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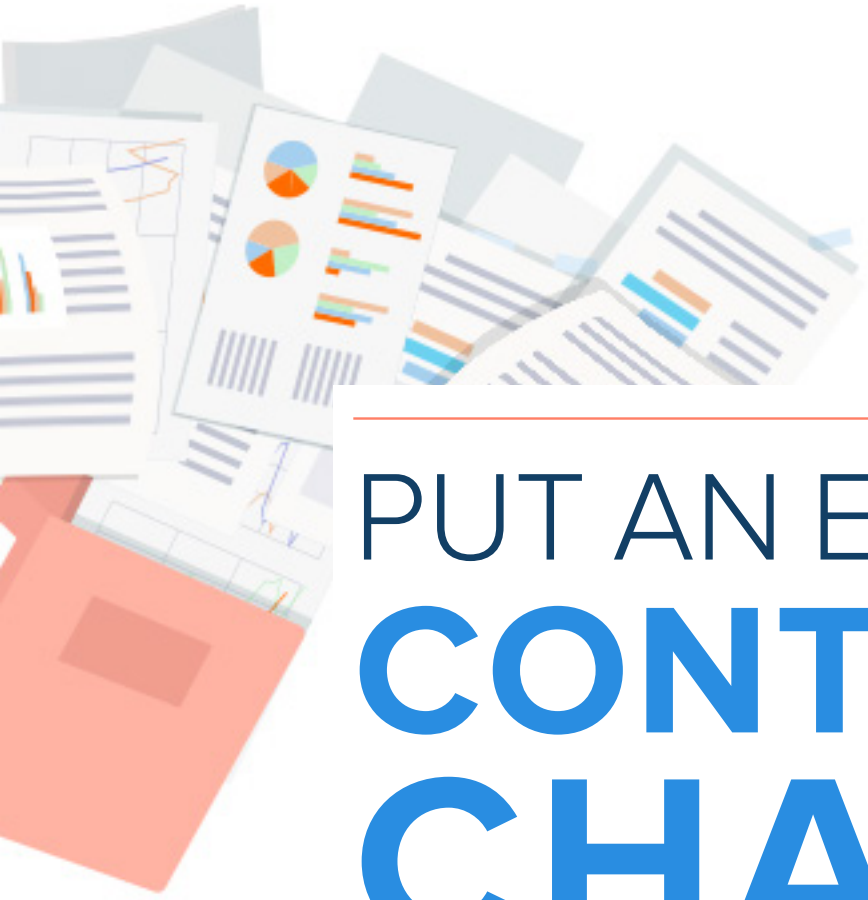


PUT AN END TO CONTENT CHAOS

How to Effectively Manage Core Sales Content So Sellers Are Empowered (Not Inundated)

www.highspot.com

More Digital = More Competitive

To say that today's sales landscape is competitive is an understatement. Buyers are able to evaluate, research, and eliminate vendors before ever contacting a seller. To elaborate, research shows that buyers travel through 57 percent of the buyer's journey before their first meaningful interaction with a seller.[1] By the time a modern buyer does reach out, they expect a fast and personalized response that adds value and insight beyond what they have already researched on their own. If not, they are likely to take their business elsewhere. Sales reps must execute at a high level to move deals forward quickly, or they risk losing out to better-prepared competitors. And to add insult to injury, Forrester finds that business buyers remain unimpressed with the content that marketing and sales present to them: 60 percent say vendors give them too much content, and most say what they get is useless.[2]

At the same time, sales cycles have become longer and more complex, causing sellers to shoulder ever-increasing administrative burdens resulting in less time spent in direct selling activities. On average, sales reps only spend a third of their day actually talking to prospects.[3] With less time available for selling, this makes it more difficult to provide meaningful interactions that are required to be successful when engaging today's buyer.

All of this means that sellers must capitalize on every conversation and approach each exchange artfully, adeptly, and expeditiously. To do this, sellers need more than traditional sales training or sales readiness and more organizations are looking to sales enablement as the oath to modern selling. The Aberdeen Group found that 77 percent of organizations now practice some form of sales enablement. CSO Insights reports that the percentage of companies with a dedicated sales enablement person, program or function increased by 180 percent last year alone.[4]

What is sales enablement?

Sales enablement is the strategic, ongoing process of equipping sales teams with the content, guidance, and training they need to effectively engage buyers. Sales enablement analytics provide marketing and sales teams with data-driven insights to optimize their business and drive revenue.

