



The Complete Content Marketing Roadmap for Hotels

Why the Days of Competing on Price Are Over

Reason #1

Content reaches travelers before they start price shopping.

You know who has the market cornered on competing on price? The OTAs. It's not a fair game, how they've convinced travelers they're getting a discount while allowing them to compare multiple hotels on price and location in one simple experience. The entire experience is built on the idea of price shopping.

So don't try to play that game. As a hotel marketer – be it at a single property or for a hospitality management company – you need to use your website and other owned media (your email campaigns, your social channels, your videos, etc.) to capture travelers' imagination and interest at all phases of the buyer's journey. A solid content marketing plan is what will get you there.

Reason #2

Travelers today care more about the experience than the discount.

Today's traveler is way too savvy, with way too many trip-planning resources at their fingertips online, to be wooed just by price. Millennials are an even more extreme case. You've heard it plenty: We're in the age of the experience economy. That's a huge opportunity for hotels and hospitality management companies. The challenge you're left with, then, is bringing your hotel and area's experiences to life.

By doing so through your own content, you help potential travelers get deeper into their relationship with you, continue to refer to your website as the go-to resource, and book direct.

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Developing the Content Strategy

This doesn't have to be some months-long exercise, but don't produce a single piece of content before defining the strategy around which it all will focus.

SECTION 1:
DEVELOPING THE CONTENT STRATEGY



What Resources & Data Should We Reference to Build Our Strategy?

Before you dive in and start building your edit calendar, you'll want to understand what type of content will perform best. Here are four places you can turn to get a sense of what matters most to your audience.

- **Website Analytics** – Look particularly at sub-pages with high time on page for ideas for top content themes your website visitors have shown they're interested in.
- **Past Email Campaign Analytics** – Deals will always drive email clicks, but what other links within past email campaigns did people respond to most?
- **Your Inbox from Competitors** – Look through the campaigns you like best from other hotels and hospitality management companies. What they do well might work for you.
- **Inspiration from Your Past Vacations** – Think about your last big vacation. What resources did you turn to? How did you define where you wanted to go? What sites did you consider once you'd made that decision? Do any of these resources inform the content strategy that would work best for your hotel?

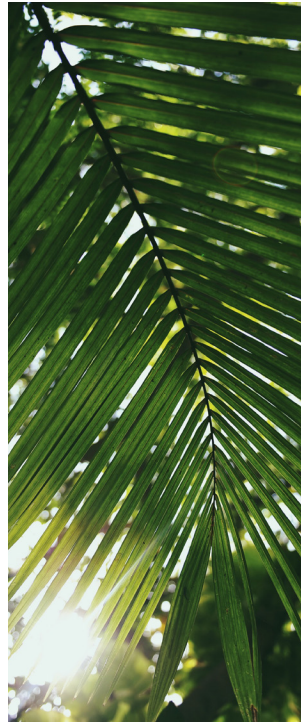
SECTION 1:
DEVELOPING THE CONTENT STRATEGY

THE BIG MISTAKE

**Mistake #1: Focusing
solely on your hotel.**

Travelers don't pick a hotel first; they pick the destination. We see too many hotel marketers limit their content to on-property highlights. Particularly at the dreaming and consideration phases, all your destination's highlights and attractions are essential to get potential guests deeper down the funnel.

THE BIG
MISTAKE



What Should a “Content Strategy” Entail?

A basic PowerPoint or even Word doc will do, to serve as a guiding document for ongoing execution.

