Content Strategy Roadmap Report

Jillian Garcia

DR. KIM SYDOW CAMPBELL
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Table of Contents

Introduction

Company Z is an innovative software company providing solutions for field service companies since 2012. Once known under sister brand name as Company A, Company Z merged the two under one brand name in the middle of 2021. Company Z offers a multitude of products and services to help field service companies simplify their operations and grow their business. Company Z supports niche A, niche B, niche C, and other niche industries.

At the time of the original content assessment, Company Z was still known as Company A. To ensure clarity, the company will be referred to as Company A in this report. Company A offers an expansive collection of user guides in its web application. The guides are used by both clients and the customer support team. After a series of client meetings, our team learned that Company A was facing a high number of support calls and ticket submissions for issues that could be resolved by following the user guides. Our team was tasked with conducting a content assessment of a portion of the user guides as the initial stages in creating a content strategy for Company A.

We conducted a content assessment of 38 guides through a four-step process. Specifically, we analyzed text, graphics, and usability before making subsequent recommendations based on our findings. We also conducted a competitor assessment to find out what the competitors are doing well and where Company A surpasses them. The following table breaks down the topics that we analyzed in each step.

Table 1: Content Assessment Sub-Topics

Text	Graphics	Usability	Competitor
• Word count • Important Points evaluation • Number of inconsistencies	• Number of graphics used • Graphic inconsistency • ADA compliancy	• Findability • Readability • Overall Performance	• Number of software videos • Number of marketing videos • Last video upload date • YouTube playlists (Y/N) • Last blog post date • Types of support

SWOT Analysis

To begin, our team conducted extensive research on our client, their pain points, and their competitors to understand their needs. We analyzed the content's strengths and weaknesses, and we identified opportunities to improve the content. We also identified potential threats from competitors. Our observations and findings are presented in the SWOT analysis below.

Strengths

The user guides cover a wide range of topics and include lots of detail. In general, Company A does a good job providing the right information. Company A has released over 100 different user guides for their products. Users are not lacking information.

Additionally, Company A uses a variety of graphics that demonstrate the steps for a task or procedure. All guides that we assessed use at least three graphics to visually demonstrate a step-by-step process or to affirm what users should see if they completed certain steps correctly. All of the graphics are relevant to the content in the guide.

Weaknesses

Although the user guides have the right kind of information, the guides are long and sometimes confusing. Our client stated that the guides are used by both customers and technical support staff. However, many of the guides do not have a clear audience; some contain too much detail for customers while others lack enough detail for tech support. We discovered inconsistency with the markup and language used in the guides. Often, guides with more inconsistencies had "Last Updated" dates of more than five months. The guides also had textual inconsistencies. For example, the terms "you" and "the user" were used interchangeably in guides #361 and #92.

Additionally, the graphics are often inconsistent in design and structure. Many of them are too small or too low-resolution to be easily readable by users with strong vision, let alone visually-impaired users. The graphics do not always follow the criteria in the style guide, and none are ADA-compliant.

Opportunities

Company A has an opportunity to improve the content in their user guides by making their guides more user friendly without compromising informative details. Since two different audiences use the guides, the content must adequately address the needs of both.

Company A also has an opportunity to make their content more accessible by ensuring that all graphics are ADA compliant. The client should address these standards by including high-resolution graphics that are large enough for visually impaired users to read. The graphics also need alt text.

Threats

One competitor provided a password-protected knowledge base specific to video guides. Company A does offer unlisted software help videos on their YouTube page. However, our team had to go out of our way to locate these videos. Competitors offering more accessible help content is a threat, and Company A should consider creating a more comprehensive and easily accessible collection of video guides. However, this report will not focus on the creation of video guides as this goes beyond the scope of both the course and the project.

Strategic Direction and Tactics

In this section, I will establish Company A' content maturity rating. I will also provide a strategic direction that the client could implement through several tactics.

Content Maturity

Using Joann Hackos' Information Process Maturity Model, I place Company A at a **Level 1** maturity, known as "Ad Hoc." Characteristics of this maturity level include a "lack of uniform practices" and little to no collaboration between information developers. Our client stated that their teams follow a loose style guide for graphics and no style guide for information development (Client Representative). Our client's development team and technical writing team both contribute to information development with little collaboration between the two teams. Colleen Jones, founder of Content Science, asserts that Level 1 organizations have little to no content leadership and that few (if any) "dedicated content roles" exist in the company. This is true of Company A, as the technical writing team is made up of two people.

