

How structured content frees creative teams and unleashes their productivity

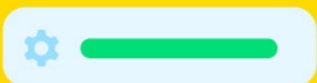
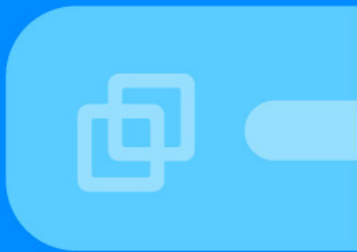
Time to break free from content code dependency



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Don't let your content slow you down

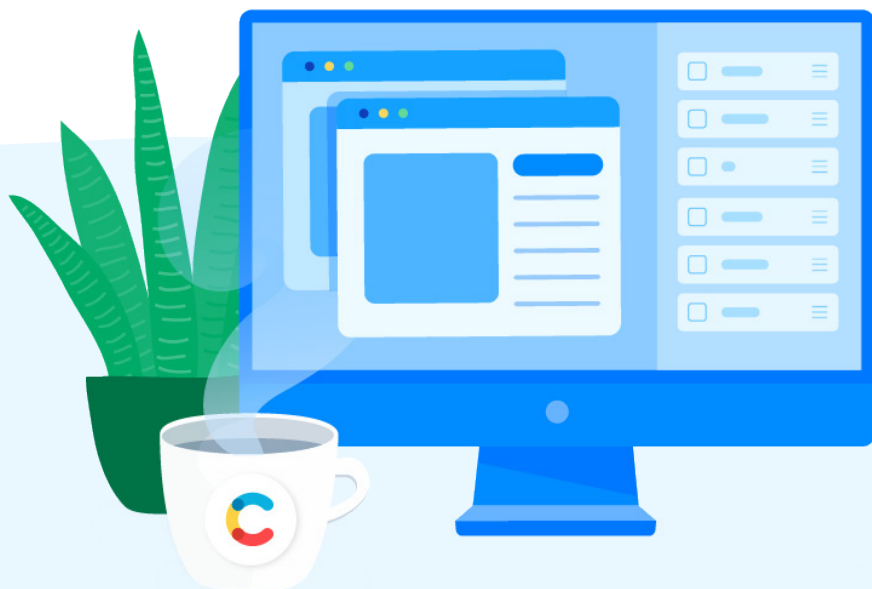
Before everything went digital, writers spent most of their time creating content. They weren't responsible for page layouts, printing or distribution. The digital era changed everything. Creators could use WYSIWYG editors within content management systems to publish content on the web all by themselves.

But what was once fast and exciting has turned into a long list of operational tasks that take hours or even days to complete. Content needs to be formatted for, distributed to and coordinated across multiple channels. One piece of content can spawn dozens of variations as it's optimized, translated, localized and personalized. And every variation needs to be tracked, managed and kept up to date, often across multiple CMSes operating in silos.

Imagine if content teams could spend that time focused on producing great content. How much happier would they be? Would they be more creative, more productive – both? That's the allure behind the emerging field of content operations.

Content operations frees editors to focus on content creation. It takes over the physical work and mental overhead of managing the content lifecycle. What's more, it provides a framework that helps content creators build momentum and create better content, faster.

More than half of our 2020 content survey respondents said they were spending too much time maintaining content and not enough time creating content



Content teams are bogged down by operations

More than half of our [2020 content survey](#) respondents said they were spending too much time maintaining content and not enough time creating content. Managing content and figuring out how everything will work together is time consuming and creatively draining.

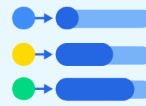
This operational overhead is caused by outdated systems and processes that weren't built for the digital-first era. Editors are spending valuable creative time copying and pasting content across digital channels, but they can't keep up with the volume of digital content: 80% of survey respondents say managing and updating a large volume of content is a challenge and 74% say content inconsistency across digital products is a problem.

The biggest CMS challenges facing content creators



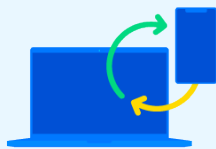
49%

say they spend too much time maintaining content



51%

are using multiple CMSes and 41% are updating content individually in each CMS



65%

say they can reuse content across multiple digital channels



57%

say they can control all of the content on their digital channels without developer assistance

The biggest challenges content teams face are related to operations, not content creation, according to the industry's [largest-ever survey of CMS users](#).

Valuable content gets lost

Without a structured approach to content management, a huge amount of content is left unused or under-utilized. Content gets stuck in silos, held up in approvals or lost in the sprawl. With content flooding in from teams and a network of freelancers, the hard truth is that a good chunk gets lost somewhere between creation and distribution. After all, we're playing with the largest volume of digital content since the creation of the internet.

Modern content operations built for the digital-first era eliminate the problems of siloed content. Better management tools help streamline processes from ideation, through creation, distribution and tracking. These tools harness the power of content you already have and immediately add value while freeing up more time and resources to create new content.



More information is being produced now than at any other time in human history.

