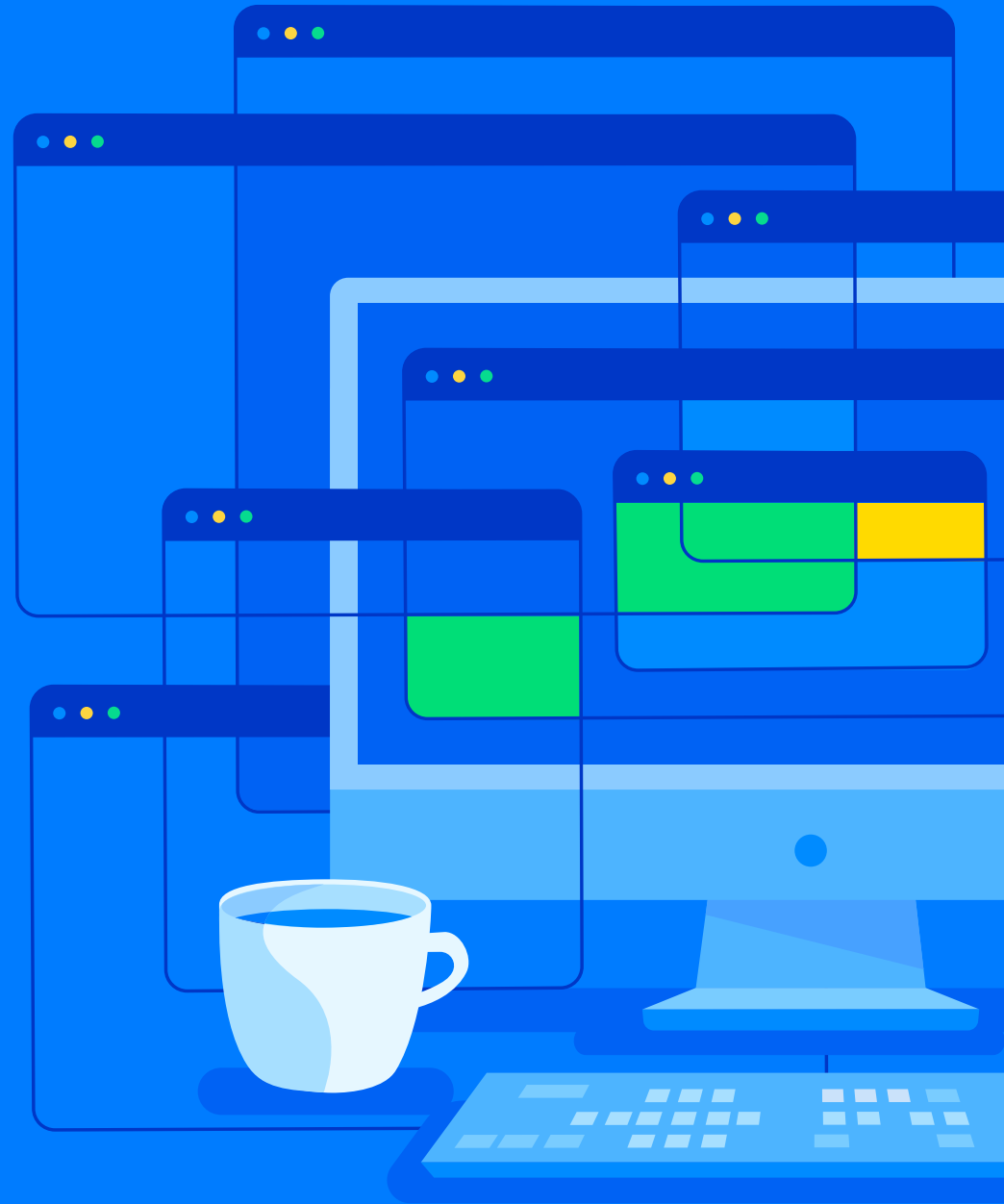


Content reusability workbook

The what, why and how
behind structured content
and content modeling



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INTRODUCTION

The name is content, reusable content

If you have a hand in digital content creation and distribution, there's a good chance you're feeling thinly stretched across the many channels, devices, personas and regions you have to support. You probably have archives of aging content to maintain and a growing list of new content to ship. Multiply these tasks by the number of channels your brand is present on and content becomes a cost center rather than business advantage.

Wouldn't it be great if there was an easier, less manual and time-consuming way to keep content uniform and deliver it everywhere consumers expect it (e.g., websites, mobile apps, voice assistants, wearables)? We have two words for you: reusable content. Reusable content is exactly what it sounds like – it's content that can be reused as is or modified to be distributed again and again to different audiences, across different channels. This type of content helps teams work smarter, not harder.

