GatherContent
by Bynder

The evolution of content strategy: The beginning, middle, and never-ending

Hosted by

Angus Edwardson
Co-founder
GatherContent by Bynder

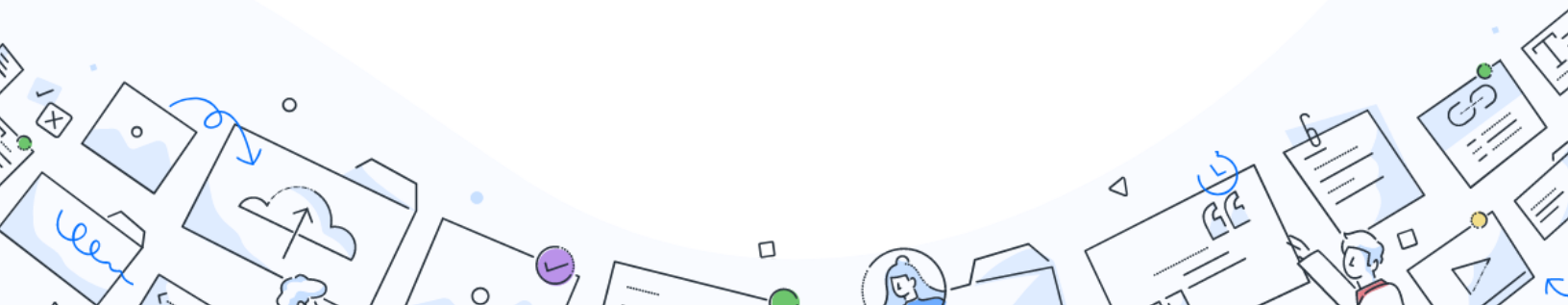GatherContent
by Bynder

Our Guest

Rebecca Steurer
Content Strategy Director
Critical Mass

CM.

GatherContent's co-founder interviews Rebecca Steurer, Content Strategy Director at Critical Mass.

Rebecca Steurer

Content Strategy
Director, Critical Mass

Follow Rebecca on [LinkedIn](#) or
[Twitter](#)

Since 1999, Rebecca has been helping organizations connect with their audiences by developing and implementing content strategies that produce meaningful and engaging content throughout their digital ecosystem.

Today, Rebecca is the Content Strategy Director in Chicago at [Critical Mass](#), an award-winning full-service digital experience design agency.

You can find out more about Rebecca and listen to her [podcasts](#) at [Succeed with Content Strategy](#).

Note: Quotes are edited in this insight summary for clarity. The full conversation can be heard on [the recording](#).

GatherContent
by Bynder

Table of contents

Key insights from the Fireside

As many content professionals have already discovered, it's not enough to be 'editors' or writers anymore — the whole content experience is far more than just being about 'words'.

What's more, several career 'tracks' have emerged for content professionals; from specialist roles in content design to roles with a content intelligence focus.

In order to understand where content strategy is headed, it's important to understand where it's already been, and how the discipline has grown and expanded over time.

> "We all **need information** — and that's what content strategy is for.
>
> It's 'how should we, as organizations who have the information, explain things in the right way, so we can provide people with the right information, at the right time?'"
>
> Rebecca Steurer

"Whenever somebody asks me, 'what do you do?' I say, 'I help organizations provide the right information to their audience.'"

Rebecca Steurer

The evolution of digital content strategy was meeting users where they were

"I was still in grad school when I first got into what we would now call 'content strategy', and I remember thinking 'this is so amazing'. When it came to 'the web' and 'content', I just wanted to understand everything I could about the internet and websites.

So when I started working at North-Western Memorial Hospital, I noticed that an approach to making our content available online would be, for example, 'we'll put our newsletter that we send out to people into PDF form, and then just put it on the website'.

I was asked to help with the website, and from there, I ended up taking over the

management of the entire site. **We needed to make sense of how people were finding health services, and what questions they were asking** so that we could promote our doctors and services in a way that's going to help users.