Alan J Porter

Author of *The Content Pool*

"The Content Pool," Alan J Porter, <https://thecontentpool.wordpress.com/about/>

Content teams need processes and technology built for the digital-first era

Content operations is transforming content teams, enabling them to scale production and reach without sacrificing quality. It's the science behind the art of content creation.

Content operations and structured content elevate creative teams, empowering them to build engaging digital experiences without relying on developers.

In this paper, we'll break down the science of content operations: How it's a natural evolution for content teams and the problems it solves. We'll touch on structured content and show you how, despite its rigid-sounding name, it gives content creators and editors more flexibility and makes content scalable. The last section provides actionable insights on measuring the potential benefit of adding content operations to your team, getting buy-in from leadership and choosing your content operations team and platform.

Is your content team made up of builders?

We talk a lot about the importance of builders and the builder ethos – a mindset of empowering people and teams to go from having good ideas to actually building them. Builders aren't just programmers and developers. They can be anyone in your organization who is part of building digital experiences. So are you a builder?

Does your work impact the customer?

Building digital experiences isn't just about coding; it includes content, design, marketing, customer support and all the systems that make a customer experience seamless.

Do you want to understand and solve customer problems?

Builders are often described as "customer obsessed." They seek to deeply understand customers and enjoy finding new ways to delight them.

Do you look at previous work and see the potential to evolve it into something better?

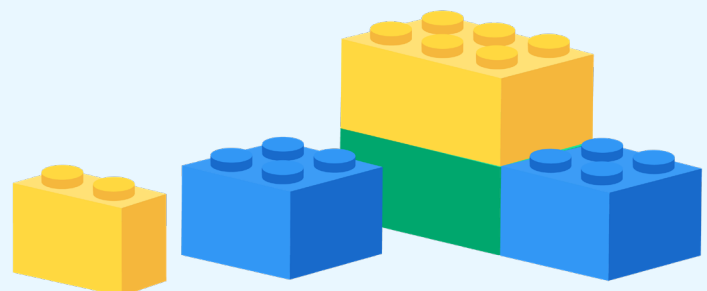
Builders iterate on what's already been done, using it as building blocks and evolving it into something new.

Is your mind buzzing with ideas? Are you always suggesting improvements?

Builders have ideas and suggestions for how to move forward. They are honest and open about what can be improved.

Do you enjoy working with a team and sharing ideas?

Despite the stories of maverick geniuses building things alone from scratch, builders usually work best together building off of and feeding on each other's ideas.

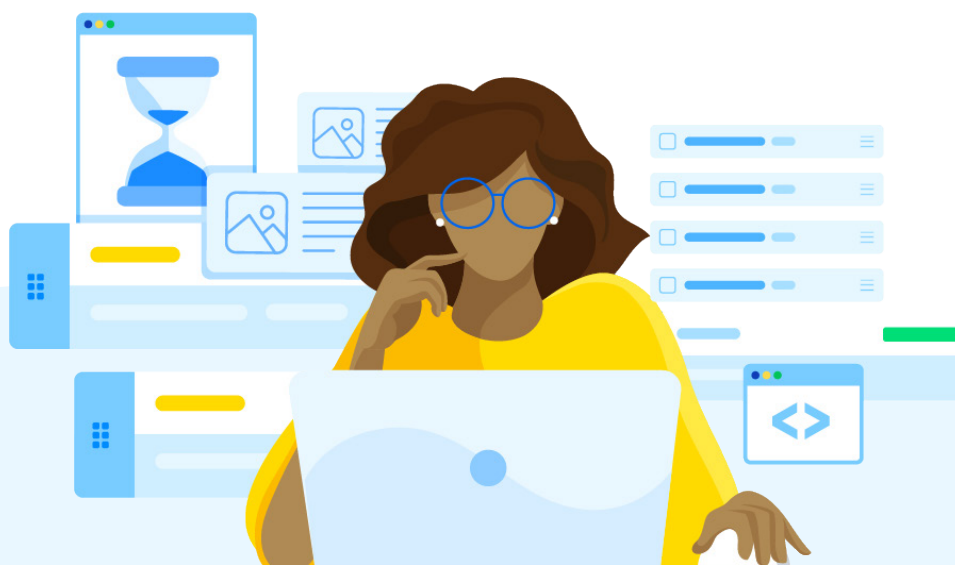


Editorial teams are managing increasingly complex content needs

Content marketing has become the catch-all term used to describe how businesses approach content and its distribution. Content marketing used to be an excellent description of what content teams did. Teams would produce resources for potential customers (ranging from blog posts to email marketing campaigns to...white papers like this one) and distribute them to the best of their ability. Updates to the website happened only sporadically, despite it being a primary driver of demand generation.