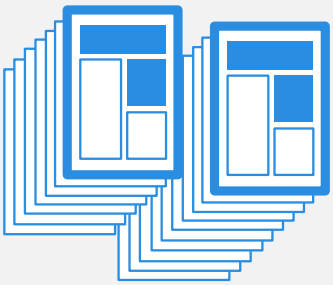
For an in-depth look at the emergence of sales enablement, the evolution of the industry, and why it's a must-have for businesses, download our Definitive Guide to Sales Enablement **here**.

The key difference between sales enablement and traditional training and readiness is that sales enablement is ongoing and it incorporates training on a continuous basis–alongside the right engagement content and assets at the point of buyer engagement.

Content is at the Core

"Content" as a term warrants some unpacking. In a sales context, content can be anything from customer-facing collateral and assets like brochures, whitepapers, and presentations to internal-only content like FAQs, competitive battle cards, and sales playbooks.

For sellers, content is the key to convincing buyers to progress to the next stage of the buyer's journey–it is the foundation for instrumental messaging, training, guidance, and direct engagement. On average, sales reps use more than 17 pieces of content throughout the sales process.[5] Content-based sales enablement helps companies grow revenue, recognize revenue more quickly in the sales cycle, and retain more customers.[6]



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The other universal truth is that regardless of an organization's sales or marketing maturity, they always have sales content somewhere, and too often it's everywhere.

For sellers, finding the right content that is relevant, properly timed, and aligned to each stage in the buyer's journey, is a very hard juggling act. Organizations without effective content management often run into the same roadblocks. Content is scattered across multiple platforms and locations (think SharePoint sites, Dropbox folders, and Salesforce libraries) and as a result, sellers can't find the content they need. Or all content is stored in one large, amorphous repository that is difficult to browse and search. Old gets mixed with new; reps rummage around in the bucket of content without being able to find the assets they need and don't know if they can trust what they find.

Sellers waste a lot of valuable selling time searching for content, in fact, research has shown that sales reps spend a full 40 percent of their time searching for or creating content.[7] The result is that reps start trusting their own hard drives as the best source for sales content–and this is a recipe for disaster. This solution invariably leads to public-facing documents and content that are off-message, off-brand, and out-of-date. This, in turn, degrades the quality and effectiveness of sales interactions and pushes buyers towards competitors.

The Sales Content "Black Box"

Another major pain point with sales content is understanding what content is actually being used and what content is most effective in driving prospect engagement. Without visibility into how content is being used, marketing can't evaluate which content reps prefer, how much content is being used, how content is modified, and how content is influencing revenue. Sales teams are also flying blind–without knowing what content they really need, and what best practices they should adopt. The result is a major disconnect between sales and marketing teams about how to prioritize content investment. Sales enablement provides a link between marketing and sales teams, not only housing the content that marketing produces but also provides guidance on how to best deliver content. With a sales enablement tool collecting and reporting content usage and effectiveness, sales and marketing teams can better align and optimize their focus and investment in sales content.

So the big question is how you bridge the gap between what you have today and the content management that can serve as the foundation for sales enablement and deliver the results you are looking for?

The Sales Content "Black Box" From Content Chaos to Coordination: 6 Steps to Content Management Success

Once you have a content management solution in place, how do you move from content chaos to the ideal state of buyer-aligned content nirvana? Creating an effective system to manage dispersed and sprawling content may seem daunting at first, but there are a number of concrete steps that can be taken to achieve the ideal outcome for sellers.

Step 1: Create a content map

The starting point and the most important strategic step in implementing a content management solution is creating a content map. The purpose of mapping is to identify the content you have to work with, what you need, and where it fits in your company strategy. When content mapping, be aware that leaning too heavily on the intuition of one team will not yield the results you need. Your map needs to accommodate the perspectives of multiple groups, never forgetting that the ultimate audience is the sales team.

In the same way, you would use a map to find a physical location, your content map is created to easily and quickly guide sellers to the best content for their specific buyer interaction. It creates the bones of your solution and structures the seller's content experience. A content map is only as good as the steps taken to create it. Ensure to follow these best practices in order to create an effective content map that sellers will use regularly.

- **Best practice: Catalog your content**
  Build a succinct catalog that captures the key types of content your sellers need to close deals. As you talk to different teams and sellers, you will often uncover content that lurks in unexpected places but is crucial to the sales process. Once assembled, your basic catalog should fit on a page or two, even if you have a great deal of content.

