Case studies

Content intelligence: A case study at the American Cancer Society

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Melinda Baker
has been improving things online for over two decades. Melinda has worked on a variety of digital opportunities, including consumer-facing content sites, corporate sites, intranets, online banking, online bill payment, reverse logistics, accounting, b2b procurement, and portals. Making things work for people by improving content, improving processes, supporting accessibility, and increasing usability are core to all of Melinda's work. She is currently at the American Cancer Society leading a team that manages the marketing strategy and implementation for the organization's web presence, including cancer.org, sub-brands and properties.

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Abstract For more than 100 years, the American Cancer Society has worked relentlessly to save lives and create a world with less cancer. The Society helps people stay well, get well and fight back against cancer through content marketing. In this paper we will explain how the Society and Content Science partnered to modernise the renowned nonprofit's approach to content and analytics by establishing content intelligence. We also will share some top lessons that were learned which any company or organisation can use to start applying and benefiting from a content intelligence programme.

KEYWORDS: content intelligence, content marketing, marketing analytics, health marketing, health communication, content strategy, marketing optimization, user experience

THE SITUATION: MODERNISING THE SOCIETY'S MARKETING

As the Society began to modernise its approach to marketing, the nonprofit faced an opportunity as well as challenges.

The opportunity

The Society recognised a chance to widen and deepen its marketing impact through content, thanks to two factors:

1. *The rise of content marketing.* As consumption of content has increased with the expansion of broadband internet access, the use of mobile devices and the use of social media around the world, content marketing has evolved into a multi-billion dollar industry.[1] Content marketing is not a fly-by-night trend. IBM recently conducted in-depth research into CMO priorities via surveys and interviews and found that the vast

majority plan to invest more of their marketing budgets in content than in advertising in 2016.[2]

2. *The Society's rich history of 'spreading truth and knowledge'.* In a way, content has always been a part of the Society's DNA. The Society has always sought to spread truth and knowledge about cancer, as can be seen in the flier from the Society's archives shown in Figure 1. Because of their long history of sharing accurate information about cancer, people trust them as an authority on the topic and seek them out when they are in need. This wealth of content and position as an authority is a real *asset*.

Organisations with a rich history of sharing useful, credible information might face similar opportunities to strengthen their marketing impact with content. This asset of knowledge also posed some noteworthy challenges for the Society.

The challenges

As the Society considered modernising its approach to content, two challenges arose:

1. *A legacy print-first mindset.* The Society approach to content was entrenched in print because of its long history with printed brochures, reports and similar educational materials (Figure 2). The Society started more than 100 years ago with nurses and volunteers going door to door with brochures to educate people about cancer, which was then a taboo topic.

   The Society still provides print materials to healthcare facilities, healthcare professionals and underserved communities and will even mail printed materials to people who call their 24/7 cancer helpline.

   Because of this rich history, print came first, *then* online. This mindset is not unusual in other nonprofits, government agencies and even corporations with a long history of producing communications. To take advantage of the opportunities around

content marketing, the Society is working to change to create content for online first.

2. *Content silos plus technology platform.* A number of different teams at the Society were producing content; medical content, such as cancer screening guidelines, and general content, such as explaining volunteer opportunities. There was a lack of consistent oversight to ensure the content followed style and brand guidelines, was maintained regularly, or met SEO, Accessibility, and mobile guidelines. In short, many people were publishing whatever content they thought was needed, without a centralised content strategy or approach to content and without regular checking to ensure the content was working.

   In the case of the Society, the content silos were partly due to how the site evolved, partly due to how teams are organised and partly due to constraints with the technology platform. While silos evolve for different reasons in different large organisations, their existence and the challenges they present for content are common.

   When the Society decided to invest in an updated technology platform with content management, asset management and similar capabilities, the need to overcome the content silos became more pronounced. At this point, the Society recognised that content intelligence was an important part of the solution.

THE SOLUTION: THE CONTENT INTELLIGENCE FACTOR

First, we will briefly define content intelligence, and then we will highlight two key elements of the Society's approach to content intelligence.

What is content intelligence?