- **Audience Descriptions or Personas** – If you have personas, great! If you don't, bullet out the basics of 3-5 top guest segments the production team should be speaking to. (ex: Millennial couples escaping for 2- to 3-night getaways, Gen X families with young kids coming for longer stays and staying on-property most of the time, etc.)
- **Content Pillars** – Think of content pillars as the ~3-7 consistent themes that all content should focus on. Ex: “Ocean adventures” for an eco-lodge on an island might be one; “Unexpected surprises” might be one for a quirky boutique brand. There will be tons of ideas for content topics; content pillars make sure that only the ideas that reflect the strategy move forward. The risk, otherwise, is content that feels scattered and loses travelers’ interest because it doesn’t consistently resonate with them.
- **Medium** – Will your content solely be text and photos? Are there any opportunities for video that could be produced within your budget? What about photography – do you have enough lifestyle imagery and access to good stock? (Our take is that both can work if done well.)
- **Frequency & Distribution** – This is about bandwidth. You don’t want to build this grand expectation for this content plan that then can’t be executed after Month 1. Who will produce this content and how much time can they spend doing so? How many “slots” will your content-focused email campaigns require? You need to make sure you’re creating enough content to feed the distribution strategy you put in place.

The Content Hub

Your content hub is what makes your content marketing plan hum. It's the central spot where all content lives and all clicks lead back to.

SECTION 2: THE CONTENT HUB

What It Is

Most often, your “content hub” is your blog. Ideally, this lives on your website (for SEO impact), whether that’s for one hotel or the central site for your hospitality management company. If your site doesn’t have blog functionality, then you can turn to building a blog in a subdomain (ex: blog.yourhotelcompany.com), using a basic blog template as the starting point. (Squarespace and Wordpress both offer lots of blog templates we have used for clients.)

OUR WORK

Some of Our Client Content Hubs



Noble House Hotels & Resorts

[Go to Site](#)

Opal Collection

[Go to Site](#)

Hotel Saranac

[Go to Site](#)

SECTION 2: THE CONTENT HUB

Consider Content Formats

Particularly if building a blog site from scratch, it's important to think about what types of content and formats you hope your content hub will include. This will determine which blog templates might work best for you – as well as if you'll need to budget for some website customization.

Stories

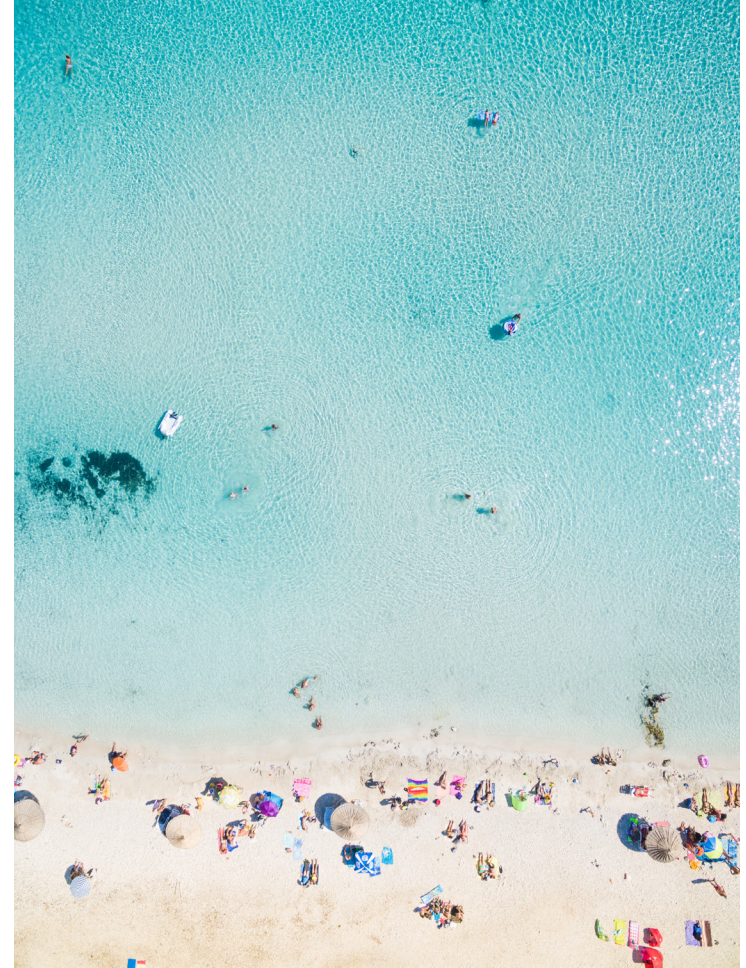
Videos

Slideshows

Audio clips

Maps

Others?