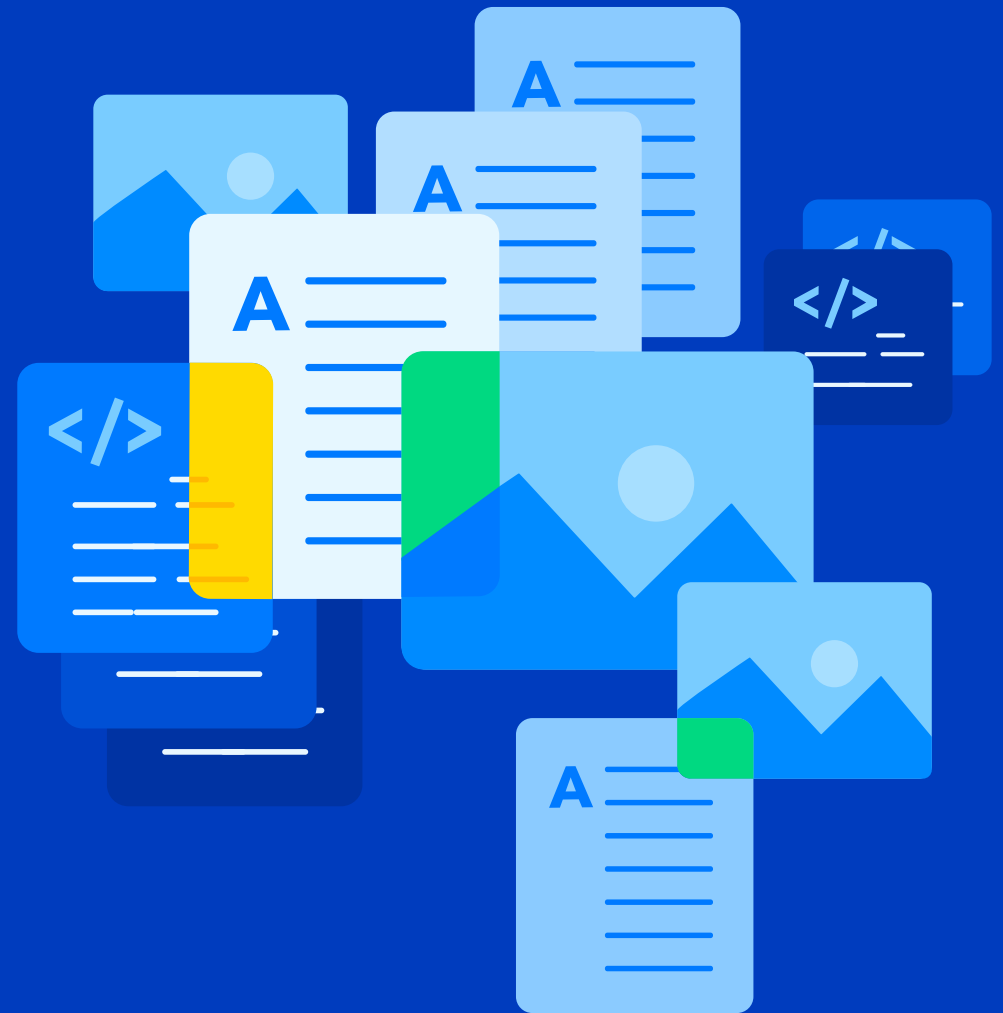
An effective content reusability strategy adopts the right technology and the right approach. Digital-savvy businesses are trading out their WYSIWYG-focused CMSes for flexible, headless content platforms. That's the right technology. The right approach, which we'll focus on in this workbook, is structured content – the foundation for reusable content. Structured content approaches content as a single system as opposed to a single output. As long as content creators and developers stay inside the bounds of their brand's structured content strategy – which will include carefully curated content models – they'll have the freedom to reuse and replicate content to their heart's content (no pun intended).

In the following pages, you'll learn all about structured content, its many benefits and how you can use it across your brand with the help of content models and a supportive content platform.

PART 1

Structured content: The foundation of reusability

Understanding what it is and its many benefits



What is structured content?

Structured content frees your information from being tied to a specific interface. Instead of content being formatted for a single platform, say a website on a mobile device, it's deconstructed into individual components that can be referenced and reused anywhere. In short, content is separate from context. Structured content provides a backbone for present and future work as the demand for diverse digital-first experiences grows.

Let's look at an example. Say your brand is having a sale that you'd like to promote on your homepage and a social media channel. You'd also like to feature that sale on your mobile app. Ordinarily, you'd copy, paste and adjust the content to meet the layout needs of each platform – hopefully you like working in sets of threes. With structured content, you sidestep this duplicative work. Instead, you determine which content components will be used across channels and segment them. In this way, you create content once and have the power to pull it into as many layouts as necessary.

