



The 6 brains you need to build a content team.

A practical guide for founders and marketing leaders

By Alice Xerri · axcontent.com.au

‘Most content teams aren’t built. They just sort of... happen.’

Content usually starts with good intentions. Someone realises the website is outdated. Sales wants better decks. Marketing needs something to post. A founder hears (for the fifth time) that content is important and probably underinvested.

So content begins.

A blog here. Some LinkedIn posts there. A freelancer, maybe. An agency trial. A junior hire with a broad job description and a lot of enthusiasm.

From the outside, it looks like good progress. But inside the business, it often feels heavier than expected. Drafts take longer than they should. Feedback is inconsistent. Everyone has opinions, but no one quite owns the outcome. Content gets published, but it doesn’t really pull its weight.

If this feels familiar, it’s not because you’ve done anything wrong. It’s because this is how most companies end up with content.

WHERE THINGS USUALLY GO OFF TRACK

The three most common mistakes

When content starts to feel messy or overwhelming, teams tend to reach for the same fixes. They're understandable moves, especially under pressure. They're also the reason a lot of content engines never quite settle.

Hiring a VA first

A VA can move things along, but they can't decide what matters, what to prioritise, or how any of it connects back to the business. Without direction and ownership, extra hands just create more noise to manage. What you end up with is more activity, not more impact.

01

DIYing content as a founder or senior marketer

When the most expensive people in the business are doing the most time-consuming content work, the whole system becomes fragile. Content only moves when they have capacity. Your job isn't to be the permanent writer or editor. It's to set direction and build a setup where content can move without you in every draft.

02

Hiring one junior person to "do content"

Content isn't one skill. It's strategic thinking, customer insight, editing, production, distribution, and analysis. Expecting one junior person to cover all of that sets them up to struggle. They spend most of their time reacting to requests. Strategy never really forms. Impact stays limited.

03

These mistakes all point to the same underlying issue: teams jump straight to job titles and output before they've worked out how content is meant to function inside the business. A more useful place to start isn't with roles at all. It's with the kinds of thinking that need to be present.

BEFORE YOU THINK ABOUT HIRES

Content needs a job first

What is content actually meant to do in your business?

Content isn't just blogs and social posts. It's how buyers educate themselves before sales gets involved. It's how long deals are supported. It's how trust is built in categories where credibility matters.

The problem is that content is often expected to do all of this at once, without anyone making clear trade-offs. That's usually the moment when content starts to feel heavier and more difficult than it should.

A QUICK SENSE CHECK**Ask yourself these four questions**

- Is there one person who's genuinely accountable for content *working*, not just content being produced?
- Is there a clear narrative about what you're trying to teach the market, or does it change depending on who you ask?
- Do you have a real editorial rhythm, or just ideas living in a doc somewhere?
- Can you see any connection between content and revenue, sales conversations, or customer outcomes?

If these feel fuzzy, it's a sign that content has grown important without being properly designed. A more useful way to approach this is to look at the different brains a content function needs to work. Once those are covered, even with a small team, hiring decisions get much clearer.

THE SIX BRAINS

Every content team needs **these six brains.**

Not six job titles. Not six hires. Six distinct kinds of thinking.

- | | | |
|-----------|------------------------------|--|
| 01 | The Strategist | Sets direction. Decides what content is for. |
| 02 | Voice of the Customer | Keeps content grounded in how buyers think. |
| 03 | The Managing Editor | Turns intent into output. Keeps it moving. |
| 04 | The Producer | Turns ideas into something real. |
| 05 | The Distributor | Makes sure content actually gets seen. |
| 06 | The Analyst | Stops content running on gut feel alone. |

BRAIN 01

THE STRATEGIST

01

This is the brain that decides what content is actually for.

Not in a vague “to get more brand awareness” way. In a commercially-focused one. What are we trying to achieve with content right now? Who is it for? What are we choosing to focus on, and what are we deliberately not doing?

Without this brain, content becomes reactive. Requests pile up, priorities shift constantly, and everything gets debated because nothing was decided up front.

This brain is responsible for:

- Setting a clear content direction tied to business goals
- Defining themes, priorities, and trade-offs
- Deciding where content should win and where it shouldn't compete
- Protecting the narrative as more people get involved

In early teams, this brain often sits with a founder, CMO, or senior content lead. It's also the one that makes the most sense to bring in fractionally first: you need senior decision-making long before you need full-time production.