SECTION 2: THE CONTENT HUB

THE BIG MISTAKE

Mistake #2: Thinking of visuals at the end.

We've seen some hotels who have a great idea for content, write up the whole thing...and then put some really poor photo as the banner photo atop it. Which means no one will ever click, no matter how good that content and idea was. Our approach for both our magazine and digital content work: We only greenlight ideas we know have great visuals already available at the outset. We also see hotels relying on their architectural photos, when the whole premise of content marketing is experiential. Shameless plug: We've produced and art directed lifestyle photo shoots for clients who need a stable of editorial, lifestyle photography for use in their content marketing as well as their global marketing plan. Ask us to see some examples.

THE
BIG
MISTAKE



Content Distribution

Our take: Defining the right way to get the right eyes on your content is even more important than the content itself. (Because great content without any page views is not “great” content.)

SECTION 3: CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

DISTRIBUTION POINT

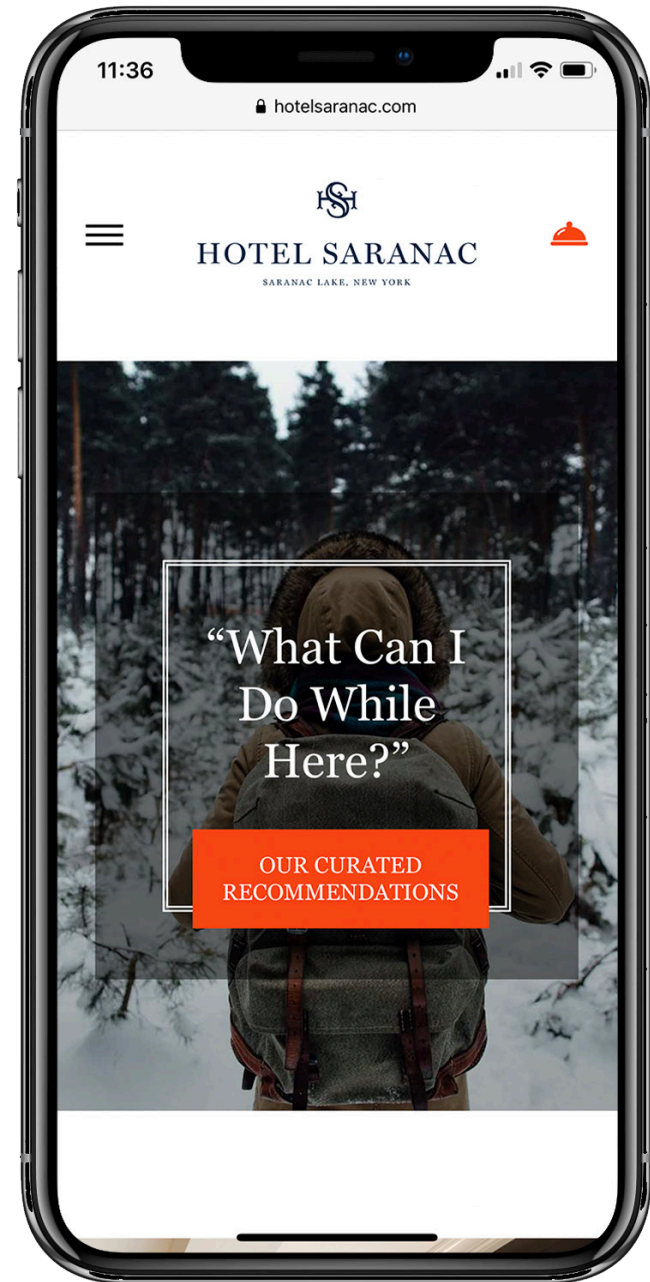
Your Website:

Your “Things to Do” Page

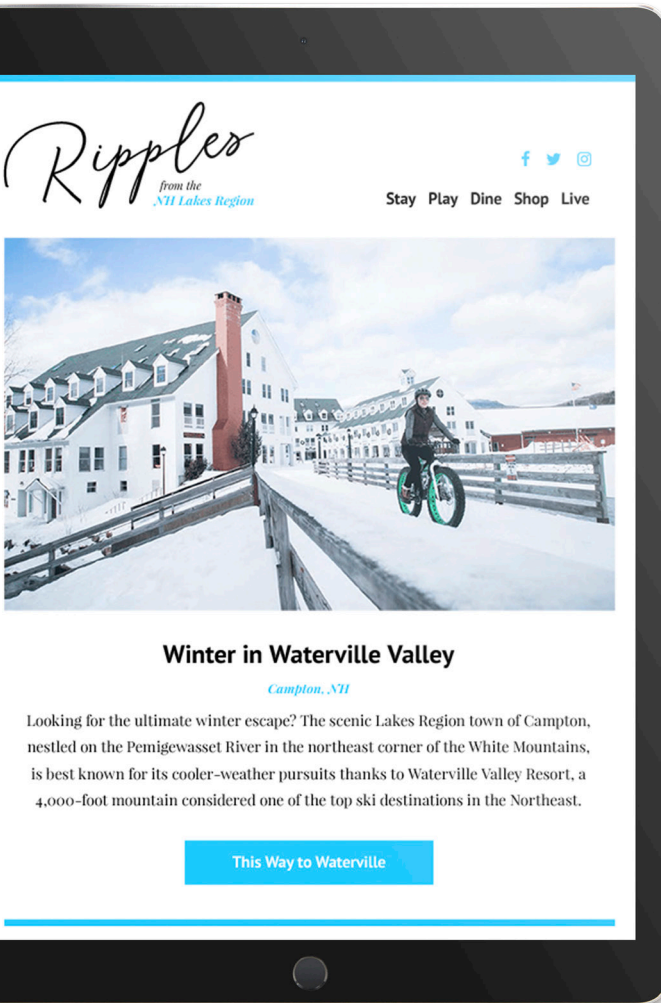
The “evergreen” activities page on your website gives a quick summary of what your resort and area have to offer. When possible, use text links in those short descriptions to click to a deeper dive on the activity within your content hub. Ex: [Linking to the content hub’s Q&A with the area’s top fly-fishing guide in the one sentence](#) describing fly-fishing in the area.

Other Places on Your Website

Most often overlooked, this may be the impactful distribution point to encourage direct bookings. Homepage real estate such as a slot rotating seasonal offers is a natural start. Also, [consider other sections of your site to tease content](#) and get users to your content hub. (ex: a tile on your Dining page where a piece of food/wine-centric content can be rotated if that’s a big selling point for your property.)



