

Adaptive Content. Plain and Simple.



# CONTENT ARCHITECTURE GUIDE

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**A quick-start guide to  
developing, designing, and  
managing your content**

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# WHAT TO EXPECT

*A quick-start guide to developing, designing,  
and managing your content*

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# GETTING STARTED

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We have all heard that “content is king.” Yet simply creating more content can be counterproductive. One look at the vast amount of content circling the globe and it is clear: **more of the wrong content only creates confusion.** And that’s a problem.

If content is king, smart content development, design, and management are its rooks, bishops, and knights.

As it stands, many people and their organizations unintentionally say less with more, when the goal should be to say more with less.

But most of us are too busy working, managing social media accounts, and fostering client relationships to monitor the quality and effectiveness of the content we produce.

**That’s where Contentiful comes in:  
Content architecture offers a solution.**



We developed this *Content Architecture Guide* with you in mind. Its purpose is to help you understand content architecture—from developing quality content (in plain language) to managing and maintaining your content for easy retrieval and reuse.

Content architecture encompasses the creation, design, and management of content. This includes systems for information retrieval and sharing, and more. It covers both the big picture and the details and clarifies the relationships between different content. This is no small task. Architecting requires cleaning up, condensing, and organizing your content. So why begin this process?

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## CONTENT ARCHITECTURE CAN:

- ☞ Help your customers find what they need or want.
- ☞ Confidently describe your product or services so your customers can make strategic decisions.
- ☞ Provide clear and relevant calls-to-action that encourage your customers to respond.
- ☞ Help your employees get answers quickly and reliably.
- ☞ Establish proper documentation and procedures to meet compliance standards.
- ☞ Further extend your brand through clarity and consistency.
- ☞ And much more!



# MAKING THE CASE FOR CONTENT ARCHITECTURE

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## *A Little Background*

In the 1990s, the World Wide Web we know as the internet was in its infancy. Some forward-thinking businesses and organizations began developing online presences, but their websites were often only home pages, places for basic business and contact information. And while many institutions began using intranets—private, in-house networks—few of them saw a real need for an internet presence.



By the end of the decade, Web 2.0 was upon us. People, businesses, and organizations were interacting digitally more than ever before. And that was just the beginning. There was a push for technology integration across industries, and individuals were getting in on the action, too. It was the Wild West of electronic communication and interaction, and it was glorious.



It was also a mess waiting to happen. Industry expert [Peter Morville](#) put it simply:

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**“Small sites are manageable.  
Large sites are unmanageable.”**

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Rather than delivering the world to our fingertips, large websites and intranets created a swamp of confusing and less-than-useful stuff. Lack of planning, integration, and oversight yielded unchecked expansion of content, hobbling what should be a tool of unprecedented and empowering communication.

At that point, information technology (IT) professionals increasingly embraced the idea of architecting information and content. They knew: **planned, designed, integrated, and managed digital information was the answer to a labyrinth of confusing content.**

Many ignored this advice, and digital content has grown with little thought to how it should grow.



# MAKING THE CASE

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## *A Word About Content*

What is content, anyway? Is it articles, data, and other website-based information? Yes... and no.

### **THINK OF IT THIS WAY:**

Information = facts.

Content = context, or how information relates to the user.



Author and content expert [Colleen Jones](#) gives the example of health data. Health tracking devices and apps record activity, heart rate, and other information. But Jones asks: “So what?”

**Facts are facts, but how are they useful?  
It depends on context.**



Information is only useful when it has a specific reason and use.

| WHO                            | WHAT             | WHY                          |
|--------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| Person with diabetes           | Blood sugar      | Guide diet decisions         |
| Person with excessive thirst   | Blood sugar      | Check for insulin production |
| Person in physical therapy     | Miles walked/run | Build stamina                |
| Person training for a marathon | Miles walked/run | Increase speed               |

So, content includes information, like websites, files, records, and forms. But it also includes context, like organization, user experience (UX), file-naming, and structuring files so everyone from clients to teams to government agencies can easily find, use, and share what they need.





# MAKING THE CASE

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## *Content Architecture*

Remember, content architecture guides the development, design, and management of content so it is useful, credible, and valuable.