Why is structured content so important?

Right now, structured content is becoming the standard for scalable digital experiences. It's risk-averse, aids in discoverability and makes everything your brand creates easy to reuse. With structured content, you can say goodbye to memorizing copy-and-paste keyboard functions. Reusable content maximizes team productivity and mobilizes developers and creatives to work in parallel on new projects, which is especially important if you aim to create fluid, timely content that changes with customer needs and desires.

Structured content benefits

FLEXIBLE Enables content reuse

SCALABLE Supports omichannel presence

CONSISTENT Powers universal updates

DISCOVERABLE Improves SEO rankings

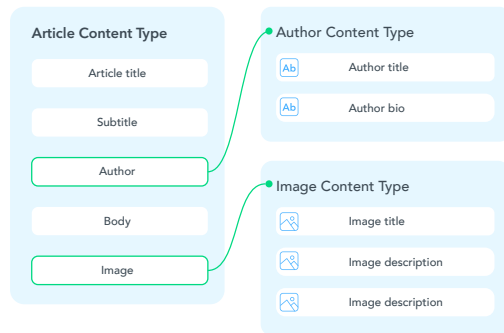
EFFICIENT Eliminates repetitive edits

AFFORDABLE Less work, less maintenance

Structured vs. unstructured content: The story of chunks and blobs

As a concept, structured content can be difficult to grasp. It's a new way to view publishing. To start, let's talk about the differences between structured and unstructured content: enter chunks and blobs. We know these aren't the most pleasant-sounding terms but, as accepted industry terminology, we'll stick with them.

Here's a quick look at the differences between each "type" of content.



Chunks

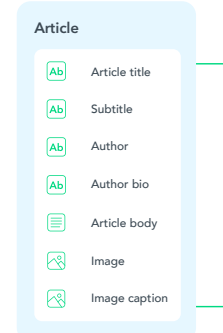
Bits of content that aren't tethered to a particular interface. They can be structured and restructured to fit different digital spaces.

AKA: Structured content sweetheart

Lifespan: Infinite

Identifiers:

- Reusable
- Flexible
- SEO-friendly
- Interface-agnostic



Cannot easily reuse parts of this content (e.g. author) because it's all living in one content type

Blobs

Groups of content tightly coupled with layout and other assets. This type of content is common with traditional CMSes.

AKA: One-time use, WYSIWYG

Lifespan: Nearing retirement

Identifiers:

- Single-use
- Rigid
- Hard to index
- Interface-dependent

Going for the goal: What reusable content helps you achieve

Goal	How structured content helps you achieve it
SCALABLE Empower content creators to do more, better	<p>In the world of content strategy, COPE stands for “create once, publish everywhere.” With structured content, there are no restrictions to the number or times or ways you can reuse content. Similarly, there are no restrictions to which channels your content lives on.</p> <p>When your team creates something exciting, they can manipulate and launch it with speed.</p>
FLEXIBLE Create unique customer experiences	<p>Personalization is about serving the right content to the right audience at the right time. It shows consumers that your brand is tuned into their unique patterns and preferences – it shows you care.</p> <p>With structured content, you can readily tweak content, even ever so slightly, so it resonates with each customer persona and site visitor. You can even plug bits of content into your favorite personalization tool for easy audience and content segmentation.</p>
CONSISTENT Edit once, updated everywhere	<p>Risk-averse is another good descriptor for structured content. When distributed content consisting of individual components is maintained locally, you and your team can feel confident that any adjustments made are reflected across the board no matter how many places the same content lives.</p>
DISCOVERABLE Improve SEO rankings	<p>Structured content models make incorporating metadata simple and intuitive. Depending on the attributes concentrated within your models, editorial and developer teams can fill and publish them quickly.</p> <p>Structured content aligns with the way search engines crawl data, making your content more discoverable. This modular approach also ensures your content works with assistive technology making it accessible to people with visual or auditory impairments.</p>
EFFICIENT AND AFFORDABLE Stick to a budget and remain productive	<p>While it requires a good deal of time spent planning, testing and tweaking, moving to a structured model allows your organization to collaborate effectively, reducing the frequency of edits or implementation changes down the line. With properly structured content, any changes that do come over time are often narrow in scope and require little effort or monetary investment to implement.</p>

PART 2

Content modeling: Activating structured content

How to apply structured content to your
business needs



Content modeling

With its many benefits, you're probably thinking, "I'm ready to adopt structured content now. How can I get started?" If you're convinced we're mind-readers, we invite you to slow down, relax and have a cup of tea. Let's first discuss content modeling – the vehicle for employing structured content.