SECTION 3: CONTENT DISTRIBUTION



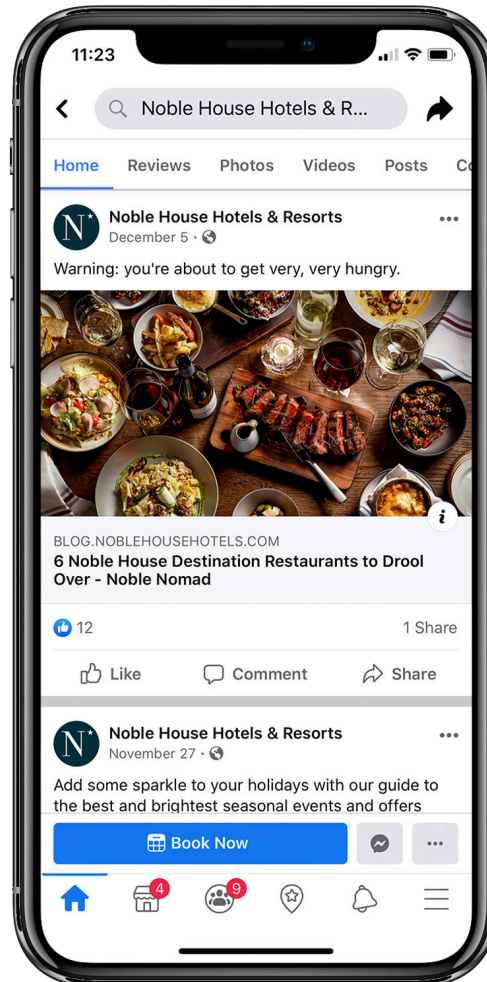
DISTRIBUTION POINT

Email

We routinely see email marketing as the #1 strategy to maximize ROI in content marketing plans. Here are some strategies we've seen work, beyond your regular seasonal campaigns (which should be a no-brainer).

- **Pre-arrival Campaigns** – Don't limit your pre-arrival to a transactional detail of the room they've booked and a few promos to your spa and restaurant. Triggered 3 to 7 days prior to a booked stay, feeding a pre-arrival email with deep dives into what to consider doing once in the area is a great way to build loyalty.
- **Leisure Incentive for Groups Guest** – A guest who came for a meeting or event got just a taste of what your hotel has to offer. Entice them back with more content, paired with a time-sensitive offer for them to come back as a leisure guest.
- **Stoking Memories 9 Months after Their Last Stay** – When they're in the same planning window a year from now, fire an email with seasonal-relevant content to get them dreaming about a return trip.
- **Time for a Getaway Together** – Content is a great, high-revenue forum to help those on your email lists to think of the specific highlights and to-dos that make your hotel a great destination for a social group stay, from a girls'/guys' getaway to family reunion.

SECTION 3: CONTENT DISTRIBUTION



DISTRIBUTION POINT

Organic Social Media

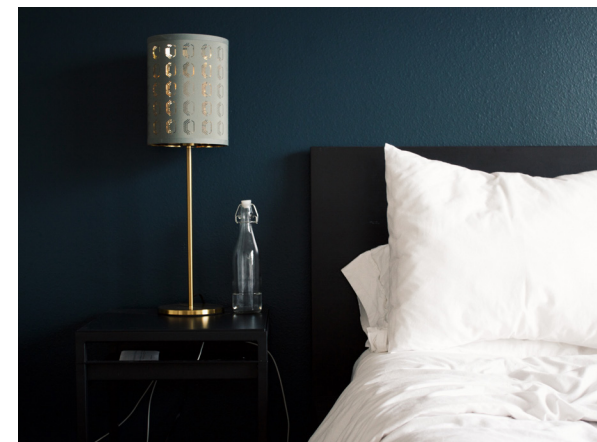
Longform content will make up just part of your overall social media strategy. Make sure to include links back to the pieces within the content hub when possible.

SECTION 3: CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

DISTRIBUTION POINT

Paid Social Media & Search Marketing

Once you see content perform well organically (at the intersection of high sessions and high time on page), put some of your paid social media or Google Ads dollars behind those specific pages to reach new potential visitors in the awareness stage of the buyer's journey. Getting them to "like" your page or sign up for your email updates may be the right conversion KPI for this part of the strategy as you build on the ongoing communication with these new audiences.



SECTION 3: CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

DISTRIBUTION POINT

SEO

What we've seen with clients is that a select few pieces of content perform well in search and then become big traffic drives to those specific pages. So it's about monitoring which pages start to show search traffic, optimizing them to continue to perform and including links to other pages you want them to visit. Then revisit those topics to see if there's another content piece with a similar theme that might drive similar results.

82%

of pageviews from Opal Unpacked's top blog post for 2019 were from organic search traffic.

[See Our Case Study](#)

SECTION 3: CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

DISTRIBUTION POINT

In-Room Custom Magazine

Just like the best digital distribution points are targeted to reach the right customers at the right time, a print magazine full of specific go-see-do recommendations and deeper dives into the culture of the destination are the right fit for those in the midst of their stay with at your hotel, to make sure they have a great time on this trip and come back again.



[See the ePublication](#)



SECTION 3: CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

THE BIG MISTAKE

Mistake #3: Expecting a “build it and they will come” approach.

