CHAPTER 12

DECIDE HOW YOU'LL MEASURE SUCCESS

You know what you're trying to achieve. You've developed your content compass to help you meet your goals and objectives. How will you know if you succeeded?

Enter measurement: how you'll demonstrate that the project you recommended was actually worthwhile. Or, it's how you'll determine if you can still do better.

Let these two thoughts sink in: Measurement is useless if you don't act on what you learn; meaningless metrics are worse than not measuring at all. Read those two sentences again. One more time. OK, let's go.

DECIDING WHAT TO MEASURE

Meaningless metrics are worse than not measuring at all. Sound familiar? Oh yeah, you read it just a paragraph ago. Three times if you followed directions.

You need to put a lot of thought into what you'll measure, why it's important, and how you'll measure it. You don't want to end up with an analytics-only dashboard that really doesn't give you any context about the data and information or how to act on it.

DEFINING SOME TERMS

Key performance indicators (KPIs), objectives, and metrics are words lots of people use, but not always in the same way. So, let's start with defining how I'm using them in content measurement. If you think about them differently, that's OK—as long as the people you're working with know how you use them.

KPIs are how a company determines, through measurement, whether it's meeting its business goals.

Objectives refer to the ways you think your content can help your company meet its business goals and influence its KPIs.

Metrics refer to the quantitative and qualitative data and information you can analyze to understand whether you're moving the needle on your KPIs and content objectives.

Let's take a look at the business goals and content objectives from the Strategic Alignment Summary in Chapter 10 as an example.

BUSINESS GOALS	CONTENT OBJECTIVES
Attract new members.	▪ Demonstrate the value the association provides for professionals just entering the profession or industry. ▪ Describe the benefits of becoming a member of the association.
Retain new members beyond the first year.	▪ Showcase content created by members, for members. ▪ Demonstrate how long-term members of the organization have advanced the profession.
Increase purchases of publications and training among prospective members and existing members.	▪ Drive visitors from free and member-only content to value-added paid content on the same topic. ▪ Learn visitor's demographics, interests, and preferences to automatically serve up content they are likely to find relevant.

The first business goal is to *attract new members* to the organization. So, the business likely has a KPI called member acquisition.

The summary outlines two content objectives to help the company acquire new members. One is to (with the website content) *demonstrate the value the association provides for professionals just entering the profession or industry.*

How do you determine whether website content actually helped to increase new member acquisition, and whether the content effectively demonstrates the value the association provides to professionals just entering the profession or industry?

You do it with metrics.

For example, one metric for assessing new member acquisition is the number of people who completed the member sign-up process on the website. A metric that suggests whether site visitors could identify and understand the benefits of membership would measure whether the content does a good job of demonstrating value.

TIP
Although the example doesn't include KPIs or objectives for doing the content work, you can measure things like efficiency. For example, you might measure how long a requested website edit takes to be made or how long a piece of content takes to go from ideation to publication.

CHOOSING YOUR METRICS

Measuring content success involves determining whether your content efforts had an effect on specific business outcomes as well as supporting content objectives. To measure these, you'll need to combine quantitative (based on numbers) and qualitative (based on opinions) methods and metrics.

Quantitative and qualitative data will help you get a well-rounded picture of how your content is performing. Numbers provide some hard-hitting information; opinions provide context to make sense of them. The following sections discuss three key methods for measurement—analytics analysis, heuristic assessments, user feedback—and the kinds of metrics each can provide.

HINT
You may want to go back and review Chapter 1 (on documenting your problems and opportunities) and Chapter 8 (on understanding your content) as you work through your approach to increasing membership.

ANALYTICS

The folks at Google have really figured out this analytics thing. It's the analytics tool most of my clients use and, thus, the one I'm most familiar with. Not only do they have a great tool they are constantly improving, their website (www.google.com/analytics) contains a ton of information about what you can track and measure and how to do it. Repeating the info here would be silly, so go check it out.

I do, however, touch on a few of the common items you might take a look at based on the example business goals and content objectives. And then you should take a look at **Content Strategy Tool 12.1**. This tool is a bit different—it's a presentation from content strategist Jonathon Colman that is chock-full of information, tips, and resources for making the most of your analytics data.

CONTENT STRATEGY TOOL 12.1

DATA SETS YOU FREE PRESENTATION

Download the presentation for an abundance of information, tips, and additional resources.