Colleen Jones defines the emerging practice of content intelligence like this:

> Content intelligence represents the systems and software that transform content data and business data into actionable insights for content strategy and tactics with impact.[3]

Figure 1: A flier from the Society's archives emphasises spreading trustworthy information to save lives

Figure 2: A sample of the robust printed materials produced throughout the Society's history

To yield useful insight for impactful decisions about content, a content intelligence system must collect multiple sources of data and execute analyses and interpretation focused on questions about content. Looking at the data through the lens of content is key.

Figure 3 shows some common data sources, but one could also fold in big data sources. Now, let us turn more specifically to two elements that the American Cancer Society implemented.

Training to expand mindsets and adjust roles

One step the Society took was to invest in training in content strategy and intelligence. Content Science brought together a number of the Society's content teams, many of whom were meeting one another for the first time, to explain some of the latest data and insights around the ways people consume content today. The training session also reviewed some research-based best practices and covered the basics of making data-informed decisions about content. Eleni Berger, managing director of content at the Society, noted that:

> … [participants] appreciated the data that Content Science was able to provide. A number of them said they had never thought about our content in this way, so the training definitely opened their eyes to that usage. They also said they would have liked more time to work on the content exercises. To me, that's a great sign!

Additionally, Melinda Baker conducted a follow-up session to dive further into topics such as how to model content to provide users with outward paths. And, how users get to content from inward paths, including how website users find content through search
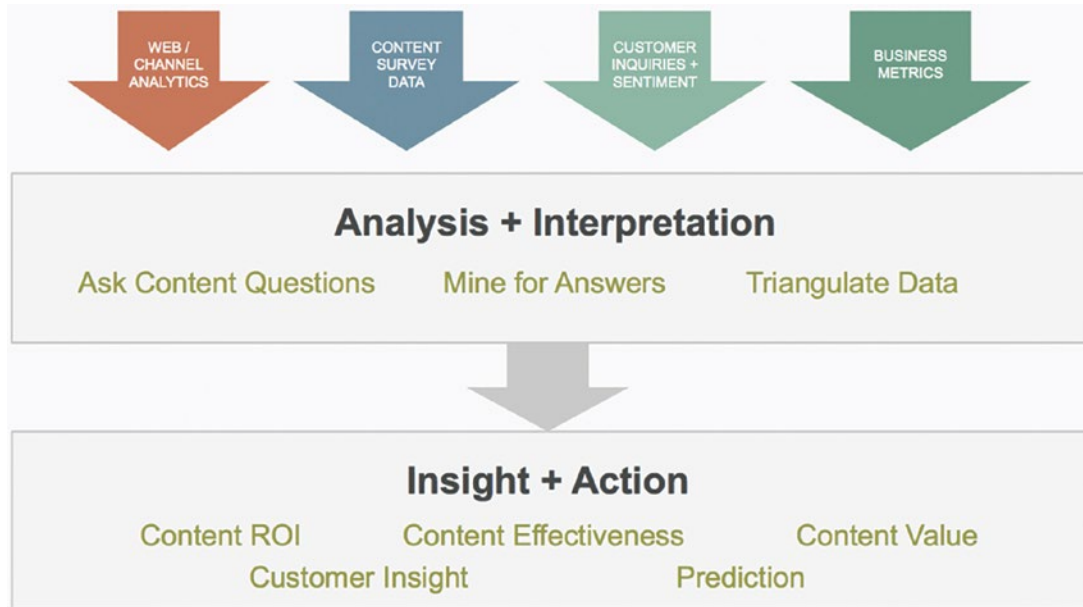
Figure 3: A diagram of content intelligence practice

engines. These training experiences created positive momentum, set a collaborative tone across silos and raised awareness about the level of expertise required to create and maintain content. This awareness led to another important outcome as the role of some experts shifted from content creator to subject matter expert (SME).

Tools to expand data sources and analysis capabilities

In parallel with the training effort, the Society started an initiative to analyse the effectiveness of the current web content (content available on cancer.org). This initiative began by reviewing content performance in Google Analytics. While the analytics provided useful insights, they also raised questions that analytics alone could not answer.

