." Then it's time to rethink what we're doing with content and figure out how we can reduce the amount of it and focus on figuring out the right process for how content can move fluidly through the business and which channels really need to be optimized.

[*Find the full interview here.*](#)
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Who Do You Think You're Talking To?

AN INTERVIEW WITH ARDATH ALBEE ON PERSONAS



*Ardath Albee authored *Digital Relevance and Content Strategies that Drive Results*. She is the CEO and B2B marketing strategist at Marketing Interactions, and spoke with me about the need to create persona-driven digital content marketing strategies.*

You help clients create persona-driven digital marketing strategy. What's that mean? Why should a B2B enterprise marketer care?

Ardath: The easy answer is relevance and context. Persona-driven digital marketing strategy is about honing in on the segments of your market that buy your products and have needs for the solutions you provide.

If you're not focused on specific segments or personas, you're trying to speak to everybody at the same time.

Buying processes are getting longer and you need to create a strategy for how you're going to engage these buyers and help them through their decision process from beginning to end. There has to be a strategy. Just publishing content is not going to get the job done.

How can B2B marketers get better at persona development—or even get started?

Ardath: Developing personas takes a lot more than getting the marketing team in a room around a pizza and saying, "Okay, let's describe our buyers."

The problem we have as marketers is we know too much about our products. We think we know our buyers, but our perspective is skewed because we make it about what we think.

When I work with clients, I stress the first thing they need to understand is what they think probably isn't going to turn out to be what's true about their buyers, once we've done the research.

So one of the things marketers really need to do is qualitative research. They need to do interviews. On top of that, they need to think about the relationships between their personas. Very often what happens is marketers address personas in silos.

In recent years, we've seen a decline in the number of content marketers who claim to have effective programs. What's going on here?

Ardath: Look back at the research all the way to 2011. 41% said they were effective with content marketing. In 2011, all of the talk was about needing to become a publisher. Marketers did that. They published blogs and content and said, "Okay, I'm a content marketer."

But content marketing really is a practice; it's a strategic approach to how you use content to engage people and persuade them to make a buying decision. It's not just about publishing content on your blog every Tuesday. That's not content marketing—that's publishing.

I think, as time has gone by, marketers have looked at it and thought, "Wait, this isn't really working," and it's because they're just publishing. They haven't taken a strategic approach.

The research shows 55% of marketers say they don't know what an effective content marketing program looks like. It's probably because they've never actually executed one.

Do you think marketers are having a hard time defining what effective means?

Ardath: I do. It's because they use the same metrics they use for traditional marketing. They may not be measuring the right things.

How many times a piece of content gets viewed will tell you whether the topic is popular with people, but it's not going to tell you if they're going to buy.

Enter marketing automation. Most marketers use it as a glorified email blaster. But what really needs to be done is figuring out lead scoring. How can we actually monitor and figure out the buying process and the things people need to actively learn about in order to make progress towards making a decision? It's a difficult thing and not as easy as everybody thought it would be.

In between doing content marketing and doing it effectively there seems to be a dark age. Marketers appear to be in the dark about how to come together to best serve their customers.

Ardath: I absolutely agree. Content marketing really requires a cultural change, or at the very least, a change of mindset from the way marketers have always done it.

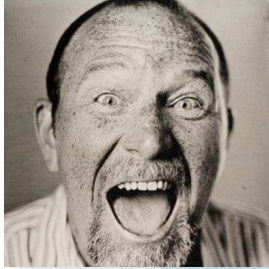
It's very hard to dislodge the product or the brand from the center of everything and put the customer there. That's not how companies were built. That's not how marketers were trained. So it's easy to revert back to that. It's one of the things that keep us from making progress.

Buyers have changed. They're not going back to "your product is the most important thing on the planet." It's not going to happen. You need to change and put the customer in the center or you're going to stay in the dark.

[*Find the full interview here.*](#)
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How Content Creators Burn Money

AN INTERVIEW WITH SCOTT ABEL ON CONTENT MANAGEMENT



Scott Abel co-produced The Language of Content Strategy. He runs The Content Wrangler, lectures at UC Berkeley, and organizes the annual Information Develop World Event. Scott and I had a great conversation about the need to manage content across the enterprise.

You wrote, “The most important factor in succeeding as a content marketer is to acknowledge that your content is a business asset and worth managing efficiently and effectively.” What inspired that?

Scott: The brand you work for is the owner of the content. You’re a steward whose job it is to spend the company’s time and resources wisely in order to produce the output you’re paid to produce.

