

Demystifying Content Strategy

15 February 2002

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Content Strategy – What is it?

What is Content Strategy?

Content strategy is a set of activities throughout the life cycle of a project that helps Sapient and the Hospital for Sick Children evaluate, create and manage all of the content that is to be used on the child health portal site. When we talk about “content,” we mean mostly textual content – the articles, introductory text and nomenclature you see throughout a site – but our definition of content includes many other items.

Content includes (but is not limited to):

- Articles – the subject matter your users are visiting the site to see
- Brand identity messages – headlines and teasers that communicate the brand, as well as introductory text that speaks in the brand voice and tone of the site
- Organizational information – press releases, employment listings, etc.
- Nomenclature – a naming system for buttons, categories, navigation, and links
- Instructional copy – text and graphics that explain how to use site features and tools
- Community areas – interactive site features like message boards and chat areas
- Error and confirmation messages
- Email messages
- Legal information – terms-of-use agreements and privacy policies
- Marketing messages – user testimonials, promotional and advertising text

The role of the Content Strategist through the life cycle of a project

Content strategists are involved in nearly every phase of a project. Below is a list of the major content strategy activities during a project, broken out during the early, middle and late phases of a project. Their involvement begins early, with activities such as the crafting of the editorial voice and tone, continues with the planning and executing of a content creation plan, to assisting in and advising the process of content tagging and scrubbing in later phases of a project.

Many of these activities are collaborative. Some, like designing the content management application interface, require only advisory involvement from a content strategist. However, this list gives a complete picture of the major activities that must be completed during a project for a site to go live successfully.

Early/Fusion

- Competitive analysis
- Content state assessment/Priority assessment
- Determine editorial roles and responsibilities
- Design the editorial workflow

Middle/Design

- Create the editorial voice and tone
- Create the nomenclature system



- Design the content types and their attributes
- Create an editorial calendar
- Content creation for new content
- Re-purpose/re-voice existing content
- Determine content sources
- Content inventory – create a content matrix

Late/Implementation

- Content tagging for the content management system
- Plan and provide oversight for content scrubbing, to ensure content is in the proper format
- Assist in the design of the content management application interface



Content Strategy Activities – In Detail

Competitive Analysis

In a competitive analysis, Sapient will evaluate and compare each of the mainstream Canadian content sites in pediatric health care and wellness, as well as selected major health content sites in other countries. The analysis is designed to isolate and examine the distinguishing content features of each site, such as message boards/community functionality, the subjects or topics covered, the number of articles in each, multimedia, links to local resources, the number of languages supported, etc.

Following the analysis of competitor sites, Sapient would provide an evaluation of the site elements that are the most critical for HSC to include, and an evaluation of the resources necessary to provide those elements.

Content State Assessment

We will need to examine your content needs carefully. Launching a site with a mix of outside and in-house content will require a thoughtful examination of what content from an outside source is appropriate for your site. We'll also need to make sure the content is delivered smoothly, with minimal disruption to your normal business processes.

We will conduct an assessment of the state of the content you already have at HSC – in online and off-line form, to get an accurate sense of the task that lays before HSC in re-purposing and re-voicing content for the new site. We will also perform an assessment, similar to the competitive assessment described above, of a range of outside content providers to examine their strengths and weaknesses, to ensure that the outside source(s) you select will meet your needs.

Some of the considerations you'll need to make when choosing an outside content provider:

Exactly what content do you want to display?

Content on children's health is a relatively specific niche – you'll want to closely examine outside providers' content to make sure what they would supply is aligned with your vision for the site.

Is the quality of the content acceptable?

You'll of course want to use content that 's of a quality you'd feel comfortable presenting to the public. You'll want to see representative sample of what an outside provider would supply.

How you wish to use the content?

Will you link to the content, or present it on your site? Will you include outside providers' articles in their entirety on your site, or will you include only part of their articles (e.g., a teaser introductory paragraph) with a link to the full article on the provider's site?

Will the outside provider allow us to edit the content?

You may wish to use outside content as is, or you may wish to edit the outside content to tailor it to the voice and tone of your site. This will likely depend on the agreements the vendor has with its content sources.



Can the content be delivered to HSC with ease?

Most outside content providers will have a method they have designed for delivering content to your site. It will be important to determine whether their systems can communicate smoothly and easily with the content management system you select.

What is the provider's relationship with its content sources?

Are the outside provider's content sources likely to remain with the provider? Can you be reasonably assured that, if the provider's relationship with a content source ends, that the provider will be able to replace it with content of equal relevance and quality?

Editorial Roles and Responsibilities/Staffing Recommendations

Creating a formal process for content creation, editorial oversight, approval and handoff is necessary to ensure that HSC will have a sustainable process for producing content for the site. Sapien will evaluate the content needs and desires of HSC and compile a list of recommended staff roles and responsibilities for HSC, so that we can help you build a best-in-class content production staff and environment.