- **Best practice: Document key learnings from key investments**
  Sales enablement technology has the ability to transform sales productivity and the ease with which an organization manages and analyzes sales content. But before you throw out the old, be sure to capture the lessons of the past. Learn what processes and content worked well, and what didn't.

- **Best practice: Always keep your seller's hat on**
  Content should be organized and managed based on what's best for sales. Problems often emerge when companies take a publisher-first mentality, which often reflects a lack of seller empathy and results in an ineffective solution for sales and one they'll resist using.

- **Best practice: Assemble a content mapping team**
  A great sales enablement team brings an assortment of skills and perspectives to any project. We recommend working hard to get as many of the people below aboard your team: Someone who likes to organize content; Someone who is an expert at existing company content; Someone who is focused on helping salespeople be effective; Someone who has spent time in the field selling.

- **Best practice: Ensure your content map supports your sales strategy**
  This requires keeping strategic goals in mind as you map and manage your content. Straightforward as this may seem, critical considerations are often overlooked, either because teams are rushing to finish their content map or are unaware of their importance.

- **Best practice: Keep the buyer's journey front-and-center**
  This starts with marketing and sales teams sitting down and discussing their perspectives on the buyer's journey. With leaders of both departments in the same room, insights are guaranteed to emerge. The objective is to apply those insights to the content map. Though the buyer's journey is not the same as the sales process, supporting content should nonetheless align.

- **Best practice: Avoid using content labels sellers won't easily understand**
  Content management is not a teaching device. Marketing teams are often tempted to assign the "right" names for content, rather than commonly used terms in the field. This can cause friction and unnecessarily extend the amount of time required to get sellers connected to the best available content for their opportunity.

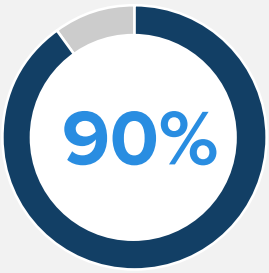
Step 2: Organize and curate

At its most essential, the content map must be set up and maintained in a fashion that lets sellers search to find what they need, in the ways that make the most sense to them. In order to do this, it's important to understand the three common ways that sellers search for information: browsing, searching, and discovery.

Consider you are searching for a TV on Amazon. You'd start by entering the term "TV" in the search engine. This returns a very large number of diverse results, with the most popular displayed on top of the list, but there are also filters which allow you to narrow down your results. For example, you might filter between 42 and 55 inches, manufactured by Sony or Panasonic. This process of filtering down the results into a smaller, more narrowly defined set of characteristics is browsing. If one TV is of particular interest and you click on it, Amazon will also present you with a number of TVs with similar attributes that you may find interesting. When the system uses this information it's learned about you (the particular kind of TV you favored) to suggest similar options you may like, that is discovery.

Effective content organization includes content curation–the act of auditing and sorting content. This means keeping content that is effective, used often, and is directly tied to revenue creation, and archiving content that is not. While this is a step where a lot of very in-depth work can be done on an asset library–updating, eliminating, rebranding where it makes sense–it is important not to get bogged down. The goal is to strike a balance between the impulse to thoroughly uncover, classify, and update every last piece of existing content and getting key assets into the content management system and ultimately the hands of sales reps.

There are broad strokes that can be taken to strike this balance and help pare down the mass of existing assets without sorting through each individual item. For example, what needs–and deserves–to be rebranded? What is old enough that it should simply be eliminated? What contains outdated information, or hasn't been updated with new product information? Is it worth updating, or should it simply be thrown out? Remember that 90 percent of B2B sellers don't use sales content because it is irrelevant, outdated, and difficult to customize. This is an opportunity to dispose of some of the dry rot that isn't being used.



of B2B sellers don't use sales content because it is irrelevant, outdated, and difficult to customize.

As the process of curating content is occurring, design and document a process to make ongoing curation a part of the content management best practices. If content is not continually curated in the new content management process, content bloat will occur again.

Step 3: Conduct a content audit

Once there is a content map in place and established content categories, it is time to audit your existing content. Content audits are an important exercise because it provides visibility into what attributes existing content align with, such as sales stage or buyer persona. Common sources to search for when auditing content include:

- Content management systems, like Sharepoint, Alfresco, and Jive
- Online file sharing systems, like Dropbox, Box, and OneDrive
- Video repositories, such as YouTube, Vimeo, Brainshark, and Brightcove
- Internal web portals or intranet
- The company website
- Legacy sales enablement solutions
- CRM systems such as Salesforce
- Seller hard drives

Once the pillar content items that sales reps use every week have been uncovered, the next step is deciding where these content pieces will fall on your map. In some cases, there will be a question as to whether a piece of content is still relevant or should it be archived. This exercise helps to show when there is too much content that is aligned with similar attributes or that content has reached its expiration date and should be removed from the content library. Another common outcome of a content audit is visible content gaps.