Content marketing is often associated with SEO, since Google rewards sites that produce ongoing content. But at this point in the 2020s, you cannot expect search engines to be the biggest traffic drivers to your content. With so many players out there creating content that will compete with yours, it's really about taking control of your own destiny with a clear owned media distribution strategy.

THE BIG
MISTAKE





SECTION 4:

EDIT CALENDAR & DEVELOPMENT TEMPLATE

Edit Calendar Development & Template

An editorial calendar is the basic spreadsheet that helps keep your strategy and content execution team on track mid-stream. We've even given you a template to get started on your own.

SECTION 4:

EDIT CALENDAR & DEVELOPMENT TEMPLATE

What to Consider Including on Your Edit Calendar

Think of the below as simply columns on your spreadsheet of ideas you'll produce. Every company's doc will be different but will tend to include the key elements of your **Content Strategy** (Section II).

- Month to be posted
- Topic
- Status
- Description
- Content pillar(s)
- Persona(s)
- Categories (on the blog site)
- Hotel(s) represented
- Destination(s) represented
- Social channels for distribution
- Email campaigns where this piece will be featured



SECTION 4:

EDIT CALENDAR & DEVELOPMENT TEMPLATE

Download the Sample Edit Calendar

You'll find separate tabs for your Content Hub's edit calendar (including columns for social distribution), and separate tabs for future ideas, an ongoing newsletter edit calendar, and basic analytics.

We've put together an edit calendar you can use as a basis for your own

[See the Edit Calendar](#)



SECTION 4:

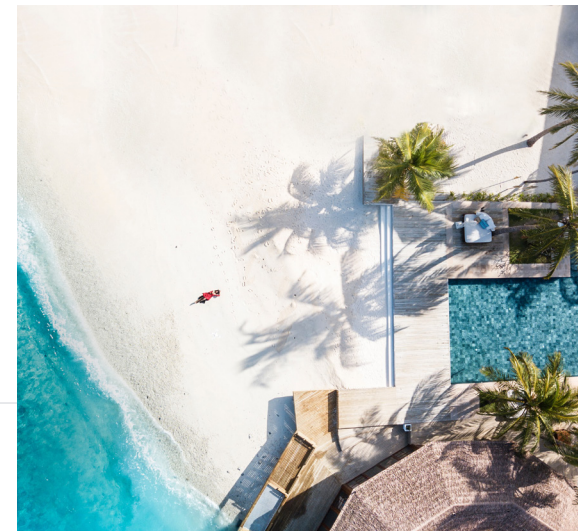
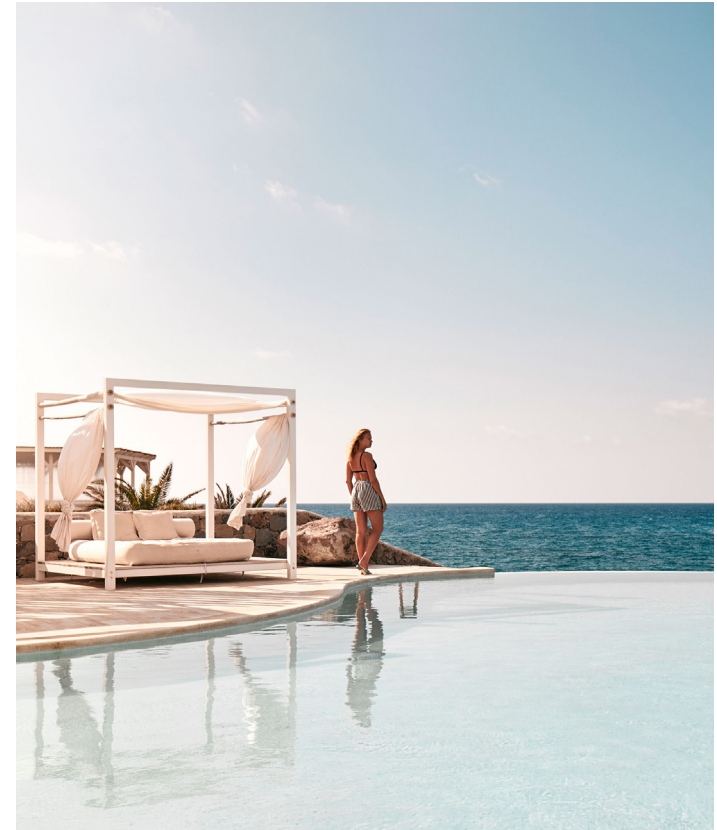
EDIT CALENDAR & DEVELOPMENT TEMPLATE