Hackos also states that Level 1 organizations practice few or no quality assurance activities and rarely consider customer needs. I place Company A at this level of content maturity based on the small section of user guides that my team assessed. As mentioned in the SWOT analysis, many of the guides are written for an unclear audience.

To increase the maturity of their content operations, Company A should implement a **quality assurance strategy** through a series of tactics. These tactics include

- Conducting a content audit to establish content strengths and weaknesses,
- Using content analytics to inform content decisions, and
- Establishing editorial standards through a formal style guide.

I also provide one synthesizing tactic that goes beyond more micro-level aspects of quality assurance and addresses the issue more broadly: increased collaboration across teams.

Content Audit

Company A could benefit from a substantive content audit. As an example, our team conducted a cursory content assessment over a small sample of one section of the entire web app. Although our sample was limited to 38 user guides, we uncovered lots of valuable information about things that worked well and things that worked poorly. For more specific findings, please see [Weaknesses](#) on page 3.

However, Company A has many more content assets than the small sample my team assessed. Company A has published over 100 user guides alone. In order to implement a content strategy, the client needs to know about the assets they are working with. The client should consider hiring a content specialist to complete this work. But no matter who is involved, Company A should begin by conducting an all-encompassing content inventory to gather information about their content assets.

Content Analytics and Data

Company A should also gather metrics about how their content assets are performing. Our team requested data on the types of issues for which users submitted support tickets and was given a spreadsheet that included the number of clicks for 38 Preferences user guides over the past 180 days. This is a start, but Company A should gather more data than this to measure content performance.

Time on page (ToP) would also be an excellent metric to track. A higher-than-average ToP for a guide may indicate that users are struggling to make sense of the content. Likewise, a low (or average) ToP might be a signal that users find the information easy to understand and follow.

I also think Company A would benefit from gathering more qualitative feedback from users. While this suggestion veers slightly into the User Focus category, this type of qualitative data can shed light on where users run into snags with the guide content (and even the rest of the content). My team was provided a list of personas for context, which indicates Company A has some understanding of the importance of user experience. By finding out where users encounter problems, Company A could reduce the number of preventable support tickets they receive. Since each support ticket and call costs money, this could save Company A money over time.

Editorial Standards

After conducting a content audit and gathering relevant data and metrics about content performance, Company A should establish editorial standards by establishing content standards as well as developing and using a style guide. Currently, people from multiple topics contribute to the guides with little continuity aside from the structure on each page. Without uniform standards, inconsistencies abound and can confuse readers. Dawn Stevens of Comtech Services recommends that qualified editors review existing content regularly to improve content quality.

Our client representative stated that the company uses a simple style guide for graphics. However, our content assessment revealed many inconsistencies in adherence to the style guide. I recommend that the client place greater emphasis on the existing style guide. Beyond a graphical style guide, Company A needs to create and adhere to a textual style guide. This will ensure that the same voice is used throughout all the guides. A textual style guide will also make sure that the content is appropriate for both technical and non-technical audiences.

Collaboration

In addition to these three tactics, I propose one final synthesizing tactic for implementing a quality assurance content strategy: **increased cross-team collaboration**. It was obvious from the client meetings that our client representative has little interaction with the technical support team or the marketing team. When we would probe for more data or specifications, we often received non-answers or incomplete responses. Furthermore, when we were provided personas, our client representative mentioned that these personas are used by the marketing team. Why not the technical writers as well? I get the sense that the two technical writers have limited interaction with other departments. I cannot speak to the company's dynamics, but I recommend that the client promote more information sharing and cross-team communication to improve the quality of their content.

Conclusion

In general, the recommended tactics all center around being more thorough and deliberate with the client's content operations. At first, this will result in more work for everyone involved. Additionally, Company A will likely face some organizational challenges when implementing more collaboration strategies. However, I believe that these tactics will contribute to a more effective content strategy that will ultimately save the client expenses over time.

If my team had completed a content assessment over the entire Company A website and every single piece of content, maybe I would have assigned a higher content maturity rating. But from the little information I've seen so far, Company A has lots of room for growth and improvement in their content maturity.

Our team was given a spreadsheet that included the number of clicks for 38 Preferences user guides over the past 180 days. However, I would have liked to know how many of those clicks were internal versus external. I also would have liked more support ticket data: how many tickets were submitted for Preferences-related issues, how many tickets for each type of guide, and how many tickets were "preventable."

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