It is necessary to document and evaluate the steps taken in the audit process, as the audit should be repeated periodically over time.

Step 4: Provide content guidance to sellers

When a content map is developed, it aligns content to the buyer's journey as well as the sales process. As a result, when sellers search for content, they find content tailored to their specific buyer interaction, aligning the buyer's journey and sales stage. The right piece of content, delivered at the right moment, provides buyers with meaningful insight while convincing buyers to move to the next stage of the sales cycle. This is why 64 percent of buyers say the winning vendor's content had a significant impact on their buying decision.[8]

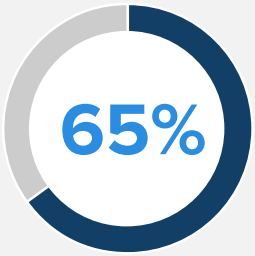
When content is provided to a seller, it's an opportune moment to deliver the asset and educate the sales rep on how to use that content when pitching to a buyer. This functions as a type of training that takes place in the middle of the workflow, making it easy for sellers to access guidance without breaking stride. It also provides learning in-context, which is a highly effective training method. Creating this dual process–of content delivery in connection with training delivery–is an approach that should be designed and built into the content management system from the beginning.

This is one of the most significant ways that a sales enablement platform plays a primary role in consistently training sales teams. In addition to training sellers in-context, a sales enablement platform delivers bite-sized components of training on a regular basis that is easy for reps to consume and remember. This keeps sales reps up-to-date on the latest product information, changes in messaging, new sales techniques, and updated best practices. With intense demands on sellers' time, this is a highly effective, flexible method for ensuring that sellers are consistently learning and ready to engage with buyers.

Step 5: Analyze content usage, engagement and ROI

One of the greatest benefits of a content management system is that it provides insight into how content is being used, to what extent, and by whom. More importantly, engagement analytics provide quantified data on which pieces of content buyers are opening, downloading, and how long they engaged with each item. This gives sales reps a tremendous leg up while giving marketing and enablement teams the ability to discern what content is linked to revenue production.

Determining content ROI is a tricky business that can only be determined with a content management system that has the ability to track the full lifecycle of a piece of content. Sales content analytics connect the dots between ineffective content and content that has helped close deals. Typically, only a very small percentage of content is used consistently by sales reps. In fact, 65 percent of marketing content is never used by sales.[9] An effective sales content management system provides visibility into content that goes unused so that marketing or enablement can examine why.



of marketing content is never used by sales, and the remaining 35% is difficult to measure without sales enablement.

This is an essential step because it helps ensure that organizations are investing wisely when they makes content decisions.

Step 6: Optimize, rinse, repeat

Based on the data gathered from the analysis done in Step 5, KPIs will help identify which assets to cull, curate, or create more of. Essential areas of focus include frequent usage and non-usage. Data from the content management system will also make it apparent whether the guidance provided alongside those assets is effective–making it easy to continually refine and update the guidance that enables sellers to pitch the content effectively.

In effect, a robust content management system is equipped to perform an ongoing content audit. With a content management system in place, organizations are able to identify the core set of content pieces that are used most often and that should be kept, improved, and invested in. Alternatively, insight is provided into which content goes untouched and therefore should be eliminated. While getting rid of unused assets might seem difficult, given the investment that's gone into creating them, culling the pieces that are cluttering the system is an important component of highly effective content management. After all, one of the essential rules of honing messaging and content delivery is making sure there aren't too many pieces of content available, but instead, ensuring the right pieces of content are aligned with their place in the sales cycle. This ongoing, continuous cycle of audit, curation, and refinement helps ensure that the content you have is the content you need.

Sales Enablement Technology: The Modern Solution to Effective Sales Content Management and Success

Selecting a robust, innovative content management solution with exceptional sales enablement functionality is the fastest way to upgrade your go-to-market starting with content at the core. Utilizing a sales enablement platform with a built-in content management solution allows sellers to find, leverage, and pitch the content they need when they need it.

Search made for finding

Sales enablement platforms such as Highspot, save sales reps time by providing one content repository for all their content needs, cutting down on the amount of time they spend searching for and creating content. Highspot's patented AI and semantic search delivers highly accurate results so sellers spend time selling–not looking. Allowing reps to find what they need when they need it.