The proliferation of digital channels and people's appetite for omnichannel content have drastically increased demand for digital content – more formats, more frequent updates, more everything. Digital-native brands, including direct-to-consumer brands like Warby Parker, Casper and Dollar Shave Club, showed that engaging digital experiences could usurp attention from established brands. This paved the way for a shift to the digital-first era – a shift even further accelerated by the pandemic. Today digital is the front door to businesses around the world – and that's unlikely to change even when pandemic restrictions are lifted.

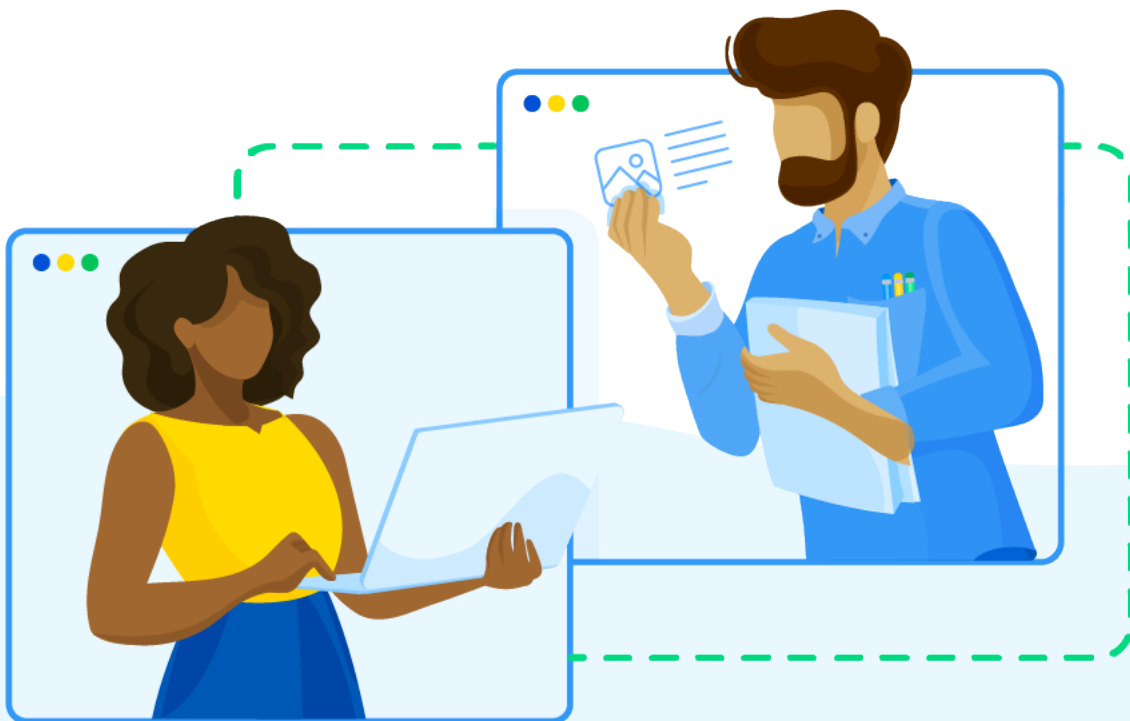
Content marketing now extends far beyond just marketing teams. Everyone in the organization needs digital content to reach customers. The content lifecycle is much more complex, involving integration with multiple marketing technologies, multiple channels and versions of content, and continuous updates.



Content creators are struggling to maintain content quality and consistency in the face of these increasingly complex organizational content needs. Take Mailchimp for example. Best known for its email services, the company started as a side project in 2001. By 2019, it had expanded to hundreds of websites. Finding content was a chore and even the tiniest of changes required a developer. [See how they solved these content woes with a unified content hub.](#)

Most content teams are severely limited by the technology, workflows, systems and processes that they use to manage complex content needs. Anyone who has worked in an editorial team and battled against a legacy CMS (or, more likely, CMSes) knows this to be true. Less than half of the our [CMS survey](#) respondents were satisfied with their current CMS, and 51% are using multiple CMSes. Delivering the seamless, connected experiences consumers want often takes herculean efforts to stitch together or recreate siloed content.