That's around the time when blogging, SEO, and UX emerged, so I feel like I have stayed in 'the fight' all this time. It's very exciting to see content strategy getting a voice."

Rebecca Steurer

Embedding content strategy into digital meant 'feeling your way'

"In the early 2000s, while I was still working at the hospital, we had to do a content migration exercise, and we were working on a redesign for the website.

We were very fortunate to have had a leadership team who understood and were forward-thinking enough to really invest in the content that was needed for the new site.

We were able to move from using loads of PDFs to creating a 'home-grown' content management system (CMS), where we could update things as we liked. I worked with a tech person and our information architect, who was really our UX lead too.

We all sat in one room, working together, and it was really the best time because no one outside of the room really knew what we were doing! They didn't understand it, and they didn't want to understand it — they just said, 'you go do what you need to do'.

Collectively, we didn't already have all of that knowledge behind us regarding what could go wrong, or what needed to happen; **we were learning as we went.**

We completed the migration of 10,000 pages, finished the redesign, and it was so exciting. I remember thinking, 'ok... I gotta do this again.'"

Rebecca Steurer

Making the case for content strategy

"Fortunately, my next role was at an agency that was very much focused on content strategy. It already acknowledged the content strategy discipline and understood the value of it, but as it was a UX-lead company, content strategy only had a small voice.

I would do roadshows with the project management team, our account directors, and with the UX team. Here's what we do, here is the time that we need to do it. So really, a lot of going out and selling it, explaining it, educating about it, and building relationships with people.

Then, when I started my job at Critical Mass, I reached out to our strategy leads and UX leads and sought some time with them so I could talk about being a content strategist and what we do.

What I like to say is that **we help to define what information needs to be shared**, but besides that, we do so much because we're helping with the overarching project. I see it as a support system, supporting UX and SEO colleagues for example."

Rebecca Steurer

"What's the difference between strategy and content strategy? *is the wrong question.*

It should be 'how does content strategy *support* strategy?'"

Rebecca Steurer

'Content strategy' should always support 'strategy'

"Content strategy can seem so complicated to people, because, 'what is it really?' What's the difference between strategy, content strategy, and UX strategy?

We think 'this content must do this, and we want to reach people by posting these blogs, this podcast, etc....' Well, content strategists are there to say, 'here's what this content is, and we have some ideas of how you might structure it'. We want to be able to communicate our vision through words.

Then the UX strategist is helping us think about things like 'how are we going to present this information in a way that is easy for users to look at on their phones? Or, how is it going to find it through their devices in general?

We wear so many different hats when we're dealing with content — and working with content isn't easy. There's so much involved. There's a lot of thinking."

Rebecca Steurer

Listen to Rebecca talk about the differences [between content strategy and content design](#)

Working collaboratively is a lynchpin behavior

"An overarching content strategy is at the forefront of all the tasks that flow out of it. Intelligence, design operations, copywriting… from a design point of view for example, the work that team completes feeds into the content guidelines, which in turn feeds into the content strategy briefs.

Alongside this, a content designer will understand the vision behind that content; what it needs to do, and they work closely with copywriters so that things move in that direction.

While it may sound like a content strategist can kind of step on 'creative toes', **that's not what we're doing at all**. What we're doing is saying, 'we can't do the creative, you guys do the creative, but, hey we know the content really well (sometimes even better than our clients!) and have the overall strategy for you, so here's that information'

We are a 'bridge'. It's like we're a support system; helping to give direction and keep the steering steady."

Rebecca Steurer

Content strategy can be split into three different job 'tracks'

"The client that I've been working on with Critical Mass since 2020 is the Army. We've been helping with managing their site, organizing the site, and doing a redesign.

So, from a content strategy perspective, we organized our team into three 'tracks': content intelligence, content design, and content operations.

The **content intelligence** part — these are the analysts; the people who come in and just want to understand how much content we have. They're thinking about aspects like the URL structure, and how content is going to be organized on the CMS.