Companies sometimes find it hard to quantify and measure the value of content and content architecture. In the pages to come, we will delve deeper into the value of content architecture. But for now, here is a simplified explanation:



If time is money, the time it takes people to look for files, get frustrated, and then try to recreate files is costly. Multiply this across all content functions, including missed sales and lost clients, and continuing to use current content costs a fortune.

Architecting your content is an investment. It takes time and money to produce, design, and manage planned and valuable content.

**BUT...**



By adopting key content strategies, this relatively small up-front investment has the potential for long-term savings and increased revenue.

**Simply put, it stops the bleeding and improves the overall health of your business or organization.**

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**Need help architecting your content?**

Contentiful offers a comprehensive suite of services to help you make money, save money, create great user experiences, pass those audits, and more!

Let's explore how we can collaborate:

[connect@contentifulstrategies.com](mailto:connect@contentifulstrategies.com)

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# THE GOAL AND HOW WE ACHIEVE IT

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At Contentful, we believe good content architecture boils down to three things:



Develop  
quality  
content.



Design  
for the  
end user.



Manage to  
improve  
productivity.



# 1. Develop Quality Content

Content is communication. If we develop, design, and manage it correctly, users (the masses) can benefit greatly. This is accomplished by focusing on creating, organizing, structuring, and labeling content in an effective and sustainable way. We do this with these main goals in mind:

- ☞ **Improve communication**
- ☞ **Drive desirable outcomes**
- ☞ **Minimize confusion**
- ☞ **Create better UX**

**Many people never learn how to appropriately say what they mean and mean what they say.**

In fact, according to a [Psychology Today article](#), 82% of the population has trouble. So, it is not a surprise that most people have trouble communicating. This ultimately translates to poorly written and ineffective content.



Bad content does not deliver a positive user experience. If the reader cannot see him or herself in the content, nothing may happen. However, effectively written and structured content creates good (even great) user experiences. **Good content is reader-focused and starts with your audience in mind.**

To create the best possible user experience, Contentiful integrates these aspects:

- ☞ Readability and clarity via plain language (Plain language experts, like Contentiful’s associate BEL Writing Services, are valuable partners.)
- ☞ Organization and design designed for the end user
- ☞ Optimized user conversion through clear wording, a prominent call-to-action (CTA), and a value proposition
- ☞ User focus

### IMPORTANT QUESTIONS:

- Who is the content for?
- How do you want them to respond?
- How will your audience use the content?





## 2. Design for the End User

A large part of design is organization, including grouping and sorting. [Eric Reiss](#), an expert in information architecture, advises:

**“Gather things in convenient categories, call them something recognizable, and put things where they can be found.”**

These guidelines make all sorts of information easy to find and understand. Reiss uses a grocery store as an example. In the produce aisle, tomatoes aren't mixed with zucchini; they are easy to find in separate bins.



The same is true for content organization.

Design also focuses on CTAs. To add interest and make information easier to understand and use, pay attention to:

**Text Arrangement • Tables • Charts • Infographics**



## 3. Manage to Improve Productivity

Quality content and smart design help businesses create and share information with clients, employees, and other relevant parties... for the moment. Sadly, some companies commit to these first steps only to find themselves back where they started after a year or two. Why is that?

Without proper management, content that starts out on the right foot quickly becomes stale. Companies create and design new content without knowing how efficient it is, without a bird's-eye-view of operations to steer the pruning and direction of new content.

Management becomes a job of putting out fires instead of forging ahead and meeting goals.

This is another time-waster.

The management part of content architecture is all about organizing in effective and sustainable ways.



At Contentiful, we know that content management is the key to maintaining and improving businesses' productivity.

Some goals of content management are:



- 📄 Organizing and labeling structures and content
- 📄 Creating, reviewing, and updating style guides, SOPs, naming conventions, and file structure
- 📄 Streamlining file access, ensuring easy sharing, and eliminating excess duplication and bulky emails
- 📄 Helping teams adopt easy-to-use and efficient tools and avoid falling back on old, wasteful ways
- 📄 Analyzing efficacy of various types of content and design





## The \$300 Million Dollar Button

**The analysis part of content management can be tied to revenue.**

User interface engineer Jared Spool recounts increasing revenue for an online retailer simply by eliminating a button.



