Content Strategy Essentials

Based on the Content Maker
Best Practice Framework by:

Content Club

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Content Club

What makes great content?

Content Builds Trust

The purpose of content is to build trust between you and your audience. Many of the brands that fail to gain a strong ROI from content marketing, do so because their content doesn't support the human elements of how the business sells.

Across all industries, it's been proven time and time again that people buy from people and that the most successful sales conversation happen face-to-face. However, in today's digital sales and marketing-led world, we must come up with reliable ways of replicating the success of face-to-face sales online.

The most most powerful and successful content replicates the intent, language and emotion of a great conversation.

In this eBook; you will learn how this is done, at both a creative and strategic level.

The Three E's

Great quality content has to tick three boxes. These represent the three core needs an audience has when looking for and engaging with new content. By following a simple checklist before, during after you create new content, you can ensure that all these needs are met you give yourself the best chance of success.

01.
Education

02.
Empathy

03.
Entertainment

You will learn why and how to feature each of these 'audience needs' in the next section of the eBook.

01. Education

The greatest value you can exchange with your audience through content is education. People will invest and engage in content if they know it will help them develop new skills, knowledge and experience. Search-led marketing is mostly driven by people looking for answers and shortcuts to figuring things out and getting things done.

By understanding search intent and the knowledge your audience is looking for you, can begin to create content that meets these needs. When planning this, you ask yourself questions which help you to focus content around the goals of your readers and viewers.

For example: If your customers are working professionals, what skills do they need to learn to get that next promotion or pay rise. If they are hobbyists, what techniques do they need to learn to make their next Instagram worthy creation?

A further reason for using education in your content is to demonstrate your own knowledge and experience. Many service based businesses can be cautious of this, because they don't like the idea of *'giving their secrets away'*. However, in reality no blog or video is going to be substitute for your 5, 10 or 15 years of experience in what you do. By using content to demonstrate the complexity and learning involved in becoming 'great at what you do', you can much more easily win the trust of new customers.

02.
Empathy

There is one human characteristic that creates trust, connection and action more than any other, and that is empathy. The trouble with empathy is that it is widely misunderstood as something 'fluffy' and often exclusively associated with face-to-face interactions. However, with simple techniques empathy can easily be leveraged and featured within written, visual and video content.

Empathy only happens by ensuring there is honesty and believability in what you are saying. For that to happen, your audience need to feel understood and included in the narrative of your content. You can do this in two ways.

The first way is directly address the ambitions and challenges of your customer and how you can personally relate to them. For example: To introduce a blog post, you can write: *"I have been growing my business for 10 years, but I keep coming up against the same problem again and again... here is how I solve it."*

The second way is to use empathetic language. Which is all about talking about feelings and perspective.

For example: Instead of saying *"Most business owners don't understand why customer leave"*... you can say... *"Isn't is frustrating when you lose a customer for no obvious reason?"*.

O3.
Entertainment

Entertainment may seem like the lighter requirement of the Three E's. However, it is vitally important to making your content unique to both you and your brand.

Entertainment doesn't always have to be about creating something 'funny or exciting'. Traditionally entertainment takes many forms; from comedy and drama, to romance and tragedy. So, don't feel like you always have to be tied down to the same old 'good, great and grand' adjectives, just to be entertaining.

For modern content marketing purposes, Entertainment is about making a decisive effort to convey your personality. People buy from people, but more importantly your customers buy from you. Your content (whatever shape it takes) has to look, sound and feel like you and your personality. This not only makes it more honest and authentic, but creates a welcoming and space for people understand you better and build a relationship with you, albeit virtually.

It sounds difficult to do, but it's actually pretty easy. All you need to do it think about your most recent and successful face-to-face conversations then analyse what made them great. What questions did you ask (and get asked), what jokes to did you tell and so on. Your answers to these questions will make the tone and style of you content. Many businesses make the mistake of trying to create a tone of voice. You don't need to this, because you already have one. The magic trick is to understand that voice in such a way that allows you to emulate in every piece of content you make.

Implementing
your strategy

Audience Mapping

Understanding the wants and needs of who you are talking to is the key to achieving great engagement with your content. And deeply intuitive level, your audience will be much like you. They will have similar ideas, needs, questions and curiosities.

However, when it comes to creating tailor messages and content types that work well with several personas and demographics within your audience, using a methodical and conscious approach to mapping out the vital and differing elements that make the audience uniquely ready to engage with your brand and content, is how you leverage that inner-intuition you already have.