And as content strategists, we're constantly evangelizing for the user and also the stakeholder, so we'll be in the background raising questions like 'who will be using the CMS and keeping that content up-to-date? All in all, we want to engineer all of this content in a way that's going to be findable for the user, all the while working closely with the SEO team and with the marketing science (MKS) team.

Content designers will be really focusing on what content needs to be on each page. Working very closely with a content strategist, they'll establish the purpose of each page, and define how the content is going to support this purpose. Who are we talking to? And what questions are they likely to have?

You can't design the content until you have background information like this.

Then there's the **content operations** track. This is the person (or team) who will make sure that, for example, all the pieces of content are being properly posted on the website, and that the content in general is being digitally distributed effectively and efficiently via channels like social.

In the case of what we're doing with our Army client, there are always different campaigns happening, so we're always doing A/B testing. It means that we can test whether the information is useful, and whether the way we're presenting it is effective.

We work with such a lot of people, but we have such a strong content strategy team, and we all just love it."

Rebecca Steurer

Hear more from Rebecca about the [three career tracks](#) in relation to her current team, as well as more information about her Marketing Science Team.

BONUS: Listen to Rebecca's advice on [structuring a small team](#) around the three different roles discussed above.

Content operations in action

"It's easy to produce large volumes of terrible content that you can't measure."

Angus Edwardson

Use marketing science to help drive decisions around content

"I have an amazing marketing science team who we can go to when our clients are asking us questions like 'are people actually coming to the site?'

For the content strategy side, we like to analyze the data closely so we can really get to some answers. For example, is the information on this particular page supporting any conversions?

Gathering the insight and the data informs future decisions on what we need to create, content-wise. It means that nothing that we are writing or recommending for the site is done just because we think, 'oh, this would be cool, this might work'. It's backed by data insight."

Rebecca Steurer

"Content governance and content operations will be the focus for me in 2023."

Rebecca Steurer

There should be a bigger-than-ever focus on governance in 2023

"I'm definitely prioritizing governance next year, and really making sure that we start thinking about it before any project begins; thinking about governance in terms of people and content, policy, procedure, and process.

The reason why I love doing that groundwork is because once you have that organized and have that laid out, your brain is free to start the more creative stuff.

I remember when I first started working on content governance, it was Brain Traffic (aka Kristina Halvorson) I was looking to for inspiration and their guiding insight. Kristina really got the content strategy name out there.

She would have that Venn diagram with the user, the business goals… and then 'content' was right in the middle. She then expanded it to the 'planning', 'governance', and 'operations' for that content.

One of the things I've noticed is that **people will typically start governance *after* the work is done**. I like to do governance work from the beginning, because our clients should be aware of [what their roles and responsibilities are](#), upfront.

How I have seen this evolve where I am is that we're getting away from thinking of content as 'pillars' and moving towards thinking about it as part of a wider ecosystem. So, we're thinking about it in terms of 'multichannel' or 'omnichannel'.

We're getting more involved with the content intelligence side, so we can make sure we've got visibility of how CMSs are being created by our tech teams."

Rebecca Steurer

Technology and tools will continue to underpin successful ContentOps

"We purchased GatherContent as our content operations tool, so we're excited about continuing to use that into 2023 — we're migrating all of our content into GatherContent right now.

The reason why we're so excited about this is because we have a lot of agency people working on client work, and we have really needed a way to be able to share documentation with our team members, as well as our clients.

What was happening is that we would have Word documents which we'd send, but then different people would be unsure as to whether they'd seen a latest version, and things would get lost in their inboxes. **That alone can create such a loss of working time**.

We knew that, as an agency, we needed to modernize and looking at all the different tools on the market, GatherContent was the tool which best matched our business requirements."

Rebecca Steurer

Hear Rebecca talk in more detail about *using GatherContent*.

GatherContent
by Bynder

Standardize, structure, and scale your content operations with GatherContent

Overcome content chaos, and bring clarity to everyone in your content workflow.

Check out **the platform overview**, and then explore our **no-obligation free trial**. It's packed with content and examples to try out.

Alternatively, **book a demonstration** to have a content operations expert talk through how the platform can support your requirements.