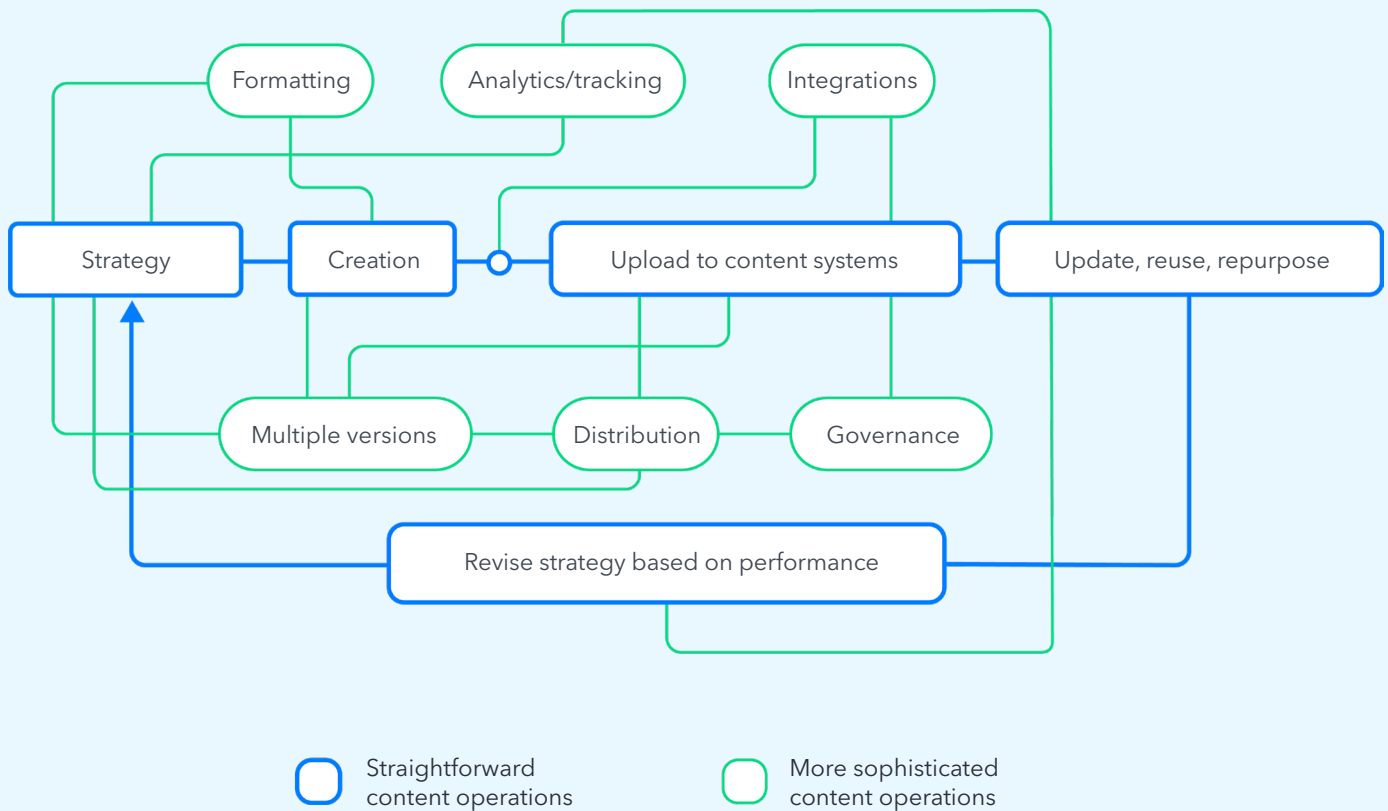
Despite increased demand for content and the growing workload of content management, content teams still tend to be small. According to the Content Marketing Institute, “Most companies, even large companies have small content marketing teams of 2-5 people. To keep up, they need more efficient operations and technology that supports, not hinders, them,” say the authors.¹ We couldn’t agree more.



¹ “Content Marketing 2020: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends: North America,” https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2020_B2B_Research_Final.pdf

The content lifecycle

As content scales, content operations within the content lifecycle get more complex.



Content operations frees content creators from operational overhead

The operational aspects of content marketing – the way content is managed, governed, organized and distributed – require a different approach and skillset than content creation. The mental overhead of considering how a piece of content will be formatted, distributed, governed, tracked, updated and repurposed can be draining for people who thrive on more creative work.

Trying to manage all of these operational tasks takes content creators out of the role where they add the most value. Instead of using their talents to bring a creative vision to life and build something new, they're bogged down trying to navigate technology. Designating a content operations person or team that has project management, communications, analytics and martech skills can alleviate this strain on content creators. Instead of struggling under a dual workload, creators can focus on generating better content and finding new ways to engage customers.

Having someone in charge of content operations allows editors and editorial teams to focus on creating content, while the content operations teams ensure it flows into digital products. With well-oiled content operations, your editors are free from busy work and their content has greater reach and value.

What is content operations

Content operations is a combination of people, playbook and platform for strategically planning, distributing and analyzing content. It's a supportive framework that helps creators do more with their content and feel confident that the content they create will be used to its full potential.

Content operation supports:

People

Content operations enables teams to scale content production and reach efficiently without piling more operational tasks onto content creators. They are also responsible for cross-departmental communication and mediation.

Playbook

Content operations optimizes the process side of content (formatting, uploading, channel distribution, analysis, strategy, workflows, etc.).

Platform

Content operations gives content creators a voice in technology decisions. By working at the cross section of people and technology, they can drive decisions towards technology that adapts to the way you work, not the other way around.