THE BIG MISTAKE

Mistake #4: Turning solely to other hotels for inspiration.

When it comes to content, you're in the broader travel industry, not just in the hospitality business. This means if you're looking for some best-in-class examples to guide your idea inspiration and execution, think more broadly about who might produce great travel content with a similar brand voice. Some of our recent favorites include retailers (ex: luggage company **Away** and men's gear curator **Huckberry**), **Airbnb Experiences**, and DMOs (ex: **Humboldt County, California** and **Travel Oregon**).

THE BIG MISTAKE



5 Top Examples

To help you put all this theoretical “do this, don’t do that” into the here and now, we’ve broken down 5 samples from our recent work.

SECTION 5:
5 TOP EXAMPLES

Example #1: Driving Off-season Stays (Opal Unpacked)

THE CLIENT

Opal Collection is the luxury sub-brand of Ocean Properties, with 19 resorts and hotels dotted up and down the Eastern Seaboard. Hawthorn has been at the helm of Opal's highly successful content marketing strategy for more than a decade, through the robust content hub, [Opalunpacked.com](https://opalunpacked.com) and its accompanying in-room magazine.

THE OBJECTIVE

Filling shoulder- and off-season rooms will never go away as a priority for hotel marketers. Content can showcase the compelling reasons for a visit, beyond deep discounts or a hollow “please come here now!” marketing pitch.

THE CONTENT

A deliberate focus of our ongoing content work for Opal is more than a dozen annually updated pieces featuring seasonal highlights. The key here is going much further and deeper than the top events and obvious attractions. (ex: A dinner series by an acclaimed local chef themed around traveling the world through food and notable books.) The big driver behind this strategy is email – these seasonal guides are featured in multiple different types of campaigns: a timely property-specific send, separate campaign to the entire 400,000+ Opal-wide send list, and within a pre-arrival campaign for those visiting this property this time of year.



Opal Unpacked

[Go to Site](#)



SECTION 5:
5 TOP EXAMPLES



Noble Nomad

[Go to Site](#)



Example #2: Highlighting a Resort Amenity in a Truly Interesting Way (Noble Nomad)

THE CLIENT

Noble House Hotels & Resorts manages 18 luxury, independent hotels across North America. Unifying themes are incredible restaurants and prime locations uniquely positioned to help guests experience the very best of the area – both on property and off. It comes to life in their content hub, the [Noble Nomad](#) blog we manage.

THE OBJECTIVE

Find a compelling reason to feature the unique attraction of Gateway Canyons's car museum, among the red rock plateaus of western Colorado.

THE CONTENT

Rather than simply a straightforward piece on the car collection at the resort, the angle here is using the museum's docents, big car enthusiasts, to give their take on the list of "The Top 10 Greatest Cars of All Time." The list included a few at the museum, but not all. The docents' expertise is the value here, delivering an engaging read in listicle format that then also accomplishes the marketing objective.

SECTION 5:
5 TOP EXAMPLES

Example #3: Covering a Well-Trodden Topic in Novel Ways (H2 Magazine)

THE CLIENT

Hotel Healdsburg, and its sister properties **H2 Hotel and Harmon Guest House**, are the premier trio of hotel properties in the acclaimed Wine Country town of Healdsburg in northern Sonoma County. In a town that's just as well known for its local food scene as it is its wine, the annual in-room magazine we produce covers both routinely.