Codifying the editorial roles and responsibilities is critical to the success of the site because the members of your editorial staff will likely take on many different responsibilities, especially in the early stages. Defining boundaries for the editorial roles will ensure that your editorial staff performs tasks appropriate to their skill sets and not outside their duties, so that the site's content stays accurate and updated and so that your content goals can be achieved.

Editorial Workflow

The editorial workflow is an illustration of the flow or process by which content is created, edited, approved and published to the Web site. Generally speaking, the process for a garden-variety editorial workflow would begin with a writer or content creator, move to an editor or approver or either approves or rejects content, and then on to a publisher who has final approval and who is given permission by the content management system to publish content to the site.

It is important to think about and plan for the editorial workflow because, at present, HSC doesn't have a content staff with an established process for creating, editing and publishing content. The workflow is also tied closely to the recommended editorial roles and responsibilities, which are discussed in more detail below. The workflow is also tied to closely to the design of the content management application interface, discussed later in this document.

Editorial Voice and Tone

The editorial voice and tone is the "sound" or the "feel" of the content on the site, the voice in which the site content speaks. This is an element that is easy to overlook, but it is critical to craft a site's voice and tone in keeping with the intended brand identity. For example, a site for a financial services company like Merrill Lynch will speak with a much different voice and tone than a site for a non-profit organization such as the American Cancer Society.



Sapient content strategists will work with representatives from the branding agency and from the Hospital for Sick Children to craft the site's voice and tone so that it is consistent with the brand identity of the site.

While it's important to ensure that all of the site's content speaks with a consistent voice and tone, these elements are among the most important:

- Instructional copy
- Email text, which includes confirmation emails, or response emails to user questions
- Nomenclature of site elements, including action buttons and navigation elements

Nomenclature

When we talk about "nomenclature," we mean a consistent naming convention across a Web site that includes content features, screen headers and titles, links and buttons. The idea behind thinking about nomenclature is that we want to ensure a clear and easy navigation so users know where they are within a site at all times. Creating a nomenclature for the new site starts with an understanding of HSC's and Sapient's definition of various terminology, usage and style that will be incorporated into the design of the new site.

When a Web site employs clear and consistent nomenclature, it helps that site:

- Facilitate user activities and processes
- Organize content and information architecture
- Minimize confusion and interpretation of content features and functionality
- Ensure a seamless design and implementation of the site

Designing Content Types and Attributes

Designing the content types for the site is necessary so that content will be created in a format that your content management system can accept and process, so that content will be displayed properly on the site. The likely scenario is that your content creators, editors and publishers will enter content into a Web -based form. The form will be designed to accept only the content types and attributes you designate; therefore, it's critical to identify the content types and their attributes accurately, so that the CMS will be useful and able to handle all of the content HSC wishes to publish.

A set of content types for the site might include types such as:

- Articles
- Job listings
- Email messages
- Error and confirmation messages
- Instructional text
- Downloadable PDFs
- Promotional messages



It is necessary also to identify each of the attributes for each of the content types, again so that the content management system will process each piece of content in the correct way.

A set of attributes for the content type “article” might include:

- Title (or Headline)
- Author Name
- Date published
- Time published
- Teaser Paragraph
- Article Body Text

Content Inventory – Creating the Content Matrix

Depending on how much content HSC wishes to use for launch, this is one of the largest content tasks HSC and Sapiient will perform. It is necessary to do an inventory of all the individual content pieces (e.g., every article, email response to user, and piece of instructional copy) so that each piece of content can be displayed correctly on the site.

Once each piece of content is identified, it is listed in a document Sapiient calls a “content matrix.” This is usually done in Microsoft Excel and contains a list of each content piece and the attributes associated with it. Also included for each content piece is the information necessary for it to be appropriately tagged in the content management system, so that it will be displayed correctly on the site.

Editorial Calendar - the Content “Roadmap”

With limited staff and challenging goals for the child health portal, HSC will have to plan ahead in order to achieve the goals outlined in the proposal request. The editorial calendar is a plan for creating, editing and approving all of the content that will be published on the site for launch. When creating the editorial calendar, Sapiient will evaluate and, with HSC, prioritize the content the Hospital wishes to have on the site for launch.

We also recommend creating an editorial calendar for the life cycle of content after launch, e.g., for one year from the launch date. With a post-launch editorial calendar, HSC can plan ahead for the creation of timely content in coordination with health events throughout the year (e.g., Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the AIDS Walk, etc.) The editorial calendar will be driven by the phasing strategy adopted for the child health portal.

Content Creation

Though it may seem obvious to plan for this, it is easy to underestimate the time and resources it will take to create all of the content for the site. Since HSC is the subject-matter expert when it comes to children’s health content, Sapiient will respect the integrity of the information you already have available and which you can present on the site. Our primary goal in content strategy for HSC will be to integrate your content seamlessly into the new site, so that it speaks with one consistent voice and tone, and to provide guidance and approaches to Web writing and content creation.