For example, when the Society reviewed the performance of content about quitting smoking, one URL with a high volume of traffic also had a high bounce rate. Why? The Society did not know whether people were finding exactly what they wanted and then leaving, or whether the content was not meeting their needs at all. Analytics could not provide the complete answer. So,

as part of a larger effort, and to better understand the impact of all of its web content, the Society decided to invest in other tools and bring together other data sources.

Specifically, the Society added the tools Optimizely, Hot Jar, and ContentWRX to collect a variety of data to shed light on whether the web content was effective and, most importantly, *why* (*or why not*). Here are the tools that were added:

- *Hot Jar* to gain features such as heat maps and visitor recordings that reveal more nuances about users' interactions with content.
- *ContentWRX* to gather feedback through validated survey protocols and analytics from survey respondents.
- *Optimizely* to compare the effectiveness of different content versions.

The Society also actively compared results with insights from ongoing market research surveys as well as enquiries through channels such as the call centre and e-mail (Figure 4).

With the training and tools in place, the Society steadily gained content intelligence over the course of a year and experienced a range of results.
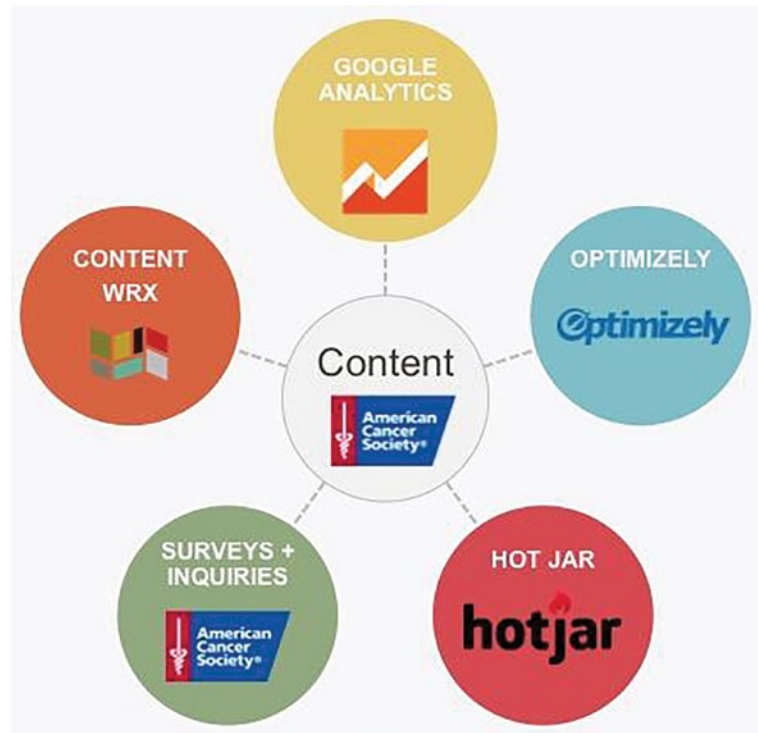
Figure 4: The Society expanded its tool set to assemble data from multiple sources

RESULTS: TOP LESSONS LEARNED

The Society gained operational benefits as well as the ability to make content decisions more strategically and confidently. Here are explanations of three of the top lessons learned.

1. Sharing content data bridges silos, empowering both content teams and stakeholders

Before assembling content intelligence, the Society had a monthly meeting to review the website analytics. A wide variety of stakeholders got on a call together and heard the big picture of how the site was doing. As the content intelligence system gathered more data and insights, the Society realised that they needed not only to share the data and insights with the people creating the content but also to enable them to ask their own questions and dig into the data for answers. Some content teams embraced the access to data and insights immediately, while others took more time to assimilate it into their content planning. But the net result was more productive collaboration on content decisions.

2. Triangulating the data from multiple sources results in more confident and effective content decisions

Triangulating the data has been especially helpful to the Society in planning the migration of its content to a new platform. For example, the following statistic had started circulating around the Society without much context:

> 60 per cent of our website users cannot find the content they are looking for

The statistic seemed high and, if true, would likely require sweeping changes to the content and the website in order to improve. So, the Society's content teams triangulated the statistic with results from ContentWRX. The Society's results in ContentWRX had significantly improved

from having 31 per cent of users saying the content they wanted was not easy to find down to 15 per cent. And even 31 per cent is significantly lower than the 60 per cent reported in the statistic.