THE OBJECTIVE

Highlight the culture and appreciation for local food within the region in a way that doesn't feel "been there, done that" and that also is of service to those currently in the destination.

THE CONTENT

In just this one issue of the magazine, we balanced a mix of stories that highlighted local food purveyors to check out (such as two craft boutiques treating dessert like an art form), take-home tips on how to make the perfect flatbread and pasta, and a profile on some back-to-the-roots winemakers with some eye-opening farming practices. The result is a mix of content that evokes the passions of the region guests can then go out and explore themselves thanks to the in-room distribution point.



H2 Magazine

[View ePub](#)



SECTION 5:
5 TOP EXAMPLES



Benchmark Meetings

[Go to Site](#)



Example #4: Making Meeting Spaces Multi-Dimensional (Benchmark Meetings Guides)

THE CLIENT

Benchmark Hospitality has embraced experiential destination marketing more fully than almost any other top hotel brand, as exhibited by several HSMAI Adrian Awards in 2017 and 2018 for its integrated digital marketing campaign, Mosaic Lifestyle Travel Journal. Hawthorn plays a key role in this ongoing campaign, contributing both blog and evergreen content to this robust content marketing strategy.

THE OBJECTIVE

Bring the same “under the surface” content expertise to Benchmark’s meeting spaces and venues, helping

event planners look beyond just room capacities and schematics when evaluating a property.

THE CONTENT

After years of bringing to life the leisure travel experiences in Benchmark destinations, Hawthorn was tasked with doing the same for each of its hotel’s meetings offerings. The result was a robust library of four sections of “evergreen” content ranging from top area off-site venues to novel team-building activities that lives on each of the property’s micro-sites and is fed by a series of user flows through Benchmark’s global site, benchmarkhotelsandresorts.com.

SECTION 5:
5 TOP EXAMPLES

Example #5: Building Momentum for a Grand Hotel's Re-opening (The Belleview Inn Story)

THE CLIENT

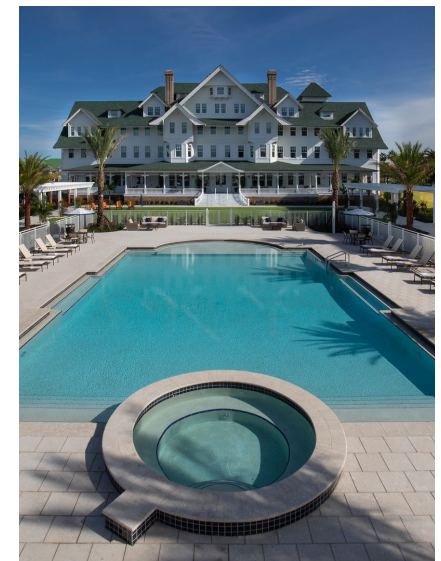
The Belleview Inn was long known as one of Florida's grandest grand hotels dating back to the 19th century. After falling into disrepair, a new investment team embarked on a multi-year, multi-million dollar restoration completed in 2019.

THE OBJECTIVE

Build momentum for the hotel's re-opening by showing the painstaking detail of the restoration, stories from the past, and rebirth of the grand hotel by building a groundswell of new and loyal visitors to the hotel.

THE CONTENT

We created a four-part series rolled out in chapters over a few months as the restoration project neared completion. Each chapter focused on a different aspect of the project (the hotel's past, longtime visitors' memories, the depth of the restoration, and the hotel's most interesting amenities today), paired with social and email campaign distribution to encourage more and more visitors to follow along with the story as the hotel neared its re-opening. The content series lives on as a top-nav section on the hotel's website for users to continue to explore today.



Belleview Inn Story

[Go to Site](#)



CONTACT US

Still Have Questions?

We're here to help. With almost 20 years in hospitality marketing, our in-house content team can fill in the gaps wherever you need us. We can simply help you get organized, or we can build your roadmap, source ideas, write content, design emails or even execute the whole shebang. Feel free to reach out and we can talk through ways to get your content strategy up and running in no time.

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