When this brain is covered, content stops feeling scattered and starts to feel intentional.

Is the Strategist brain missing from your team?

This is the work I do as a fractional content lead. I come in at a senior level to set direction, define priorities, and build a content function that actually connects to your business goals. If your content feels scattered or reactive, this is usually where to start.

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BRAIN 02

VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER

02

This is the brain that keeps content grounded in how buyers actually think, speak, and decide.

It's easy to assume this happens naturally. After all, everyone in the business talks to customers in some way. But when this brain isn't deliberately covered, content slowly turns inward. It reflects how the company talks about itself, not how buyers frame their problems.

That's when content starts sounding generic, overly polished, or strangely disconnected from real objections.

This brain is responsible for:

- Bringing real customer language, questions, and concerns into content
- Mapping content to actual buying journeys and decision points
- Pressure-testing ideas against what buyers care about, not what the business wants to say
- Keeping content focused on problems before solutions

This brain doesn't always sit in the content team. It often lives across product marketing, sales, customer success, research, or through direct customer interviews. What matters isn't the title. It's whether someone is actively feeding real insight into what gets created.

When this brain is missing, content becomes self-referential and safe. When it's present, content feels familiar to the reader in a way that's hard to fake.

BRAIN 03

THE MANAGING EDITOR

03

This is the brain that turns intent into output.

Strategy might be clear. Ideas might be strong. But without someone owning the day-to-day mechanics, content stays theoretical for far too long. Things slip. Drafts linger. Standards wobble all over the place. The Managing Editor is the one who makes content move and keeps it moving.

This brain is responsible for:

- Turning strategy and ideas into an editorial plan
- Briefing work clearly and assigning it to the right people
- Keeping things on track, on time, and to a consistent standard
- Acting as the final gatekeeper for quality, voice, and accuracy

This is the brain that reduces friction. Writers know what they're aiming for. Feedback becomes clearer. Content stops bouncing endlessly between stakeholders.

In regulated industries, this brain also plays a critical role in managing reviews and approvals. Not by slowing things down, but by designing workflows that balance speed with safety.

When this brain is missing, content feels chaotic and exhausting. When it's covered, content becomes predictable in the best possible way.

BRAIN 04

THE PRODUCER

04

This is the brain that turns ideas into something real.

Strategy and plans don't mean much until someone actually makes the thing. The article, the guide, the deck, the video, the email. This brain is about execution, craft, and getting things done.

Producers are often underestimated because their work looks obvious once it's finished. But good production is the difference between content that's just correct and content that's actually useful.

This brain is responsible for:

- Writing content that's clear, structured, and easy to follow
- Designing visuals that support understanding, not decoration
- Producing formats that suit the channel, whether that's long-form, short-form, or multimedia
- Making complex ideas feel approachable without dumbing them down

This brain usually shows up as a group rather than a single role. Writers, designers, video producers, and editors all sit here. Strong Producers understand the audience and the context they're creating for.

In early teams, this work is often shared between one strong generalist and a bench of freelancers. As content becomes more important, Producers tend to specialise by format or channel.

Need a Producer brain you can rely on?

I work with B2B and fintech companies as a content writer and copywriter. Long-form articles, website copy, and editorial content that's clear, well-structured, and built for the audience you're actually trying to reach. Not just correct. Worth reading.

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BRAIN 05

THE DISTRIBUTOR

05

This is the brain that makes sure content gets seen.

A lot of teams put huge effort into creating good content, then just publish it once and move on. When that happens, content performance looks disappointing, even when the work itself is strong.

Distribution shouldn't be an afterthought. It's a discipline that should be prioritised from the start.

This brain is responsible for:

- Choosing the right channels for each piece of content
- Deciding how and when content shows up, not just where
- Repurposing one asset into multiple channel-native formats
- Building repetition and consistency so content has a chance to land

This brain often shows up as social, email, lifecycle, or community building roles. What matters is that someone owns reach and frequency, not just creation. When this brain is missing, good content disappears unknowingly. When it's covered, content builds over time instead of starting from zero every week.