Specifically, Sapient content strategists can work with HSC to ensure that the new site's content:

- Engages visitors and encourages them to use the site's resources and take action via clear messaging and intuitive navigation.
- Allows users to access information easily and efficiently through instructional text that assists users with tasks that are often difficult to perform on the Web, such as finding (as closely as possible) the information they're looking for in a Web search, or completing forms
- Successfully positions HSC as an international leader in children's health, wellness and safety information by integrating the brand identity into the site's content in a seamless, consistent fashion
- Encourages users to return often to the site through the use of fresh, updated content that is useful, informative and distinctive from your competitors' offerings.

Re-purposing/Re-voicing Content

HSC has a large amount of content that could be used for the site. However, in most cases, it was written or created for purposes other than display on Web site, such as for brochures, print magazines, and other off-line media. When we talk about "re-purposing" content, we mean taking content that is valuable information that could be used on the site and putting it into a format that is easily readable on a Web page – editing content to include HTML tags and tables for display on the Web, as well as creating Web-ready images for illustrations used in off-line content.

When we talk about "re-voicing" content, we mean re-writing the actual text itself so that it reflects the brand voice and tone that HSC wants to communicate on the Web. This can take a few different forms, but basically it means re-writing content for your target audience. In the case of HSC, you may have content that was created for an audience of physicians or other medical personnel. Re-voicing that content would mean re-writing it for your target audience of families with infants, toddlers, school-age children and youths, in the brand voice and tone of the site and in a language that audience would understand.

Content in Multiple Languages

One of the goals in the request for expression of interest is that the site be viewed as a worldwide source for children's health information. To that end, is one of HSC's goals to provide the site in multiple languages, so that it will be accessible to as large an audience as possible?

When planning for the development of content in multiple languages, it is critical to evaluate and prioritize which languages HSC wishes to support, and to what degree non-English-language content will mirror the English-language content on the site. This will impact the staff roles and responsibilities you'll need to consider, as well as the number of people you'll need to hire for your content staff. There are many options here; you can provide only content with a long "shelf life" in multiple languages, so that your updating demands are low for that content. You can also limit the number of languages you support, or support only English-language content at launch and adopt a phased approach to including non-English-language content over a period of time.



Content Tagging

Content tagging, or meta-tagging, means giving each piece of content an assignment to a place on the site, so that each content piece can be accessed at the appropriate place on the site. The organization on which the content tagging system is built is derived from the information architecture for the site, how the content on the site is organized, and the content types and their attributes.

The process of content tagging is perhaps the part of the project that involves the highest level of cooperation between the content team and the technology team designing the system architecture. There is often a high degree of day-to-day interaction among the members of the two teams during this effort; it is a detailed process that requires assigning the correct tags to each piece of content, so a large amount of knowledge has to be transferred from the content team to the technology team to ensure that content surfaces correctly.

Content Scrubbing

Depending on the number of articles, brochures, etc., that HSC wishes to use from off-line or other sources, it will be necessary to plan for time to make that content ready for publication on the Web. If that content comes from your or another existing Web site, we will have to ensure that everything on those pages displays and functions properly. If that content comes from a print or other off-line source, this means that we will make sure that all proper formatting has been done.

In content scrubbing, we review page elements such as:

- Links
- Navigation elements
- Page formatting, such as tables
- Text formatting, such as headlines, italicized text and bolded text
- Images
- Inter active/functional page elements, such as a form or button

On the American Cancer Society project, ACS had a large amount of content they moved from their previous site onto the new site. Those pages (which numbered in the thousands) contained many hundreds of instances in which some or all of the page elements listed above did not function correctly. To correct this for launch, the content team at ACS worked closely with Sapient to go through each page on the site and correct all the instances where page elements did not function properly. The process took about two months to complete during the implementation phase, but it was critical to delivering a successful user experience for the site.

Creating a Content Management Application Interface

This is a task that is performed mostly by the technology team, but building it will require input and guidance from your and Sapient's content teams. A content management interface links your content creators, editors and publishers to the content management system through a Web-based graphical interface.



The goal is to create an easy-to-use, intuitive interface that allows your writers to enter and edit content easily and quickly, send it to editors for approval, and publish it to your Web site. The process your writers and editors use (and the design of the CMA) depends on the editorial workflow you've designed, and the flow of creation, approval and permissions to publish content that you wish to implement. Creating the CMA is normally done during the implementation phase of a project.

Here, there are many options as to how elaborate or simple you want your CMA to be. Depending on your needs and the number of content staff you employ, it may not be necessary to build an especially sophisticated CMA. Sapient will work with HCS to determine how much effort to put into building this part of the content management system.