Your content model documents and organizes all content components (chunks) within a project. It defines the relationships these components have with one another which helps developers determine how to nest each chunk of content.

In part one, we introduced the components of structured content as chunks – the term used to separate components of structured content from those associated with unstructured content (blobs). Content modeling has its own set of terms and definitions which the developers spearheading the planning, building and testing of such models must learn to implement and utilize for this content strategy to be successful.

Now that you have a general understanding of what content modeling is, it's time for us to get more specific.



Content models [are] one of the most important content strategy tools at [your] disposal. It allows [you] to represent content in a way that translates the intention, stakeholder needs and functional requirements from the user experience design into something that can be built by developers implementing a CMS. The content model helps [you] make sure that the content vision becomes a reality.

Rachel Lovinger

Content Strategy Director, Razorfish

Content model components

Because content models show informational hierarchies, we think the best way to learn about their components is with a top-down approach, outlining the largest overarching pieces and then diving into the nooks and crannies (or, in this case, the entries, fields and references).

Note: Content modeling is not a universal language. Different systems and content strategists use different terminology to label the various aspects of content models. Confusing, right? To bring order to the chaos, we've added a "/" to denote different terms which refer to the same content modeling idea or component.



CONTENT TYPE

Content types are the key pillars of content models and represent groups of related items. This serves as a blueprint for content entries. The built-out structure of a blog, author bio and individual product listing are all examples of content types.



ENTRY/CONTENT ITEM

When an author fills a content type with specific, unique information, it's considered an entry/content item. For example, a blog is a content type whereas an individual, fully fleshed-out blog post is an entry/content item.



FIELD/ATTRIBUTE

Fields or attributes are individual elements of text/media that make up a content item or content type. Examples of common field types include short text fields, media fields and reference fields.

(Note: Uploaded media files are called assets.)



REFERENCES/RELATIONSHIPS/LINKS

References, relationships and links explain how content types are related. They allow you to connect different entries so that any changes and updates made to one content type populate universally.



ASSEMBLY/MODULE

An assembly is made up of multiple references and content entries. These components often account for context, presentation and content. The most common assembly types are web pages or landing pages. If we continue with the examples above, a blog homepage is an assembly/module. Assemblies can be fixed, flexible or include a combination of both assembly types.



FLEXIBLE

Offers one-to-many fields that allow a field to be linked to multiple entries. Assemblies can be arranged in different orders to present information in order of importance to end-users. Certain design elements can also be controlled. Not all components within one assembly have to be flexible, there's the option to restrict elements from being flexible through validations. Flexible assemblies offer greater freedom with less governance.



FIXED

Fixed assemblies are made of one-to-one fields, meaning they can only be linked to a single entry. Content authors are restricted from making layout changes meaning they cannot reorder content. This assembly type has stricter governance to support consistent user experiences.

Content modeling basics

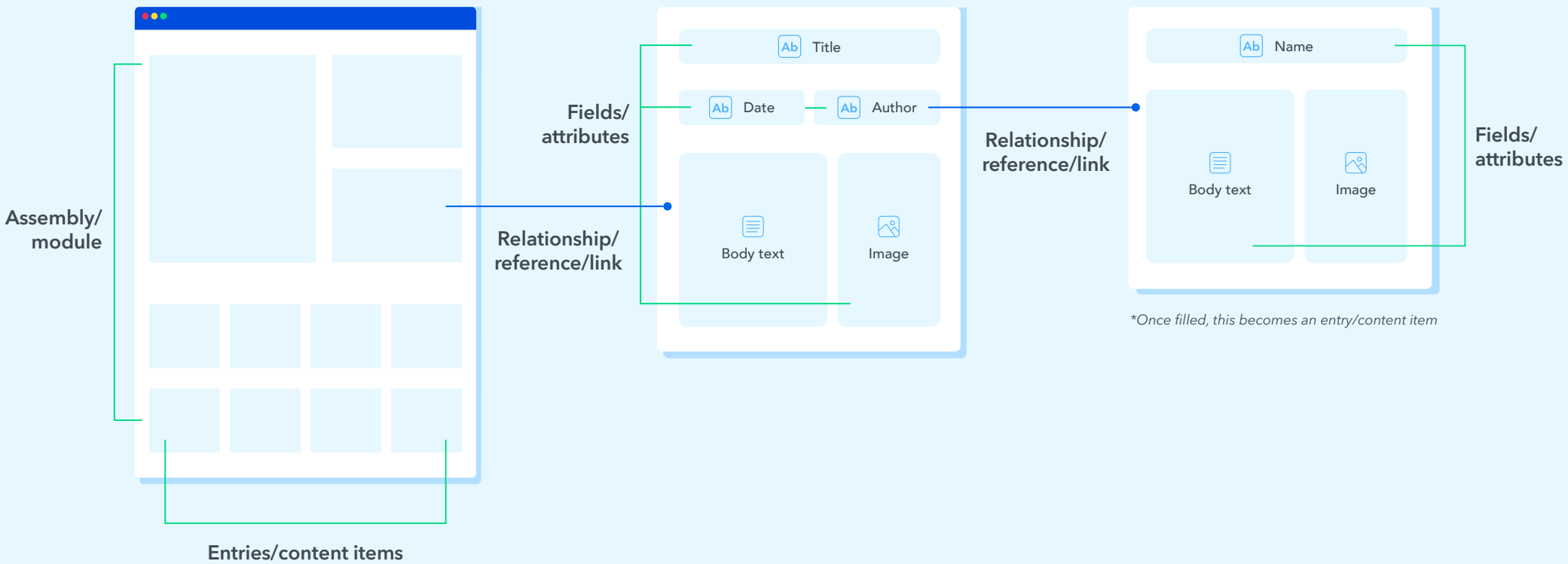
Take a deeper dive into content modeling definitions and concepts in Contentful's Help Center