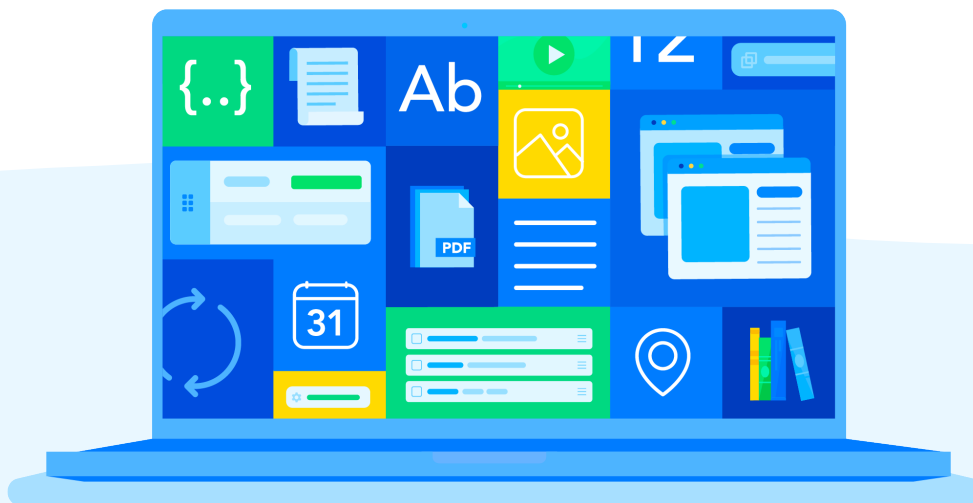
Structured content is the secret to flexible, scalable content operations

Your content operations team, or team member (if you're a smaller unit), will have a clearer overview of content and its lifecycle. They'll manage the challenges of tracking, organizing and optimizing content across your portfolio of digital products. But shifting those operational headaches to another person will only get your team so far. To get the full benefits of splitting creation and operations, you need to give your content ops team the tools they need to manage content efficiently. This is where structured content comes into play.

Think of the operations team as a city planner. Structured content is like the individual buildings – a school, church, bodega, apartments, houses. The city planner uses these components to assemble new neighborhoods faster. Not by cutting and pasting, but by using the original buildings as a starting point to create new structures. This helps everyone build faster and more creatively.

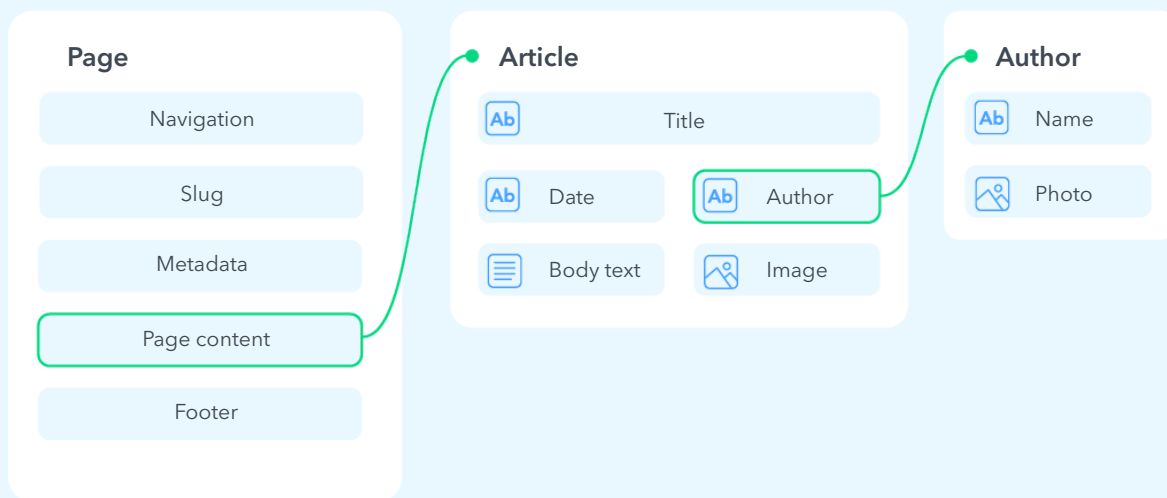
With structured content, an article (or anything) that you write is organized into component parts – title, author, body text, image, meta data, etc. These parts are moveable, reusable and, if organized well, easy to find in the future so they don't get lost. Once you get used to it, the structure itself fades to the background and users (authors and developers alike) enjoy a better experience.

Organizing these components within a content model creates a single source of truth for content creators, content operations and developers. Customized user interfaces allow each group of users to access and work with content using the view and tools they prefer.



What is structured content?

Structured content is a general term referring to content that is organized in a predictable way, usually classified with metadata. All content used in Contentful is considered structured content because it is organized into unique, bite-sized containers for content called content types. This makes every component moveable and reusable – with no copy-pasting required.