TIPS

- Follow the links to the resources included in the presentation. This presentation is your gateway to so much helpful information.
- Remember that not everything in the presentation or other resources will apply to your situation. And even if it does, you don't have to look at every metric or implement every tip. Start with what's manageable.

WHERE TO GET IT

Download the presentation at www.peachpit.com/register.

WHERE IT CAME FROM

Jonathon Colman (www.jonathoncolman.org)

TIP

The same data point applied to various pieces of content can mean different things. For example, bounce rates (the percentage of people who come to your page and then leave) are typically considered to be negative. Yet, a high bounce rate might mean they got the information they needed (such as a phone number) and left. That's a success. Or, maybe they bookmarked the page to take a look at later. Keep in mind that context is everything.

OK, on to our example:

The KPI you're tracking is new member acquisition. This is something you can track quantitatively pretty easily by just counting the number of member sign-ups completed on the website. Sweet.

You can use some other analytics data to understand whether the website is demonstrating the value the association provides to early-career professionals and showcasing the benefits of becoming a member. Example metrics might include:

- How many times, on average, did someone visit the site before becoming a member?
- What paths did visitors take to get to the new-member sign-up page?
- What percentage of users, once landing on the membership benefits sign-up page, initiated the sign-up process?
- Which version of the membership sign-up page resulted in more visitors initiating the sign-up process?
- How frequently (weekly, monthly, quarterly, and so on) did users who signed up for membership visit the site before becoming a member?
- How many visitors choose to become a member after purchasing content or registering for a webinar or seminar?

HEURISTIC ASSESSMENTS

A heuristic assessment (sometimes called a best practices review) looks at how your content measures up to commonly regarded standards for information architecture and web content. You can also mix in some strategic factors related to how well content supports your core strategy and conveys your messaging framework.

I really like the way Abby Covert (known as @abby_the_ia on Twitter) talks about heuristics. She combines some of the expert views from other practitioners, like Jakob Nielson and Lou Rosenfeld, into a mega heuristics framework that is the most comprehensive I've ever seen.

Table 12.1 covers it at a high level, and **Content Strategy Tool 12.2** is a link to the framework you can download to decide what heuristics make the most sense for what you want to measure.

CONTENT STRATEGY TOOL 12.2

HEURISTICS FRAMEWORK CHEAT SHEET

Download the framework for a cheat sheet on heuristic assessments.

TIPS

- You can interpret the heuristics multiple ways, and some of them overlap a bit. That's OK—just pull together a set of heuristics that makes sense for your KPIs and objectives.
- This isn't a comprehensive list of everything you might want to assess your content for. You can also build in other factors to consider, such as content purpose and audience focus.
- Some of the heuristics mentioned need to be validated with actual feedback from users (for example, only a user can tell you for sure if something was valuable). If you can't validate for whatever reason, just keep that limitation in mind.

WHERE TO GET IT

Download the cheat sheet at www.peachpit.com/register.

WHERE IT CAME FROM

Abby Covert (www.abbytheia.com)

TABLE 12.1 **SUMMARY OF ABBY COVERT'S HEURISTIC FRAMEWORK**

HEURISTIC	EXAMPLE QUESTIONS CONSIDERED
Findable	Is the content easy to locate via search or navigation? Are there multiple ways to get to the information?
Accessible	Is it available on all devices? Does it comply with accessibility standards for people with disabilities?
Clear	At what reading level is the content written? Is the content straightforward and free from industry jargon? Does it provide the necessary information for a user to complete a task or process?
Communicative	Does the content clearly communicate the messages you want your users to understand? Does it provide a solid orientation of where a user is in a process or task?
Useful	Does it provide information that the target user wants and needs? Does it anticipate what users might want or need next?
Credible	Is the information up to date? Is the content about a topic on which the organization is realistically known as an expert?
Controllable	Can you or your users modify what information they have seen or have access to? Do error messages provide the context necessary to fix a mistake or solve a problem?
Valuable	Does the content improve the customer experience? Does the content help the user assess the value of what you provide?
Learnable	Is the experience consistent and predictable? Can users grasp the concepts quickly?
Delightful	Does it offer something extra or special that users can't get from competitors? Does it exceed users' expectations?

Let's go back to the example:

If you want to understand how well you're demonstrating the value the association provides to early-career professionals and showcasing the benefits of becoming a member, you might conduct a heuristic analysis that answers the following questions:

- Is content about the benefits of membership easy to understand?
- Are you providing content that makes the site seem like a credible resource on industry-related topics?
- Is it clear how your organization helps early-career professionals or those new to your industry?
- Do you encourage users to become members at appropriate times—for example, times when they found something that met or exceeded their expectations?