In the toolkits associated with this guide there is a template you can use to begin the mapping exercise. However, for the purposes of understanding how audience fits into what we have already covered in the areas of education, empathy and entertainment, you need to begin thinking about the qualities and questions your content will focus in on, in order to engage the right people.

Creating a list of 20+ questions you believe your audience have is a great way of beginning to create calendar of pre-planned content. Then establishing which types of content, tones and styles, questions and answers, platforms and channels will work well is how you begin planning how you will create that content.

Content Categories

The first practical step in content strategy is design your content categories. You can build upon the defaults with in our framework, however over the years we have found this basic three tier strategy is the most effectively and achievable way of categorising content and managing user-journeys. We break up content in three categories, which are defined by chrematistics such as engagement, effort to create, time to read/view, and likelihood to drive buying behaviour.

Core Content —
High Engagement, High Effort to Create, Aims to drives sales behaviour

Supporting Content —
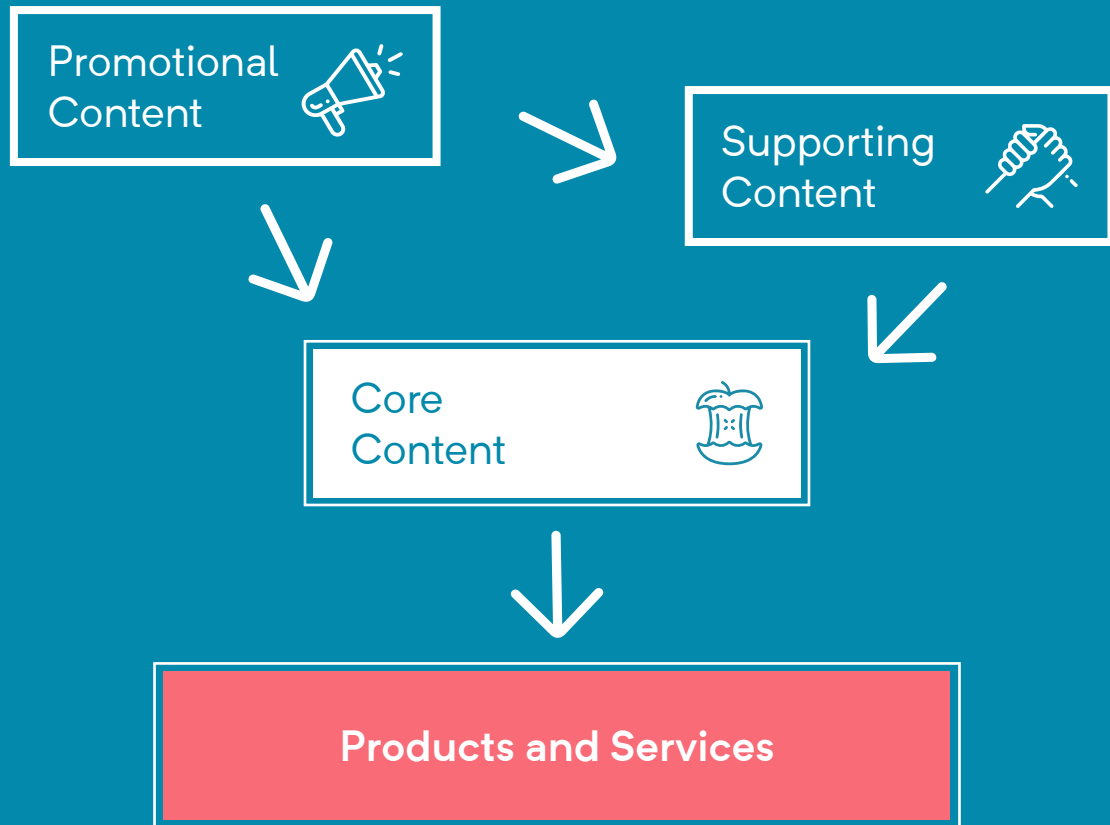Mid-level engagement and effort to create, aims to drive traffic to core content