He found that site users—first timers and repeat customers—had trouble with the “Register” button they encountered before getting to their shopping cart. He replaced “Register” with “Continue” and a note that they could register later if they wanted to.

**Customers felt more at ease and revenues soared by \$300 million dollars within the first year!**



A common struggle is getting employees to change the way they do things. There's a learning curve with every change. Employees often find new methods take more time at first. At that point, it is natural to fall back on old, comfortable ways of doing things. This, of course, wastes money.

Compliance auditors and industry experts agree that poor documentation is a leading cause of non-compliance. When auditors cannot easily find and understand the information they need, the consequences include:

- Longer, more costly audit processes
- Fines
- Shutdowns
- Litigation

The underlying issue is often lack of compliance documentation. If your content is weak, your business runs the risk of failing its next audit.

Contentiful's content management strategy focuses on developing SOPs that help employees stay on track and stick to new, more efficient methods.



## A CASE STUDY

For instance, Contentiful recently worked with a company that struggled through audits. Auditors had a hard time finding what they were looking for. The process was stressful and reflected badly on the company.

Contentiful unified their company documentation and redid their intranet site—staying resolute about building and maintaining their file structure. The next year, the auditors were astonished with the progress. Everything was so easy to find, it felt almost like a new company, and they passed their audit easily.



Content architecture can help you establish standards (i.e., documentation, procedures, processes) to improve productivity of daily operational tasks and activities. This, in turn, mitigates the risk of failing internal audits or compliance checks.



# 10 REASONS TO ARCHITECT YOUR CONTENT

1

Your content looks and sounds more professional and modern.

3

You find what you are looking for because it is where it should be.

5

Your employees are more productive and engaging more frequently.

2

Your auditor gives you glowing reviews during your internal compliance audit.

4

You are no longer embarrassed to send out your company literature.

6

Your information is getting read, and people are contacting you.



# 7

Your content is a powerful communication tool.

# 9

You see a significant drop in duplication of effort.

# 8

You win a higher percentage of contracts and projects.

# 10

You can clearly explain and demonstrate what you do.





# CONSIDER THIS

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Architecting quality content is a choice. Many people are choosing to create poor or mediocre content, which produces the same results. Great content is built on a foundation of the following four characteristics:

1

**CUSTOMER-FOCUSED:** Google has changed the way people develop content. Instead of focusing on the needs of our readers, we tend to stress over SEO and rankings. Too much of the content on the Internet is “writer- and Google-focused” rather than “reader- and end-user-focused.” If the reader cannot see him or herself in the content, nothing happens.

2

**DELIBERATE + INTENTIONAL:** Crafting deliberate and intentional content takes time, energy, and practice. Something most people claim they do not have enough of. But the result of misdirected, confusing, and poor communication can result in substantial costs of time, money, and lost productivity.



3

**INFORMATIVE + EFFECTIVE:**

Content is about creating an experience. It should be meaningful and provide a better user experience. Whether in a brick-and-mortar shop or online, people will stay longer if they can find what they need and feel like they are treated well.

4

**PLAIN AND SIMPLE:** Plain language is the opposite of dumbing down information. It is about making complex information clear for the intended audience without losing meaning or context. Elements of plain language include word choice, sentence structure, paragraph length, headings and subtitles, infographics, and other visual aids.





Everyone knows that a structure is only as good as the foundation upon which it was built. Your content is no different. If you miss integrating one of these elements, your content (and the results that follow) will be unreliable.

**Now is the time to take stock. Where does your organization's content stand?**



### **CONTENT ARCHITECTURE CHECKLIST:**

- ☞ What does my organization do to ensure our content works FOR us?
- ☞ What does our current content and informational infrastructure say about us?
- ☞ What content-related challenges do we face?
- ☞ What steps can I take myself?
- ☞ What steps do I need help with?

**Not sure where to start?  
Here's one more thing to consider...**



# CONSIDER US

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CONTENTIFFUL  
STRATEGIES

Contentifful Strategies specializes in the art and science of content architecture. Our mission is to help you break through the content clutter and create a game plan that get results. We offer adaptive content strategies and solutions that balance design with usability. To view the details of our strategies, read our blog, and learn more about our company, visit: [www.contentifful.com](http://www.contentifful.com).