



# FIELDING A WINNING CONTENT TEAM

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## THE **RUNDOWN**

As more brands shift budgets from standard creative development toward content creation, many marketers have the same question: Where do I start? Kim Larson, head of Google BrandLab, believes creating content calls for both new thinking and new structures in marketing departments. Larson, who helps more than 100 global brands develop digital strategies each year, explains how the first step in creating great content is building a winning team structure.

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The conversation around content strategy has dramatically shifted over the last 18 months. It used to center on *why*. Why do I need a content strategy? But on the heels of a number of successful content campaigns from across the brand spectrum, the conversation is shifting to *how*. The questions we hear most often in Google BrandLab are: How do I do it? How do I structure a media plan to power a content strategy? How much content do I need to publish?

It's becoming clear that when it comes to the content game, fewer and fewer brands feel they can afford to keep watching from the sidelines.

The answer to most of these questions—and the foundation for a successful content strategy—lies in putting together the right team to meet your objectives.

## **Fielding a winning team**

We see four different structures that brands are using to test, learn and hopefully win the content game.

## **Learn from pros**

First, some brands choose to outsource everything, particularly if an organization is just learning how content strategy, production, media and ongoing management work within its broader digital ecosystem. Outsourcing means bringing in professional content creators to play the game for brands. Content creators can be creative agencies, social media agencies or PR firms. It's an easier way for some brands to learn what works for them. Once brands begin to feel confident in their strategy and in particular, once the need for tighter media integration pushes them over some virtual tipping point, they tend to outgrow this outsourcing structure.

One of my favorite recent examples of this approach is [IBM's "A Boy and His Atom."](#) Folks at YouTube had the chance to chat with the team through our [TED Ads Worth Spreading partnership](#). The idea was born when IBM's longtime agency, Ogilvy & Mather, met engineers who were inventing new ways of manipulating atoms to improve storage technology. It's also a reminder that seasoned storytellers can find great content almost anywhere. Compelling ideas might come from a lab or a product testing facility—like this one did.

## Play with outside help

Second, some brands manage by using their existing team but enlist the help of outside agency partners. Typically, the content strategy is run by the advertising, social or digital team, and outside production agencies are brought in when necessary. This strategy works well for brands that are beginning to find their footing in creating content. It's great to have a team that already has some level of media budget responsibility managing your content strategy. Your content should integrate seamlessly and support other, more traditional media tactics. And when the two teams are one and the same, integration tends to happen more naturally.



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One of the best examples of this kind of collaborative brand content creation I've recently seen came out of our very own Google Earth team. A local journalist first uncovered the [story of Saroo Brierly](#), but our marketing team picked up on it and helped the story find its form. Although Google Earth is a truly awe-inspiring product, it's not typically the most compelling. By working with agency partners, the team brought that story to a global audience.

## Your own pick-up team

Third, some brands manage their strategy by combining players from across existing internal teams. This structure means that different groups own different parts of the strategy based on their roles. For example, the product team might own product launch content (such as demos, how-to guides and blogs) while the marketing team might own the more glossy campaigns or brand-oriented stories. Meanwhile, the social team curates customer stories and testimonials from across owned and operated properties such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Everyone shares ownership, and content creation is part of every marketing function. This strategy can be successful, but it can also make coordination more complicated. You could end up with too many different threads of content that do not cohere well.

## Your own pro team

Finally, some marketing organizations have their own dedicated content team responsible for everything from sourcing to managing content. Production and promotion depend on what stories they can tell. This approach is the most resource intensive, but it might provide the best long-term value because the content strategy is created and managed using dedicated processes. In the long run, this content creation structure might eliminate the duplication of resources across teams. But it's definitely a long-term play and not best for an organization that's just learning the content game.

## Who is your content quarterback

Regardless of which structure you choose, content opportunities will sprout up across your organization. More than anything, you need someone who always has his or her eye on the ball. This person will spot opportunities and capitalize on them. Your content quarterback establishes the team's vision, knows what's out-of-bounds, and understands what is and isn't part of the strategy. The content QB becomes the essential filter for the team. Without someone fulfilling this role, quality suffers and content lacks focus. Without a QB, every team within the organization has an incentive to make content, but there's no one to filter out the stories that should be told.

When nonmarketing departments come across a customer service story or a compelling research development, they can pass it on to their content QBs to set everything in motion. Part of the content QB's role is to make sure that compelling anecdotes aren't overlooked and omitted. I'm sure that many of us have heard the legend of the [Nordstrom tire return](#); your content QB is the person who is constantly hunting for the next legendary customer service story.

## Where do you line up?

Perhaps one of the only indisputable facts in marketing is that consumers are tired of brands talking at them. Brands need to start exercising their storytelling voices. Regardless of your organization's size, maturity or digital sophistication, the most important thing is to get started. By testing and finding your way to the right content creation structure,

your team will learn to create content quickly and make game-time adjustments as you start getting signals back from your audience. Over time, you'll increase your chances of creating successful content quickly.

As you find your voice, you will undoubtedly adjust your team structure, but the most important thing is to get started. Go team!



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