Promotional Content —
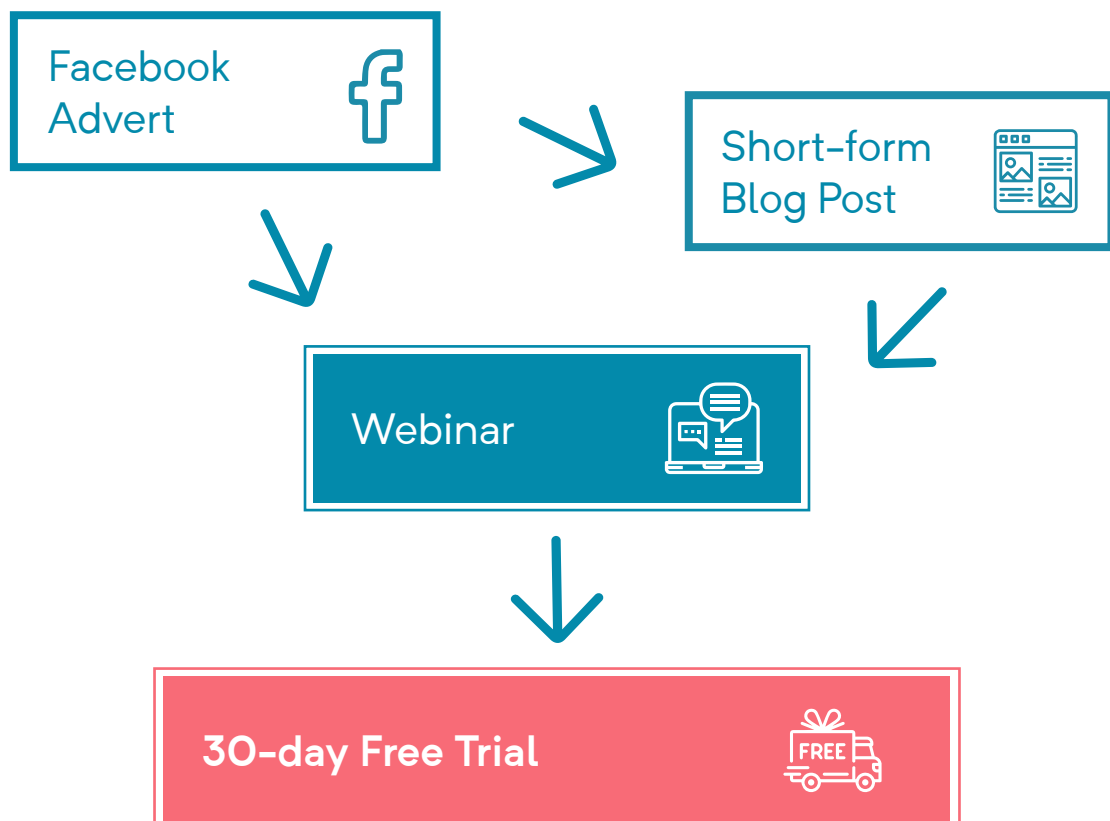Easy to engage with and create, aims to drive traffic to core/supporting content

Every piece of content must have a relationship with at least one other piece. Not just in terms of clicks and links, but with user-journey, education and thematic intention too.

The next page shows you to design these relationships and user journeys.

Concept

Promotional Content → Supporting Content

Promotional Content ↓

Supporting Content ↓

Core Content ↓

Products and Services

Example

Facebook Advert → Short-form Blog Post

Facebook Advert ↓

Short-form Blog Post ↓

Webinar ↓

30-day Free Trial

Core Content

Examples of Core Content include: webinars, podcasts, explainer videos, live chats, online courses, long-form blogs, research, case studies or eBooks (like this one!).

Core content is the starting point in your content creation roadmap. Many businesses begin content marketing with smaller and lower level content, then get frustrated when 10 weeks of Facebook posts don't turn into new business. To avoid this, turn your focus to creating something larger, more engaging and educationally rich. Something that you can get months of value out of, rather than just a few days or even hours.

This content also needs to address the question **"What makes people buy from you?"** For example hearing from another customer, finding out the how a product is made.

Core content must be rich is value and represent the investment your are willing to make your customer's outcome. There must also be a clear and fair exchange or 'price' for access. That could be contact details, a subscription or even a small payment.

Supporting Content

Examples of Supporting Content include: Blogs, list posts, interviews, short videos, video blogs, quizzes, surveys, photos, Q&A's, recorded webinars, stories, recorded live chats and industry news.

As the name suggestions supporting content is there to support the success of other content. In itself, it has to have a good amount of educational, empathetic and entertainment value. However, it should aim to create enough interest, curiosity and engagement to push the reader or viewer to another piece of content. Supporting content should be something you can regularly produce and use to get consistent engagement with an audience. You may find that prospect has to reading 4 or 5 supporting blogs posts, before they think 'Yeah okay, I will download that eBook'.