[Learn more](#)

Blog homepage assembly/module

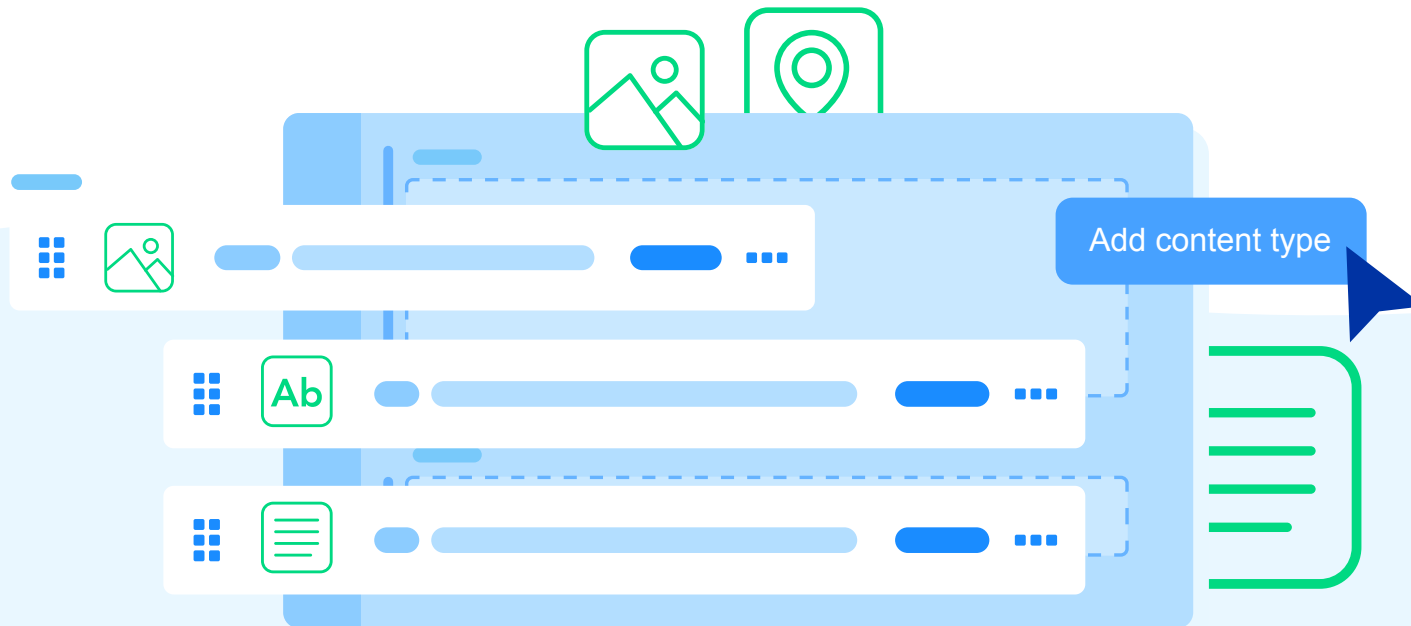
Blog content type

Blog author content type



Content models can get sophisticated pretty quickly as content types and their relationships grow increasingly granular. The goal with content modeling isn't to break your content into the smallest chunks possible. The goal is to segment things small enough that your job gets easier – there is a risk of overdoing it. A good rule of thumb is to go no deeper than five nested relationships. Creating models deeper than this sends creatives down a rabbit hole of relationships and content types should they need to edit content that sits in the lowest levels of your organization's content hierarchy.