BRAIN 06

THE ANALYST

06

This is the brain that stops content from running on gut feel alone.

Without it, teams guess. They keep producing what feels right, what gets positive internal feedback, or what they've always done. Sometimes that works. Often, it doesn't scale.

The Analyst brings reality back into the room.

This brain is responsible for:

- Understanding what content is actually doing in the business
- Connecting content to outcomes like pipeline, sales conversations, activation, or retention
- Identifying what to double down on and what to stop
- Feeding insight back into strategy and prioritisation

SEO usually lives partly here. Not as a standalone activity, but as a source of signal. What people are searching for, what's ranking, what's declining, and where there's real demand that content could meet.

When this brain is missing, content repeats itself and hopes for the best. When it's covered, content evolves with intention instead of habit.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

How your first content hire grows into the six brains

In most companies, the six brains don't appear all at once. They usually start compressed into one senior role, then slowly separate as content becomes more important and more complex. This is why the first content hire matters so much. You're not just hiring a person. You're setting the shape of the entire function.

This is also why teams that start with junior execution often struggle later. They've hired production before they've hired ownership. A strong Head of Content doesn't just "do content". They hold the function while it's forming, then deliberately decide which brains to keep, which to hand off, and when.

STAGE 01**EARLY STAGE**

One person, many brains

01

At the beginning, content leadership is broad and hands-on. The Head of Content typically covers the Strategist, the Managing Editor, parts of the Voice of the Customer, light Analyst work, and selective Producer work on high-leverage pieces.

Execution is supported by freelancers or agencies, but the thinking stays central. The focus is not volume. It's getting the narrative right, setting expectations, and building something that doesn't collapse the moment more work is added. This is where fractional leadership works particularly well. You get senior ownership and decision-making without committing to a full-time role before the function is ready for it.

Is this the stage you're at?

As a fractional content lead, I come in early to hold the strategy, set the standards, and build the foundations so that when you're ready to hire, you're hiring into something that already works. If this sounds familiar, it's probably worth a conversation.

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STAGE 02

GROWTH STAGE

Brains start to separate

02

As content demand increases, the pressure shifts. The Head of Content starts handing off production first. Writers, designers, and video producers come in, either in-house or through a stable freelance bench. Distribution often becomes a named responsibility rather than an afterthought.

Strategy, prioritisation, and coaching take up more time. Feedback loops tighten, and content becomes more consistent. The role becomes less about making things and more about making sure the right things are made.

STAGE 03

SCALE STAGE

Structure replaces heroics

03

Once content supports multiple products, segments, or go-to-market motions, the function needs more structure. The Managing Editor brain often becomes a dedicated role. Analysis becomes more formal. SEO and performance are treated as inputs to strategy, not side projects.

The Head of Content focuses on keeping the six brains aligned, managing senior stakeholders, making bigger bets on formats, channels, and themes, and evolving the team as the business evolves.

Need senior content thinking without a full-time hire?

Whether you're building a content function from scratch or adding structure to something that's grown without it, I work with businesses as a fractional content lead and content strategist. Senior thinking without the full-time overhead.

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WHY FRACTIONAL WORKS EARLY

The case for fractional content leadership

The aim isn't dependency. It's momentum.

Fractional Head of Content roles work best when the goal is to build, not just maintain. They compress senior leadership into a few focused days a week, bring experience from teams that have already scaled, and design the function so it can eventually run without them.

For most companies, this model makes sense in the early and growth stages. You get the brains you need before you pay for full-time headcount you're not ready to use properly.

Senior thinking from day one	Builds a function that scales	No full-time headcount needed
Strategy, priorities, and foundations set before any hires are made.	Designed so the function can run independently once it's established.	The right level of investment for the stage your business is actually at.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Alice Xerri

Content strategist, copywriter & fractional content lead

I work with B2B, fintech, and SaaS companies that take content seriously. That means anything from website copy and long-form content to full content strategy and fractional leadership for teams that need senior ownership without a full-time hire.

This guide came from a lot of conversations with founders and marketing leaders who were frustrated that content wasn't pulling its weight. When we dug in, they'd usually skipped straight to output before any of the foundations were in place.

If it resonated, I'd love to talk.

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axcontent.com.au · alice@axcontent.com.au