Supporting content also needs to be easy enough digest quickly and get what you came for, so if your audience don't tend to spend more than 3 minutes reading stuff, don't go over 600 words. If they want to find answers in chit-chatty conversation make a 10-15 live video talking about how to do that thing.

You should also try out different 'Calls to action (CTA)' to see what best converts traffic to core content.

Promotional Content

Examples of Promotional Content include: _Facebook posts, Instagram photos/videos, LinkedIn posts Tweets, stories, email campaigns, paid adverts, and direct messages (Facebook, Instagram etc)._

Promotional content can push readers/ viewers towards supporting or core content, it depends on how much engagement you believe is needed ahead of someone committing to that further piece of content. Promotional content is quick make and quick to engage with, this is so you can publish higher volumes of promotional content and ensure that audiences feel like they are seeing something new and interesting each time.

Promotional content is short and sweet, so it has to be packed with expectation. Instead of trying to squeeze 10 ideas into 50 words of text or 45 seconds of video, you want to convey your point and your personality within one message, and use the power of a promise to achieve further engagement.

For example: _"My first top tip for summer fashion is wearing bright block colours, because it grabs attention and says 'Hey I'm confident and I love it!' ... watch my latest video to find out the next 7 tips!"_

Managing
Content

Frequency and platforms

When getting started out with a new Content Strategy, one of the most common mistakes is to spread yourself to thin across too many platforms and content types. For brands who are new to content or those who have struggled to get content working for them in the past, we recommend the magic number of three.

That means three content types (more on this shortly) and three platforms. This gives you realistic amount of content to plan, produce and promote each week/month and so on. You then have to allocate a frequency to each content type/category so you know how often you are going to be promoting each piece of content and on what platforms. There is a really handy platform planner in the toolkit associated with this eBook.

Example: As core content, you may want to create an eBook and keep that has your only core content for 6 months. You may then publish a 500 word blog (which will feature links to your eBook) every week as supporting content, and promote each blog on Facebook and LinkedIn every day, for a further two weeks. This is consistent and manageable plan, which will drive regular engagement to both your blogs and eBook.

The most important thing here, is to give your self a frequency and number of platforms, which is within your capacity. Many people lose hope and confidence, when they can't meet their own overly high expectations of blogging, video making or social media. It's better to start smaller and grow from there. As you grow it's better to focus on a creating more tailored content for a smaller and more focused number of platforms.

Content Types

This is the really important stuff, so get your notepad for this one. The success of content creation comes down to having easy to use and reliable content types.

When you prepare you content content categories, you should be thinking about what content types you are going to use within each category.

Content types are things like 'Short Form Blog Posts, Long Form Videos and Live Q&As'. But more importantly you have definitions around these content types so you quickly workout how you and you going create that content and manage the Calls to action (CTA) within it. Doing this allows you design the relationships in content before you create the actual content.

Each set of definitions you attribute to a content type should focus on giving it the best chance of success for engaging with your audience. For example, you may have 'long form thought-leaderships pieces' as as content type within your supporting content category. The definitions around could then be *'1000 words long, 2-3 images, a question-led heading and a call action to buy your latest book'*.

These definitions will then inform your Content Templates, more about this on the next page!

Content Templates

Building templates is an essential part of your planning and producing process. In the same way we define 'types of content' before we put pen to paper, we need to create a set of guidelines to follow when creating each piece of content too. This enables you to cut out a lot of the decision making processes at the point of creating, and standardising the basics of your creative work.

For example, a blog post template might have a heading, footer and four sections of 250 words each, which you can then use to create easy to follow 1000 word blog posts. Take a look at this example:

1. Heading — Question or 'How to...'

2. Introduce the topic — 250 words

3. Explain why it's important — 250 words

4. Give an example of how you do this — 250 words

5. Show the reader how they can do it too — 250 words

6. Call to action — Link to landing page

10 Minute
Strategy Planning

10 Minute Strategy Planner

Products and Services (Eg. 30 day free trial of our software)		
Content Types (separate by Content Category)		
Core Content (Eg. Webinars)	Supporting Content	Promotional Content
CTA (Eg. Free Trial)	CTA	CTA
Frequency (Eg. Monthly)	Frequency	Frequency
Platforms (Eg. Zoom)	Platforms	Platforms