There was a specific, limited context where this statistic was accurate, but it wasn't the whole picture. It was a limited item, and having the other data enabled the team to put it into perspective. The good news was that triangulating the data showed that the ContentWRX data and the Google Authority score were in alignment, which gave stakeholders more confidence in the data (Figure 5).

3. Content intelligence informs both strategic priorities and tactical decisions for impact

If one does not act on content intelligence, one might as well not have it. To make the most of its investment in content intelligence, the Society made using it in content decisions a priority.

Setting priorities for content migration

For example, content intelligence has simplified prioritisation as the Society prepares to migrate content to a new technology platform. The Society could make many changes to the content. Which
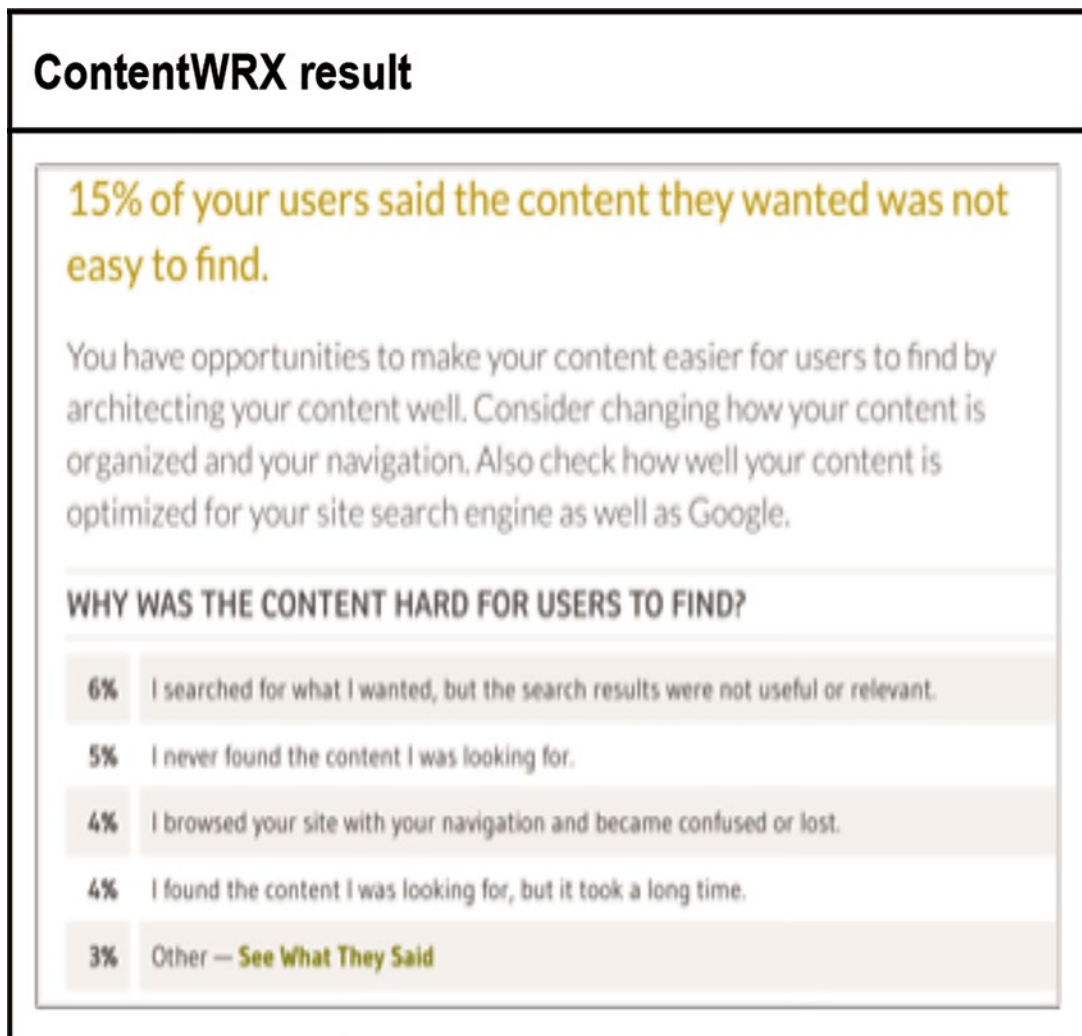
Figure 5: Scores from the ContentWRX tool