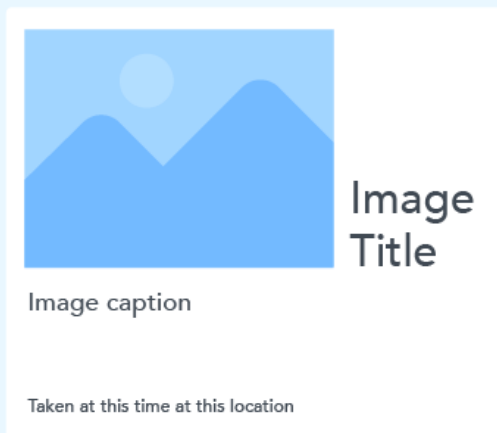
[Read more: WYSIWYG who? Structured content is an editor's best friend | Contentful](#)

Decoupling codependent relationships; or, how a content platform makes you happier

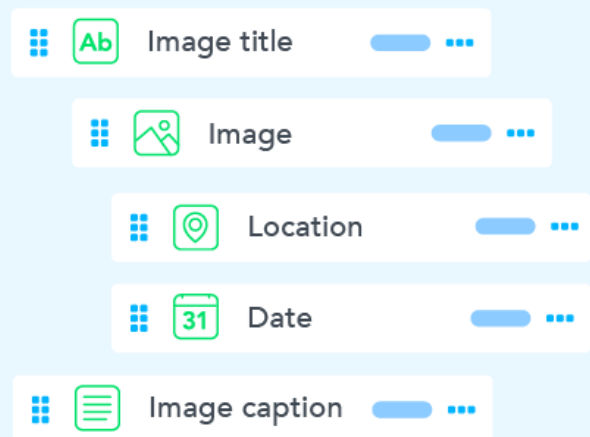
More time to write and create with less operational overhead sounds great, but how does it actually happen? From a technical perspective, modernizing content management is all about decoupling things that don't need to be rigidly tied together. Modern content platforms decouple the front-end presentation layer from the backend authoring and development tools. Content operations decouples the operational side of content from the creative side. Structured content decouples reusable content components from each other.

Decoupling doesn't mean that you eliminate the relationship between these components. It means that you create a more flexible one. Monolithic all-in-one platforms intermingle content with the code used to deliver a page, and limit authors and developers to a small set of vendor-specific tools.

Modern content platforms separate the content from the code, so each can be created and updated independently. They integrate with the tools of your choice, giving authors, developers and the operations team the flexibility to choose how they work.



Coupled image content



Decoupled image content

This is how companies manage content and build customer experiences in the digital-first era. Content operations becomes a valuable function, separate from content creation, that helps turn content into a strategic asset across the customer journey. While editors create new content, the content operations team can work in parallel to optimize and assemble existing content into new experiences.

Atomizing content into reusable structured blocks that are managed through a central hub enables content teams to get more mileage out of content and deliver digital experiences with speed and consistency. What's more, this flexible, integrated approach on the backend aligns with the need for integrated content and channels on the front end.



Case study: Kärcher

[Kärcher](#) has manufactured functional, user-friendly, sophisticated cleaning products since 1935, long before digital entered the scene. Not to be outdone by digital-natives, Kärcher embraced new technologies and processes that are helping them thrive in the digital-first era. One big win was their experiment with Alexa Skills. Using Contentful's API-first content platform, they were able to adapt existing content to launch two Alexa Skills and then scale them into multiple markets and languages. With this success under their belt, they can now reuse that content in chatbots and the Kärcher IoT-enabled machines. [Learn more.](#)

This type of creativity and reuse couldn't be done without a flexible, central content platform. In legacy systems, content is siloed. Everything you create is tightly tied to a specific page and channel format. It can't be easily reused in a different channel or even rearranged to add some variety. Content starts to look and feel very duplicative as you scale, because everything starts with the same rigid templates. Customers and content creators quickly tire of these cookie cutter experiences; they want more excitement.

A content platform powered by structured content allows creators to achieve scalability by evolving content, not duplicating it. Content teams have a library of components to choose from when building a new digital experience. Instead of a blank page or rigid template, they have a palette of colors that can be mixed and matched to bring their content to life in new ways. Because these components are atomized and managed in a central hub, that masterpiece can be recreated across channels without manual copying and pasting and image resizing.

Modern content operations and technology solve content teams' biggest challenges

Content bottlenecks and inconsistencies occur when legacy systems and processes fail to keep up with digital teams.

Old processes and technology

Time-consuming workarounds

The explosion of digital products and channels has strained legacy systems to the breaking point. More channels to manage, siloed content and poor integrations with key martech have editors jumping between systems. Time spent chasing content across systems, navigating different technologies and performing post-production tasks adds up fast and cuts into valuable creative time.

Developer dependency: hurry up and wait

Dependencies between content and engineering teams waste time. As work is passed back and forth, teams lose time switching from one task to another. Transferring knowledge at each handoff often results in missed information that requires more back and forth to fix. Teams are forced to work on lower-priority projects while they wait their turn.

Inconsistencies across a sprawl of content

74% of CMS users say inconsistencies across digital products are a problem. Brand consistency is easy on a single site, but scale that to hundreds (or even thousands) of digital experiences on multiple channels across global markets and it becomes impossible to keep content consistent manually. Trunk Club found themselves dedicating an entire group of editors to that task – [see how they broke free of the content maintenance spiral](#).