TIP
Heuristic assessment data is largely qualitative because it's based on the content evaluator's opinion. However, you can use the quantitative data to report in a qualitative fashion. For example, from your data, you could find that 73 percent of your website pages contain clear membership-related CTAs when they are appropriate.

USER FEEDBACK

User feedback is critical for adding context to your analytics and heuristics findings. You can get feedback from your users a couple of ways. User surveys focus on getting quantitative data. In-person feedback gathering gives you more qualitative information about how your content is performing.

Let's start with the survey. You may already be surveying your users regularly with a survey tool such as Foresee (www.foresee.com). With a tool like that, you can randomly survey your site users with defined-response (for example, ranking an item on a scale of 1 to 5) and open-ended questions (for example, a written free-form response). You can dig into the quantitative and qualitative data from user surveys and compare with your heuristic review.

TIP
Make sure your survey asks some demographics questions so that you can slice and dice the data to look for patterns related to user characteristics, such as gender, age, customer or member status, or location.

You may remember that Chapter 8 talked a bit about three categories of feedback you can get from users: findability, readability and comprehension, and favorability. In that case, you were trying to understand how current content was performing. Now, you'll be looking at the content once you've improved it. In both cases, the principles are the same. You can get the information with interviews and user tests. (You may want to return to the "User Tests" section in Chapter 8 for a refresher and check out Content Strategy Tool 8.2 for some sample user tests.)

Back to the example once more:

After asking whether the user is currently a member, some defined-ranking survey questions you might ask to understand how content is affecting membership acquisition might include:

- How often do you visit the website for resources related to your profession or fulfilling your job duties?
- What kind of information were you looking for today?
- Were you able to find the information you were looking for on this visit?
- How satisfied were you with the information you found?
- If you're not currently a member, do you plan to become a member of the organization?
- Did you know that <*insert benefit*> is one of the benefits you get as a member of the organization?

And here are some possible open-ended questions you'd ask during in-person interviews:

- How has content you've found on the website helped you in your job?
- What do you think would be the benefits of becoming a member of this organization for people new to the profession or industry?
- If you're not currently a member, what has stopped you from becoming an organization member?
- If you are currently a member, why did you join?

And finally, you might ask users to complete and reflect upon some tasks related to understanding the value the organization provides and what a membership provides:

- Where would you go if you wanted to learn about organization membership?
- After reading through the membership page, describe what you think the benefits of becoming a member might be.
- Did the content on the membership page make you feel more or less confident in becoming a member? Why?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Before you do the measuring, you'll need to document your metrics and the methods you'll use to collect the data. You'll also want to document the measurement cadence or how often you'll collect data for each metric. **Table 12.2** is an example of what this documentation might look like. I've included a couple of examples for each method of measurement (analytics, heuristic assessment, user feedback).

TABLE 12.2 **SAMPLE KPI, CONTENT OBJECTIVES, AND METRICS DOCUMENTATION**

BUSINESS KPI	**CONTENT OBJECTIVES**		
Member Acquisition	▪ Demonstrate the value the association provides for professionals just entering the profession or industry. ▪ Describe the benefits of becoming an association member.		
METRIC	**QUANTITATIVE OR QUALITATIVE**	**METHOD(S)**	**FREQUENCY**
Number of new member sign-ups from website	Quantitative	Analytics	Monthly
Top paths to sign-up page	Quantitative	Analytics	Monthly
Clear membership-related CTAs when appropriate	Qualitative	Heuristic Assessment	Annually
Messages about the value for early-career professionals	Qualitative	Heuristic Assessment	Annually
User satisfaction with website content	Quantitative	User Feedback (survey)	Quarterly
User comprehension of membership benefits	Qualitative	User Feedback (in-person)	Biannually

MEASURING CONTENT EFFECTIVENESS

Pause for caveat... You've probably noticed that measuring content effectiveness is not quite an exact science. The numbers can tell you only so much by themselves. The qualitative data and insights are always going to be a bit subjective (because they come from humans). That's OK. Content measurement is about getting a sense for whether you're headed in the right direction and what you can improve.

Measuring content effectiveness involves documenting how your content is performing and reporting to stakeholders what you learned. Let's go.