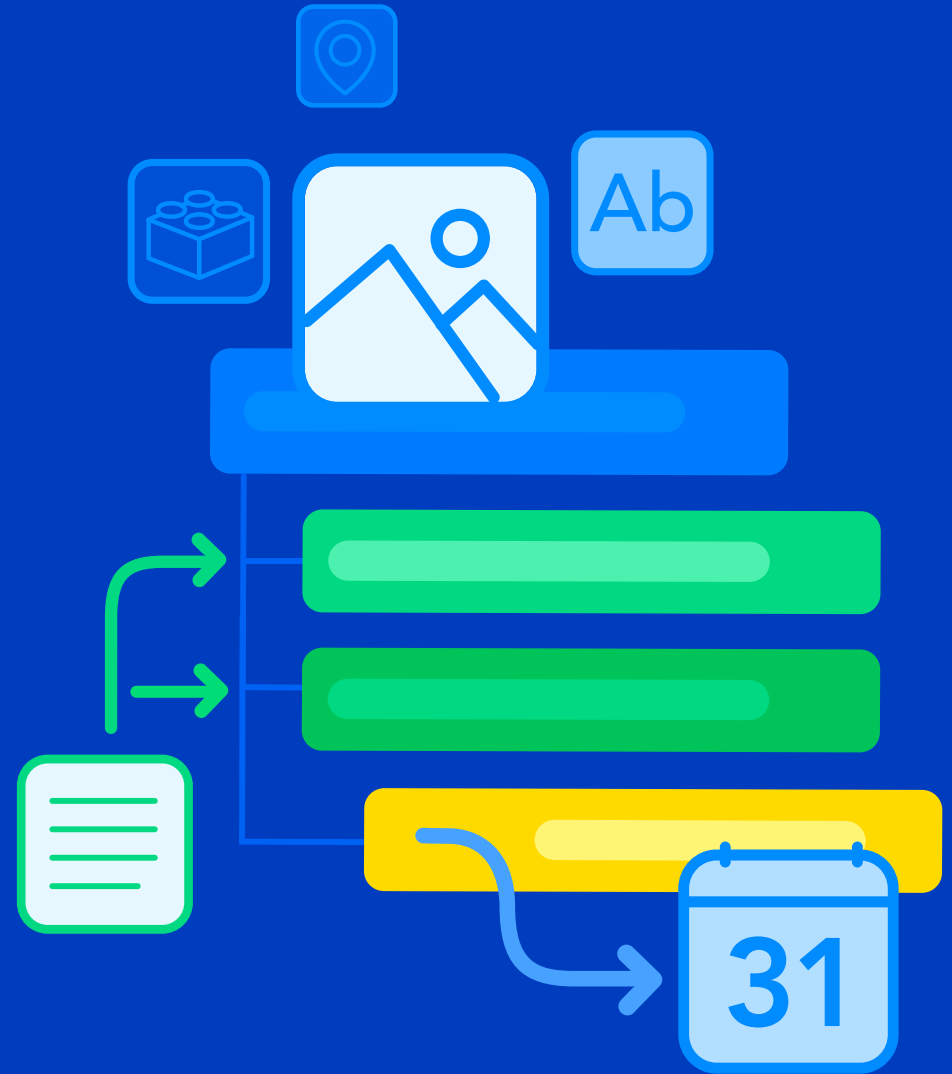
Give your developers a jump-start on content modeling lingo and best practices with our [white paper on content modeling](#).



PART 3

Crafting content models

Planning, drafting and launching



Next steps for implementing structured content and content models

Getting started with a reusable approach to content requires the right technology, the right approach and some change management for those who work with your content. Successful content modeling requires more planning than building at the onset. It also requires collaboration, drafting and testing, among other things.

Below we outline how to make content modeling a central part of your content strategy in four steps:

- 1 Onboard stakeholders**
- 2 Draft your content model**
- 3 Select the right platform and build**
- 4 Test your content model**



STEP 1

Get stakeholders on board with content modeling

Like most aspects of successful digital transformation, content modeling is a team sport. It requires cross-functional members of technical and creative teams to come together at every stage of the process. Having the right stakeholders present early on ensures that the model ideated, drafted and used supports the following items: business goals, technological preferences and productivity.

Meeting these requirements is easier said than done, however, as each stakeholder will likely believe their needs and rationale to be the most important (although they may not admit it openly). It might seem cliché, but every stakeholder's interests, fears and desires here are valid, which is why gaining consensus on what elements complement the end goals is so important.