Modern content operations and technology

Focused workflows

Editors create content using a friendly, editorial interface. Within a modern content platform, editors can create content in an intuitive editorial interface. The content operations team performs post-production tasks and delivers content across channels. With everyone working within their area of expertise, teams deliver better digital experiences, faster. See how Alpro [streamlined workflows to launch a new brand across 32 markets in just six months](#).

Editor empowerment: parallel workflows

With structured content editors can edit content (even things normally hidden in code), preview and publish without a developer. Teams work in parallel, without interrupting each other. See how [Clover found a seamless content platform that both engineers and marketers love](#). Their content operations team manages communication keeps the moving parts connect – without slowing work down.

Consistency is built into structured content

Structured content is organized and reusable, pulling from a single source of truth, integrating with martech tools and delivering content across channels. Updates are made to the original content and then published any- (and every-) where with no duplicates or errors. Content operations teams use governance, tracking and performance tools to ensure that all content aligns with brand, priorities and revenue goals.

How to get buy-in for structured content and content operations

Workarounds and developer dependency can mask technology and operational problems. Our 2020 survey revealed a big disconnect between business leaders and content creators: While 79% of digital leaders believe their CMS has sufficient capabilities to achieve their business goals, only 53% of content creators agree. To drive change, content creators need to convey the heroic efforts they are making to bridge system gaps and deliver seamless digital experiences.

Two-thirds of business leaders believe they are behind competitors in delivering new digital experiences and 82% of survey respondents believe that delivering those experiences will increase revenue. You can build a strong case for change by showing business leaders how content operations and content management technologies will free up resources to build more of those high-value experiences faster.

You can't know where your team is spending their time unless you start tracking it first. A complete audit of your content, processes and workflows should be your first step.

Key questions to ask when building your case

- What non-writing tasks are editors responsible for and how much time do those operational tasks take away from content creation? Framing this in terms of what work could be completed in that time can make the value more tangible. (For example, in the ## hours editors spent on post-production tasks, they could have written ## blog posts.)
- How much time does the team spend looking for existing content, copy/pasting content across systems and synchronizing content? How often do brand inconsistencies and mistakes occur as a result of these manual efforts?
- Are projects mismatched on time? Search for instances in which the working time it takes to accomplish a task is substantially less than the calendar time it takes to finish. (For example, a minor text edit takes weeks to implement.)
- Are there quality issues that can be tied back to confusing workflows, editors being spread too thin or lack of governance tools?
- Does the content team suffer from high turnover/employee dissatisfaction?

What to look for when you choose your team (and your tech)

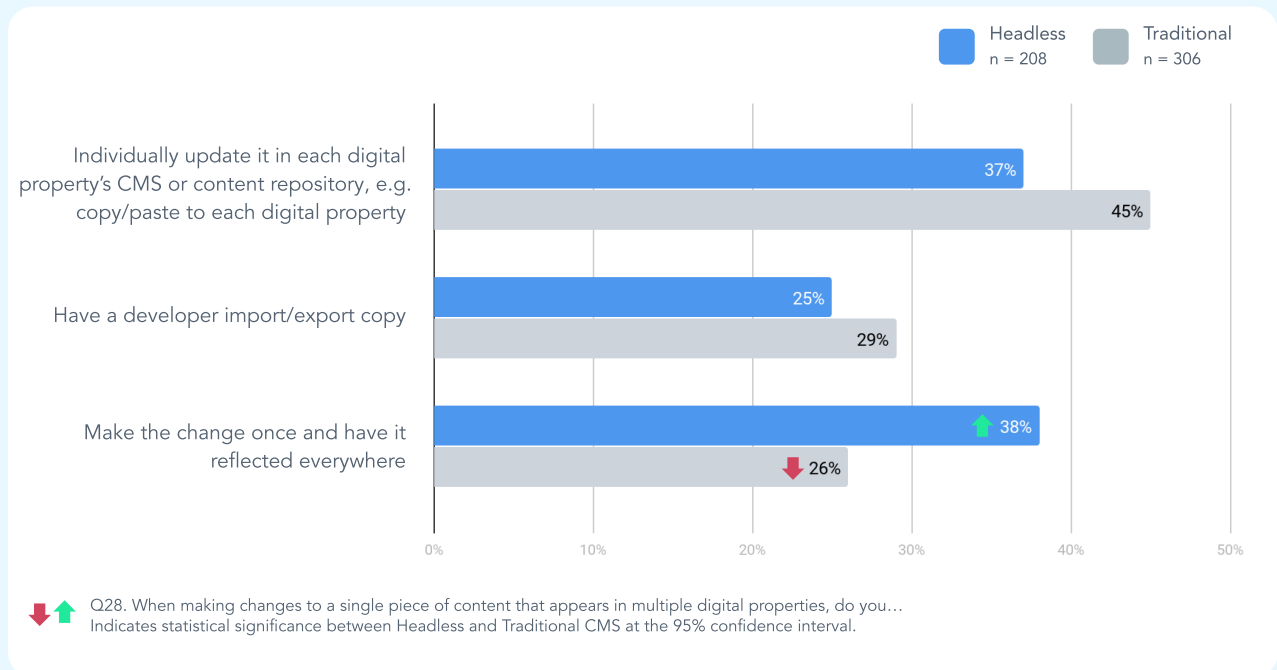
Content operations is an emerging field in companies that are pivoting to digital-first. Large amounts of content are required to support a globally-connected brand. Companies need content operations to make producing, distributing and maintaining that content scalable – it's as simple as that.