How to use this planning canvas

- Define your product or service

- Define your Core content

- Define your Supporting Content

- Define your Promotional Content

- Check how these all work together

- Check that you have capacity to create this content

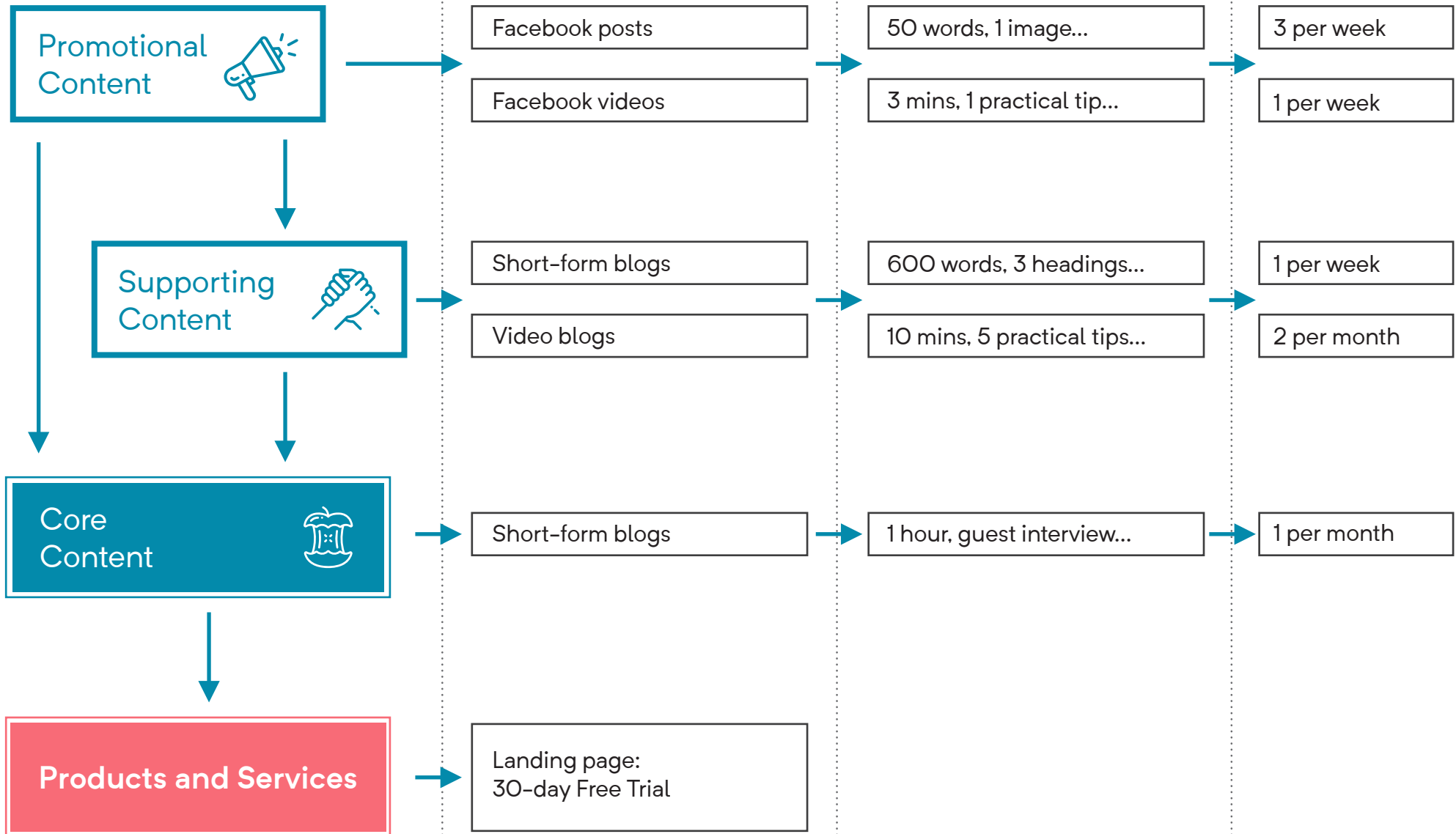- Check each content type matches the needs of your audience

Pro Tip:
Keep your plan simple and as close to three content types as possible.

Categories	Types	Templates	Freq.
Promotional Content	Facebook posts	50 words, 1 image…	3 per week
	Facebook videos	3 mins, 1 practical tip…	1 per week
Supporting Content	Short-form blogs	600 words, 3 headings…	1 per week
	Video blogs	10 mins, 5 practical tips…	2 per month
Core Content	Short-form blogs	1 hour, guest interview…	1 per month
Products and Services	Landing page: 30-day Free Trial		

Categories   **Types**   **Templates**   **Freq.**

Promotional Content

Supporting Content

Core Content

Products and Services