Table 1: The Society tracks priorities for content migration in a spreadsheet

F	L	M	
	Page status	**Page template notes**	**Content**
Content usage	Keep	Content would fit new modular	
Privacy policies	Update	Content would fit new modular but needs updating	
Internet privacy policies	Update	Content would fit new modular but needs updating	
Online and mobile privacy policy	Remove		Duplicate

changes are most important? The content teams' guiding principle has been to go ahead and make a change *if* the work will support a business goal now *and* will make the imminent migration easier. Additionally, the teams do not want to 'break' content that is working well. So, content intelligence has helped the Society discuss and discern what changes have a strong potential for improving content impact and what changes risk introducing problems (Table 1).

Content intelligence has also informed tactical decisions.

Connecting the right segments with the right content

For example, the Society's Road to Recovery programme helps patients get a ride to and from treatment and appointments. Not everyone has a car, is able to drive during treatment or is able to get a friend or family member to drive them to treatment. Volunteers fill this gap, after meeting some important criteria, and provide rides for patients. It is a win for volunteers, as they are doing a very tangible task that is helping someone with cancer, and it is very tangible for patients who might not otherwise get the treatment they need.

Originally, cancer.org offered a single page of content for the Road to Recovery programme. The page was doing double duty, speaking to:

- patients who need rides;
- potential volunteers.

Content intelligence showed that the page content was not meeting the needs of either segment, however. The Society received many questions from people who wanted to volunteer as well as patients who simply wanted a ride. This challenge of connecting the right segment or audience with the right content is common across a variety of organisations.

To solve the problem, the Society crossed silos. The marketing team coordinated with the cancer control team to develop two pages of content — one page for patients and one for potential volunteers (Figure 6).

This change led to significant results including:

- significant decrease in bounce rate;
- significant decrease in questions from both patients and volunteers.

Without data, this problem never would have been recognised and solved. With a data-informed content solution, someone who needs a ride to treatment will hopefully get one. And, treatment saves lives.

Furthermore, this tactical change is only one of many the Society has made since implementing a content intelligence programme and having solid access to multiple data sources for six months. These incremental improvements, together, add up to meaningful results in a relatively short time period.

For the Society, the results have been worth the investment of time and resources in a content intelligence programme. Consequently, the Society plans to continue and evolve the activities over the next year.
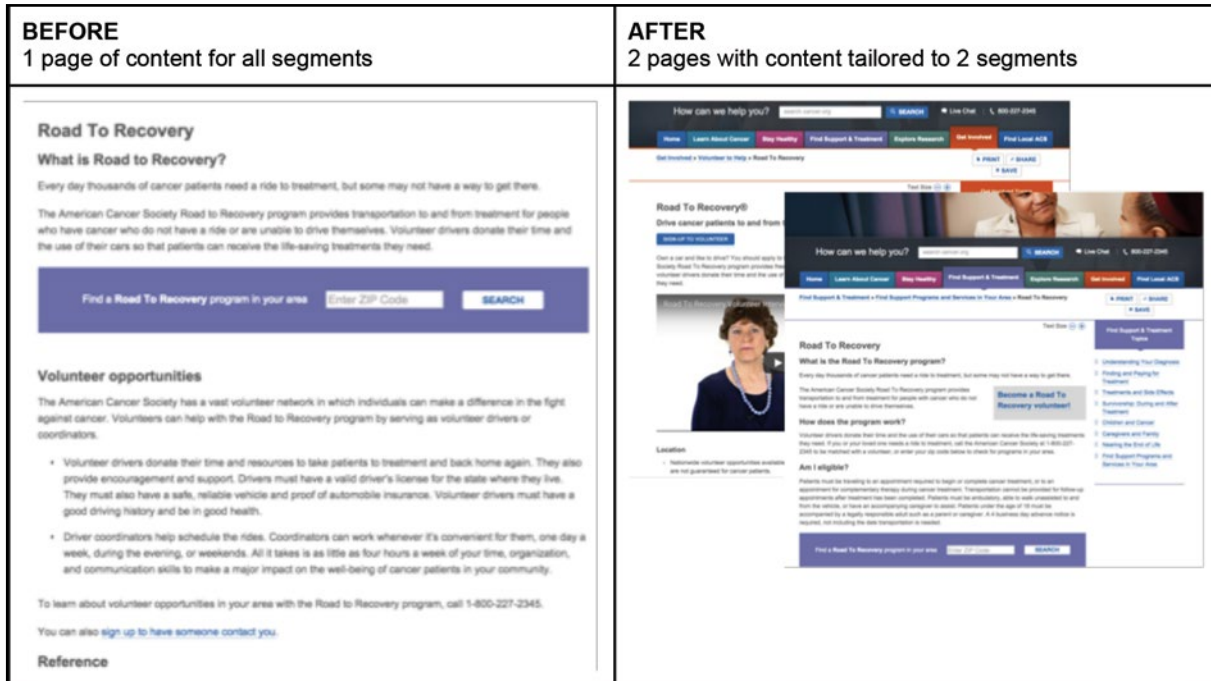
Figure 6: Road to Recovery programme pages before and after