Here's what you should look for in a content operations manager or team:

- Strong communication skills to create strong cross-functional partnerships with the teams at your workplace
- A proactive, not reactive approach
- Strong quantitative background with the skill to analyze large datasets and the ability to translate hypotheses (based on quantitative data and analytics) into actionable changes
- Ability to track metrics and trends and turn them into informed decisions and strategy
- Skilled presenter who can articulate findings when it comes to analytics and insights



As we've said, designating a content operation person or team will only get you so far. To maximize the value of that investment, you must also consider the technology behind your content operations. Next-generation tools can streamline and automate many operational tasks, freeing your operations team to focus on strategy.



Traditional CMS users are more likely to manage content for each digital property in separate CMSes, multiplying the time and effort required. Those using next-generation tools are able to automate and streamline content delivery, saving time and resources.

[Contentful](#) is the leading content platform for digital-first business. Our flexible platform enables greater speed and scale than traditional CMS solutions, helping over 30% of the Fortune 500 and thousands of brands around the world create and manage digital experiences for their customers across any channel.

Content is the heart of every digital experience, so we've worked hard to make what started as a developer favorite into a platform for all builders.

Features for editors and content teams include:



The Web App

A friendly and fully customizable interface that provides editors with the tools they need to create new layouts, preview and publish – without waiting in a developer queue.



The App Framework

With Contentful's App Framework, connecting to any service is a snap – whether it's other cloud vendors, legacy tools or your own custom-built integrations. Access your favorite tools from one central authoring hub.



Launch

Enhances the ability of content teams to plan and schedule releases. Content pieces can be viewed together, managed as one project and scheduled to publish in a flexible manner. Teams can easily manage and deliver content as part of large campaigns, such as a Black Friday sale or new product announcements. And campaign managers can use Launch to plan the release of content from a single destination, allowing teams to collaborate better and deliver faster.



Compose

This new, streamlined version of the web app focuses on authoring and editing in a familiar, page-centric model. The user interface is simple, intuitive and aligns with the way content creators and editors work. Editors can assemble pages from predefined content components and media without involving additional engineering resources.

[Explore editor features for your content team](#)

[Learn more](#)

the studio



Check out our video series

Highlighting popular features for content creators and content operations teams

[Watch videos](#)

Glossary of related terms

The lingo around structured content can get a bit confusing, so we've included this cheat sheet to help you decipher some of the terminology your more technical colleagues might drop into the conversation.

Authoring experience

The way in which a content solution supports editors and makes creating digital content more intuitive.

CMS, headless CMS, content platform

Content solutions continue to evolve. Contentful is considered a next generation content platform, delivering the capabilities of a headless CMS (content decoupled from code and no set presentation layer) through an extensible, flexible platform that forms the heart of your tech stack.

Content assembly

A content assembly lets you organize design components for your digital products, and you can use them repetitively across all channels.

Content design

A content design system is a set of scenario-specific components, agreed upon by the team and integrated into the design system. This provides context for content decisions and aims to be a set of repeatable content patterns that keeps things consistent.

Content governance

The rules and permissions that determine who can update, edit and remove content, as well as which content elements can be edited and when content should be updated or retired. Governance is a critical component of scalable content operations.

Content maturity

Progression along a continuum of digital content capabilities. [Learn more.](#)

Content modeling

Content modeling is the process of structuring your content. It's focused on designing content types and workflows. A content model is the collection of all content types in a project. Think of it as the blueprint to your project. It gives structure and organization to your content.

Content operations

Content operations describes the set of processes, people and technologies for strategically planning, distributing and analyzing content.

Content type

A content type works like a stencil that defines the structure of an entry. Each content type comprises fields that denote the kind of content that will be included in the entry. Content types are created in spaces. When a content type is created and activated, editors are able to create individual entries using it.

Reusable content/content reuse

The ability to repurpose content elements without copying, pasting or rewriting them. For example, a single editor bio could appear on multiple blog posts.

Structured content

Structured content is a general term referring to content that is organized in a predictable way, usually classified with metadata. All content used in Contentful is considered structured content because it is organized into fields and entries, making it reusable and easily distributed across any and all channels.

This type of content is sometimes referred to as **atomized content** or **modular content** because it enables smaller pieces of content to be reassembled and reused in different ways.