While your organization may invite other stakeholders into the conversation, content modeling will require, at the very least, these four players: platform/content strategists, developers, content creators and designers. Below we outline each stakeholder's role, interests, fears and superpowers related to content modeling. There's also a hint or two on how to help each stakeholder feel more comfortable adopting this new content strategy.



Platform/content strategist

ROLE

Helps plan, analyze and draft content models

INTERESTED IN

- Increasing team productivity
- Positively impacting business goals to move KPIs
- Controlling governance to maintain content quality and brand consistency

FEARS

- Investing in a content model that doesn't work
- Wasting time and resources
- Changes in team dynamics due to opposing opinions

SUPERPOWER

Can unite stakeholders and help them develop the skills necessary to build and use content models successfully

GETTING BUY-IN

Point out the planning, testing and adjusting that will occur to help ensure the content model lives up to its expectations



Developer

ROLE

Builds out and adjusts content models

INTERESTED IN

- Creating a content model that requires little maintenance or updates in the future
- Building something low-code with dependable delivery

FEARS

- Developing the "wrong" content model
- Extensive updates to the content model in the future

SUPERPOWER

Can enhance project management and communication skills to ensure the final content model supports all stakeholder needs

GETTING BUY-IN

Highlight how current, thoughtful development efforts and agile technology can translate into less work in the future



Content creator

ROLE

Writes, edits and curates content within the content model

INTERESTED IN

- Reusing content for experimentation or personalization
- Maintaining consistent content and eliminating errors
- Increasing productivity

FEARS

- Losing the ability to format written text and images
- A complex model will apprehend content creation

SUPERPOWER

Can become familiar with content modeling terminology and how to utilize the content model to enhance productivity

GETTING BUY-IN

Discuss how flexible assemblies and microservices increase creator efficiency and content reusability



Designer

ROLE

Supports overall front-end design

INTERESTED IN

- Maintaining a consistent, cohesive brand presentation across all channels
- Ensuring the flow of content and imagery makes sense to consumers

FEARS

- Losing the ability to dictate design should content creators have too much formatting freedom
- An unattractive front-end user experience

SUPERPOWER

Can extend editorial freedom and enhance brand consistency by creating a library of design components for reuse

GETTING BUY-IN

Include them in review and testing phases, asking and actively incorporating their design recommendations



STEP 2

Draft your content models

Before you jump into creating your “real-deal” content model, you should create a draft. During this phase, it’s important to consider the expanse of your brand’s content, where it lives and the experience customers have with it. Once you have an understanding of your present-day content, you’ll need to consider what your future plans are. Would you like to expand that content? Restructure it? Change directions? Because so much goes into the drafting stage, it’s important to take your time and really understand the strategy behind your content. For more information on website strategy and how a content model can fit into your own, consult our [guide on modern website strategy](#).

You can draft preliminary content models several ways. The direction you choose will largely depend on how visual, hands-on or technology-oriented you and your team are. Some teams will find themselves in a sea of color-coded sticky notes, others will scrawl and sketch on a whiteboard. Still, some may look to an online whiteboard and visual collaboration tools.

30-minute course

Take Contentful’s Intro to Content Modeling course for guidance on developing your first content model

Get started

Areas to consider	Questions to ask
IMPLEMENTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can the content model use existing setups? • How easily can the content model be adjusted? • Can new content types and fields be added quickly? • Do tools exist that empower content model updates over time?
GOVERNANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who should be able to create, edit and publish content? • What content should require permissions for legal/ethical reasons? • What content validations do you plan to introduce? • What is the process for getting content published?
USER EXPERIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will authors and editors interact with this model? • Will team members want to sort content? If so, what filters are important? • Are fields labeled in a way that's easy for non-technical users to understand? Is help text available to offer more context? • Does the content model simplify creating, editing and publishing content? • Is it possible to split up content after creating it? • If error messages occur, do they clearly describe the issue and outline steps to resolve it?
VISITOR EXPERIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can customers get the information and experience they're expecting from the model in use? • Does the structure, layout and information hierarchy make sense or does it hinder the customer journey? • Do the content model and technology support localization?
METADATA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What metadata is important to include? Is it easy for content creators to input it themselves? • Can additional data (alt-tags) be incorporated to extend content accessibility?

After answering these questions, you and your stakeholders may decide to edit your draft to include new fields. You may also decide to add feature requirements to your CMS shopping list so you can fully deliver on every element you deem important.



STEP 3

Select the right platform and build

When you and your team feel confident with your conceptual content model, it's time to bring it to the digital world, which will require the right content management system. If you're locked into the current CMS you have, first understand how flexible it is – or isn't – when it comes to content modeling, and ensure your work is within your technical limitations. If you're in the market for a more flexible tool, use your content modeling expectations to drive that search. A content platform like Contentful offers workflow capabilities, interface flexibility and collaboration opportunities to drive your content modeling and reusability efforts.