Businesses don’t think about it that way. If they did we would have content on the balance sheet and you would know how much money you’re spending—just like how much you would on a facility or various services. When you’re manufacturing products, you know how much it costs and how you’re going to assemble your product. Why don’t we know that about our content?

Okay, so if you don’t, where do you suffer?

Scott: You run out of money. You don’t have enough budget. You don’t have any time.

In a factory, they optimize everything so they can be as efficient and effective as possible. They automate everything that is conceivably automatable. Where humans do a less precise job, machines take over. I think that needs to be the case with lots of content-related tasks.

In the world of marketing, we produce a lot more content than we should or need. Often, nobody actually reads it or watches it.

Obviously nobody wants to spend money creating stuff nobody consumes. Do you think this is an internal problem?

Scott: Yes, it's a problem of content discoverability. Companies like IDC have written about this, and say one of the major challenges corporations face is people create content and then they archive it somewhere on the LAN. It gets stored in a file folder, in a database, or somewhere, but because of the way companies are organized, there's no awareness the content exists.

Searching for it is challenging because you may be using different vocabulary, looking in a different place, or you may not have access to the place where the content is stored. It is a business asset that should be available to everybody in the company to see, to borrow, and to repurpose. And yet that doesn't happen. So what does happen is we re-create content that we can't find.

People will spend hours looking for content only to give up and have to recreate it to the best of their ability, which will mean that the content is incongruent from the other content. When people begin to do this you end up with mixed messaging. You end up with the potential for lawsuits. It's just sloppy and far from good resource allocation.

Do you see alignment between departments becoming a super painful problem in the B2B enterprise?

Scott: Yeah, and I'd say it's not limited to these two departments. Customers are exposed to the content they are exposed to. They don't care what department created it and they don't care if sales and marketing are misaligned. They really are just frustrated because they are looking for information and are not able to find it. When they find it, it's incongruent.

What's also interesting beside the content that's unused is the content that is used. Often the content that's being used—especially in a B2B environment—is technical content. It may be content created by support, or training, or technical communication, but it may in fact propel somebody from being a prospect to a customer. I think there's a bigger problem here when we talk about the alignment issue— and that is we must be thinking of ourselves as brands instead of departments.

Have you found content teams understand the need to create centralized content repositories?

Scott: I think this is the whole reason you're starting to hear marketers talk about intelligent content, which is the discipline that was brought about because of these challenges content marketers are having today. It leads to something called single sourcing, which is

about having one location for a piece of content and then being able to reuse it with the help of computers.

Now why would you want to do that? Most people say, “I reuse content already.”

You copy and paste it, which means you make another instance of it that is disconnected from the source. It’s the disconnection from the source that introduces the problems, and that’s why mature organizations that adopt advanced information management practices and tools and methodology are able to perform better.

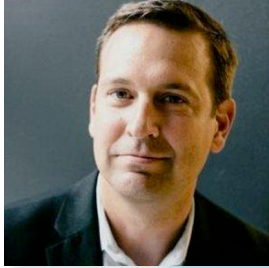
They’re able to produce more relevant content and more personalized content. They’re saving time and they’re making money and they’re able to innovate.

It’s because they took a step back and said: Just because we’ve always created content this way doesn’t mean we should continue. A centralized single source of content is often the best way to get there. But for marketers it’s kind of a new approach, so we have to start thinking, “How can we leverage marketing content? How can we start doing things smarter?”

[*Find the full interview here.*](#)
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It's Time B2B Enterprise Marketers Did Some Math

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL BRENNER ON MEASURING ROI



Michael Brenner co-authored The Content Formula. He is the CEO of Marketing Insider Group, and co-founded the popular site Business2Community and directed strategy at NewsCred and SAP. Michale and I dug into the difficult subject of measuring content, which is the subject of his book.

You and your co-author, Liz Bedor, claim content marketers need numbers they can take to the bank. Do they have them?

Michael: We wrote the book because we think that content marketing ROI is the biggest question we hear, especially when senior-level marketers are asking about or challenging content marketing. My snide remark is often, “Do you know the ROI of your marketing efforts overall?” No one has actually ever answered me.

I really do believe a large majority of marketing leaders, and I mean CMOs, really don't know the ROI of their marketing programs overall. So it's kind of a sarcastic response to the question, but it starts with a fundamental principle that I believe marketing should be held accountable to business results.

So the answer to your question is, unfortunately, we haven't done a good job of presenting marketing in the context of strategic business value. I'd say CMOs who don't have these numbers need to get them.