NEXT STEPS

The Society will continue its now well–established habit of continuous content improvement and of meeting monthly to discuss analytics, ContentWRX results and other pertinent data. The Society will institute a quarterly compilation of insights and lessons learned to communicate upward (Figure 7). The Society is also planning comparisons of results before and after
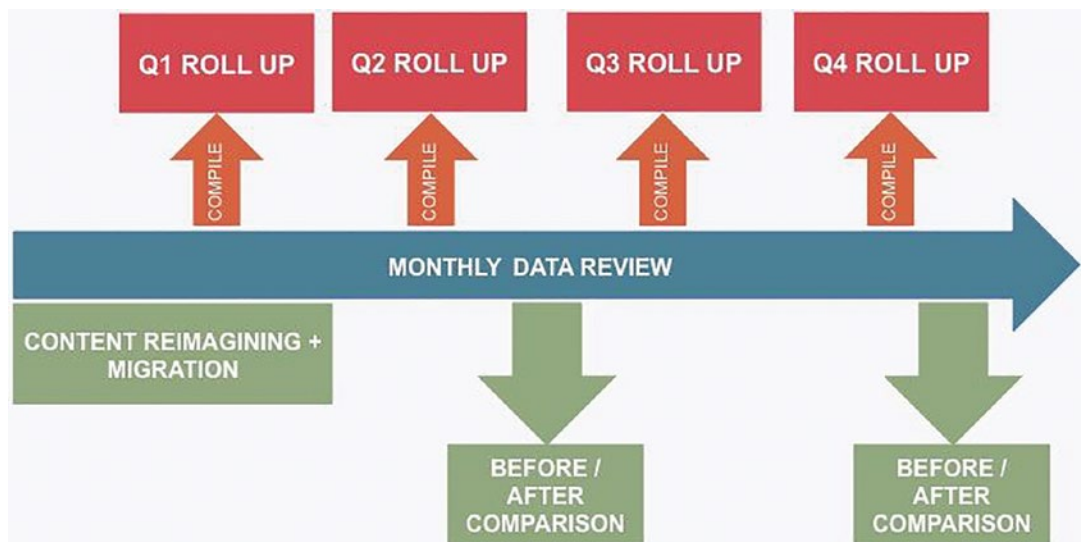

Figure 7: The Society will add quarterly compilations and before/after benchmarking to its system of content intelligence

migrating content to the new technology platform.

So, we challenge the readers to ask themselves and their organisations what the opportunities are that they face with content. How can a system of content intelligence help us act on those opportunities? We are optimistic that as the lessons discussed in this paper are discussed, the readers' data and their organisations' content will have impact. Whether that impact is saving lives, improving the customer experience or growing the business, the impact will be significant.

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