

Five lessons in proving content ROI



By [Claire Butler](#)

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On a recent quest to prove my content marketing efforts, I read a quote on content measurement from content thought leader Ryan Hanley that really resonated with me.

Ryan, quoting from his book *Content Warfare*, said "People who bitch about the return of investment of content marketing are focused on manufacturing attention, not building trust". This got me thinking - if content marketing's real return is trust, how do you put a measure on that? I set off on a mission to unpack and understand what content ROI really is. Here are the five key lessons I learned.



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Lesson 1: Proving content ROI is something most marketers struggle with

My first takeaway from preliminary research is that content measurement is something pretty much every marketer is struggling to get right. In fact, [42% of businesses](#) say that their top content challenge right now is an inability to measure their content marketing effectiveness.

What is ROI, really?

When your CMO or Director talks about ROI, they're mostly referring to impact on the bottom line: how content creation and distribution translates into sales, profitable action, money in the bank, and so on. For a long time I've felt blinded by this, by having to prove content impact on that end goal of sound revenue generation. That was until I started to unpack what measurement really is, which lead me to lesson number 2...

Lesson 2: Content measurement is about performance against clear objectives and conversion goals that, when combined, impact the bottom line

Measurement is about assessing performance - it's about understanding the degree to which something has met its objective. That objective might not be immediate money in the bank, but one part in a series of events that culminates in improving the bottom line of a business. I've learned that it's important to make this distinction and approach content measurement based on objectives, and that's where Hanley's quote gave me the much-needed perspective I needed to move forward and prove content ROI.

Every piece of content you create should be associated with a clear conversion goal (usually tied to the call to action associated with your content). Measurement then becomes the answer to the question: how many people acted in the way I needed them to act after consuming or engaging with this piece of content?

Lesson 3: Content ROI is not just about conversions, it's also about attraction and retention

Content marketing has many benefits: it can help you attract, convince and retain customers. In other words, there is a place for content to play across your entire sales funnel.

Having this holistic view of content's role, and plotting it against your entire customer journey, is imperative before you even try to make sense of how to measure content or plot your performance metrics against conversion goals.

Lesson 4: Content marketing ROI requires putting a measure on trust

Quoting the [Content Marketing Institute](#), the premise of Content Marketing is "the belief that if we, as businesses, deliver consistent, ongoing valuable information to buyers, they ultimately reward us with their business and loyalty".

If that's the case, then proving Content Marketing's worth is actually about putting a measure on trust - does your audience trust your brand, your messages, and your product enough to buy from you; to recommend you to their friends; and then continue to buy from you? Only once you measure the extent to which that trust has been established will you know whether or not your content marketing efforts have been effective.

Where would you even begin to measure trust?

Building and measuring trust could include an analysis of which content is resonating best with your audience; which content is being shared; how much your audience is talking about you or referring you; how many visits, and repeat visits your blog is receiving; how much time and attention your consumers are willing to invest in engaging with your content; how much proactive engagement your consumers are displaying; and how ready and willing your customers are to part with their details and give you permission to market to them.

Lesson 5: Proving content ROI is something that takes time, and requires an analysis of month-to-month, even year-to-year performance, before real return can be proven

Trust is not something that is instant, nor can it be measured immediately. Establishing trust is a long-term commitment. As you build trust, your stats on all of the above should grow, and along with it, so will your sales. That's when the real ROI of your content marketing efforts can be proven.

ABOUT CLAIRE BUTLER

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