DOCUMENT HOW CONTENT IS PERFORMING

Guess what? You already know how to document your findings, and you have the tools to do it. All the work you did in the discovery phase prepared you for this. Repurpose these tools to document your measurement findings:

- **Content Strategy Tool 1.1: Audit Spreadsheet**—Set up your heuristic assessment using the spreadsheet as a starting point. Just as you did for your mini-audit in Chapter 1 and your larger-scale assessment in Chapter 8, define what you'll be looking for on each criterion—or in this case, heuristic.
- **Content Strategy Tool 6.3: Discovery Insights Workbook**—You can use this workbook to record insights you gather from user interviews and a review of your analytics. For analytics and user surveys, you'll have access to some nifty dashboards through the tools you use, but I recommend adding your thoughts on what the numbers might mean or suggest to the insights workbook.

REPORT TO STAKEHOLDERS

Now that you've done the measuring and documented what you learned, let your stakeholders know how your content is performing. Provide a high-level scorecard for each KPI and the related sets of objectives and metrics and back it up with a more detailed report.

Depending on what you use to build your scorecard, you may be able to automatically pull in some of the data. You'll probably have to do some of it manually. I've yet to find a perfect solution for creating a scorecard, so I tend to manually create it even if some of my data sources, such as an analytics dashboard or Excel spreadsheet, have some auto-populated data within them.

Table 12.3 shows how you might repurpose your KPI, content objectives, and metrics documentation into a scorecard. And **Content Strategy Tool 12.3** is a sample heuristic review summary from Kathy Wagner at Content Strategy, Inc., that you can start from to create your back-up report.

CONTENT STRATEGY TOOL 12.3

CONTENT SCORECARD REPORT SAMPLE

Download the sample for ideas on how to put together your own content measurement report.

TIPS

- The sample is geared primarily for a heuristic assessment, but you could use the same format to build in findings from other methods, too.
- When findings suggest that content changes are necessary, you don't have to include precisely what needs to change in your report. It's OK to just say further exploration is necessary to determine the best course of action.
- Include visuals if you have the time, so readers can get a good sense of what the data says without reading every word.

WHERE TO GET IT

Download the sample at www.peachpit.com/register.

WHERE IT CAME FROM

Kathy Wagner, Content Strategy, Inc.

You may do a full scorecard and report only once or twice per year, depending on how often you're conducting heuristic assessments and soliciting feedback from users. Although you may not feel you're doing enough measurement, that frequency is probably OK. The quantitative data is more accurate if you are looking at it over a timeframe. You'll get a better picture of how your content is doing and not risk acting on an anomaly if you don't have a knee-jerk reaction to a month or two of data.

TABLE 12.3 **SCORECARD SAMPLE**

BUSINESS KPI	**CONTENT OBJECTIVES**	
Member Acquisition	▪ Demonstrate the value the association provides for professionals just entering the profession or industry. ▪ Describe the benefits of becoming a member of the association.	
METRIC	**ASSESSMENT**	**HIGHLIGHTS**
Number of new member sign-ups from website	Satisfactory	User survey results suggest that people who signed up on the site knew they wanted to sign up before that particular site visit.
Top paths to sign-up page	Neutral	The primary path to the membership page is site search, suggesting that users are most likely to come to the site specifically for the purpose of signing up. Secondary paths were from beginner-level content with a CTA to become a member for expert-level content.
Clear membership-related CTAs when appropriate	Satisfactory	CTAs could be better tailored to their placement, so that you're not asking people to consider membership before you've demonstrated your value.
Messages about the value for early-career professionals	Neutral	Although they were satisfied with the resources available, early career professional user-research participants did not feel content was particularly targeted toward their context.
User satisfaction with website content	Satisfactory	Ninety percent of survey participants said they found what they were looking for when they visited the site and eighty-five percent said the information was useful.
User comprehension of membership benefits	Unsatisfactory	Although we feel the content includes messaging about the value the organization provides, users could not easily describe the benefits of becoming a member.

PUTTING YOUR MEASUREMENTS TO USE

All right, you're ready to measure once your new content is in place. Doesn't being prepared feel good? You can use your metrics like you will your content compass when you're planning and creating your content, too. Cool, right?

Before I send you off to design your content, let's revisit something I said in the beginning of this chapter: *Measurement is useless if you don't act on what you learn.* Make yourself a promise that you will do whatever you can to adapt and improve your content after doing all this measuring. If you don't, you may as well not even find out if the content is working. Chapter 15 talks more about how to use the findings to maintain current content and plan for new stuff.