As previously mentioned, modern buyers travel through most of the buyer's journey without interacting with a seller, preferring instead to conduct their own research and compiling a shortlist of vendors they engage with. These new behaviors now require that sellers are prepared to provide content rich with value-added guidance and subject matter expertise, almost immediately. If sellers are unable to find the content they need or don't know it exists, they will lose prospects to better equipped competitors.

In order for sellers to have impactful conversations that demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of a buyer's business needs they must present content that provides well-matched solutions.

Spots, not folders

With Highspot, sales content is organized in Spots™—a more intuitive way for sellers to discover and locate the assets they need. Organizations can collect any series of related information in a Spot, whether categorized by topic, theme, asset type, or other principles that resonate with sellers. Spots are flexible and content assets can exist in more than one of them at a time. So, for example, a new case study can reside in the customer evidence Spot, the marketing collateral Spot and a copy can exist in a seller's personal Spot. The key is offering multiple paths on the content map that lead to the same goal, and that those paths capture likely seller intent.

This is possible because the Spots themselves are organized with lists, the same way you might have a playlist of songs on iTunes. Any given song by your favorite band can belong to different categories based on genre, musician, or as one of your favorites. Any of these categories can be used to sort the songs, and a given song (like a piece of content) can appear on multiple lists. When it comes to content lists, categories include things like content type, industry, language, persona etc. Building lists in Highspot are easy, items can simply be dragged into them. This avoids the need to tag content and makes it easy for Spot owners to keep content fresh and up-to-date.

Content within Spots can also be curated, allowing editors to customize the user experience and guide sellers to specific content in a Spot. Sellers are led efficiently to the right content, ensuring they are not lost in potentially thousands of related assets. Using permissions, Spot owners can determine who can see the assets in their Spot, and who can't. Another method for effectively curating and guiding sellers.

Intelligent recommendations

Measuring the effectiveness of content is very important as it provides insight into whether a content strategy is properly aligned and in fact driving growth. Analytics that provide insight into buyer activity, such as email opens, content downloads, and time spent on content are key indicators of effectiveness. With this information, marketing and enablement teams can evaluate content messaging and effectiveness at each stage of the buyer's journey to uncover what is ultimately influencing revenue.

With Highspot, the most effective and top recommended content is automatically identified using AI, or managers can hand-curate their recommendations. Highspot automatically identifies the most effective and top recommended content based on historical customer engagement and revenue production data. As a result, Highspot can guide users to effective content that is most relevant to their current scenario, based on sales stage and persona. This guarantees that the seller will have the right content in hand when she goes to pitch her prospect.

Content and guidance side-by-side

Today's buyers expect sellers to be nimble and knowledgeable enough to send content that is valuable, personalized and aligned to their stage in the buyer's journey, almost immediately. To navigate this new set of expectations sellers need access to guidance that is easy to use, dynamic, digital and intuitive. Highspot provides sellers with one location for the content and guidance they need, throughout the sales cycle.

Not only should content provide buyers value and new insights, but it must also map to their stage in the buyer's journey–helping them progress through the purchase process. With Highspot, sellers can find content that is aligned to their prospect's opportunity record within the CRM. As a result, the content buyers receive is directly mapped to their stage in the sales cycle and aligns with important attributes such as buyer persona. This allows sales reps to quickly find the best content for each conversation, ensuring they stay aligned to the buyer's stage in the purchase journey.

Conclusion

In today's competitive sales landscape, adaptable, intelligent solutions that provide effective content management and ultimately drive seller enablement are a necessity. As a result, it becomes easier for sellers to guide prospective buyers through the sales process quickly and methodically, allowing them to win more deals. With easier content discovery, higher quality engagements, and more analytics, sales enablement tools create drastic improvements for today's seller effectiveness.

About Highspot

Highspot helps sales teams increase conversion rates and generate more revenue faster. From content management to pitching and analytics, Highspot delivers enterprise-ready features and platform integrations in a modern design sales reps love. Using Highspot, sales and marketing teams are able to stay connected to the best-performing content for each opportunity, measure and optimize their content, and engage with customers more effectively than ever before. With nearly 90% average monthly recurring usage, Highspot is the sales enablement industry's most complete platform.

To learn more about Highspot or any of the topics covered here, we would be delighted to chat. We can be reached at **highspot.com** and **sales@highspot.com**.

Citations:
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