As an enterprise marketer looking to begin this process of putting ROI numbers together and measuring stuff, what do you believe matters most?

Michael: The math of ROI starts with understanding the investment and then calculating the return, a pretty simple mathematical calculation. In the book, we provide calculations to do that, but the structure we presented was to think about it in terms of reach, engagement, and conversion, which maps pretty well to the classic marketing funnel metaphor.

What we're trying to say is you can measure value in a quantifiable way at each stage of the funnel—from a reach, engagement, and conversion perspective. So that's the way we structured the book and there are values that can be placed against each one of those.

In a recent post on *Entrepreneur*, you wrote, “60 to 70% of the content your company creates goes completely unused.” Sounds expensive. What should an enterprise do to tackle this problem?

Michael: The first thing is to admit it exists. The research that we cited comes from SiriusDecisions based on something like 1,400 B2B companies. This was a detailed audit of content created by marketing teams and obviously, it cost money to create. What they found was it's not that the content stank and it's not that it didn't perform well. No, it was created and never used.

I've done audits for about a dozen companies who resisted admitting they had a problem in this area. The audit I did first was when I worked at SAP, and sure enough: We found right around 56% of the content was never actually used.

So there is a massive opportunity inside B2B companies to look at the content they're creating and just make sure it actually gets used. And so before we even get to the performance questions—and this really gets to the part of the book where we talk about how find the budget for content—start to look at the content your organization creates, and make sure there is process in place that rationalizes those decisions.

Do you think it make sense to say a logical place to begin looking at content usability is measuring internal reach?

Michael: I do. It presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The reason that they identify that as an important metric gets to this point of accountability. How do you hold your own teams accountable for creating stuff that people want? A lot of that content waste we talked about comes in the form of content that isn't created for an external audience, but maybe, like you said, sales enablement, or even customer reference.

It can be a huge budget item for a lot of B2B companies. They're spending a lot of time, a lot of money, using a lot of process to get customers to stand in front of the video camera and talk about why they chose the company they're a customer of. It's a piece of the puzzle and a step in the right direction to start holding the teams that are creating content accountable.

Do you think most enterprises are in the dark when it comes to measuring the effectiveness of the content?

Michael: Yeah, and part of this comes down to the difference between content and content marketing. Content marketing is ultimately much more measurable and quantifiable than either content or marketing by themselves.

What do I mean by that? Well, what's the ROI of a white paper? I have no idea. The ROI of a whitepaper that never gets used is a negative. Whatever you spent was wasted cost.

But content marketing means publishing to a brand owned destination. And so the investment you make in building a brand owned destination, examples like "OPEN Forum by American Express or "The Red Bulletin," from Red Bull—all the famous examples that are out there—the investments we make in these kind of platforms are completely trackable. The results these platforms generate are completely trackable.

The point is, the ROI of most marketing investment is hard to track, but it's not impossible.

The ROI of content marketing is infinitely more measurable. We can identify the cost of the digital platform. We can identify the cost of the people that are running it. We can identify the cost to create blog posts, white papers, infographics, and the technology infrastructure that supports them.

That's why we're seeing this shift in marketing overall from things that are less trackable to things that are completely measurable.

[*Find the full interview here.*](#)
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To your bright future...

IT'S GUT CHECK TIME. YOU NEED TO ASK YOURSELF:

Are your content marketing initiatives helping your company thrive?

They can. And if you're able to identify and address your weak spots, they will.

Just make sure you're asking these questions: Does your marketing department have strong leadership? Do you have a plan in place that everyone is onboard with? Is your content truly persona-driven? Is your content being managed effectively across the enterprise? Are you able to measure your return on investment?

High-performers address these questions and make these high priorities.

I'd like to thank our all-star cast of content marketing leaders for shedding light on these issues. I hope you found their ideas illuminating.

Ready to Deliver an Enlightened, World-Class B2B Customer Experience?

Kapost Suite offers a complete stack of features to manage the strategy, execution, distribution, and optimization of your B2B marketing content. Only Kapost ties your B2B content directly to revenue, shedding light on its critical value within your organization.

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Barry Feldman co-authored the ultimate guide to personal branding, [The Road to Recognition](#). The founder of Feldman Creative, Barry provides content marketing consulting, copywriting, and creative direction services. He writes for the web's top marketing sites and was named one of 25 Social Media Marketing Experts You Need to Know by LinkedIn. Visit his blog, [The Point](#), at Feldman Creative. Connect on Twitter [@feldmancreative](#)