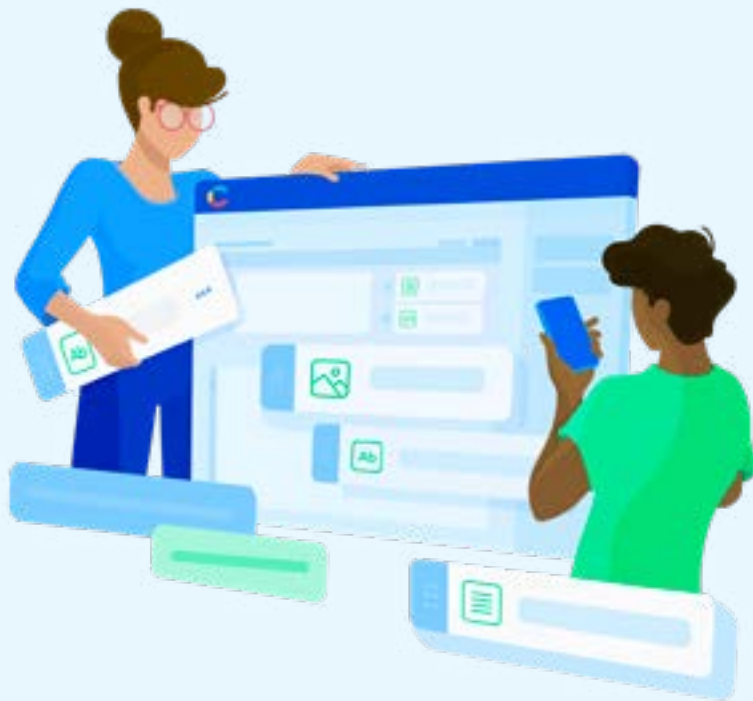
What is a content platform?

Learn more about Contentful and how it powers scalable digital experiences

[Learn more](#)

Below are a few features of content management systems ideal for supporting content models – and growing digital-first brands.

Characteristic	What it means	Why it's important for content modeling
HEADLESS	A backend-focused system that separates content from the interface so it can be served to any device.	Headless technology allows teams to take advantage of the full benefits of content modeling by supporting delivery to any presentation layer.
API-FIRST	A prioritized feature that enables applications, software and services to communicate with one another.	API-first technology makes introducing microservices simple and straightforward. A connected tech stack and effective content model allow your content to be usable across your technologies.
CLOUD-NATIVE	Low-maintenance data backup and storage occur within the cloud. Delivery is continuous and, with a CDN, becomes local and reliable.	Cloud-native technology is secure and risk-averse. If you make an adjustment to a content model and the outcome is less than ideal, you can roll back to one of the backed-up versions of your model living on the cloud.



STEP 4

Test your content model

Content model draft? Check. Technology to support it? Check. Now it's time to marry the two with testing. During the testing phase, the goal is to work out any kinks or questionable areas based on stakeholder review. This feedback will inform edits which, when implemented, will result in a ready-for-deployment content model.

Check off each step you take while testing the content model within your CMS

- Host usability testing with content authors and editors
- Review front-end appearances with designers
- Make necessary adjustments
- Migrate all content to the final model

Once the steps above are complete, developers can rest easy. As content, customer journeys, marketplaces and digital landscapes continue to expand, you'll find it necessary to adjust your content and content strategy. At this point, it's back to the drawing board (or should we say content models).

Does your content solution support content reusability?

See how Contentful supports content reuse and future-proofed content strategies

[Request a demo](#)



Learn more about content modeling on Contentful's Learning Center

[Explore courses](#)



RESOURCE LIBRARY

While this guide covers a lot, there is still plenty to learn about structured content and content modeling. Here's a collection of videos, articles and online courses you can tap into to deepen your understanding of these concepts.



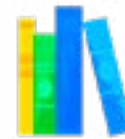
Watch

- [Structured content explained](#)
A two-minute video explaining structured content.
- [Content modeling webinar: Practice makes perfect](#)
An hour-long webinar recording that focuses on real-world, successful content models and strategies.



Read

- [Content modeling basics](#)
A long scroll full of hot tips for creating contentful models within the Contentful web app.
- [Content modeling: Creating structure and navigation](#)
A white paper outlining three basic, reliable content models and strategies.



Learn

- [Introduction to content modeling](#)
A free 30-minute online course that covers content modeling terminology and procedures to get started.
- [Content modeling weekly](#)
Free weekly lessons on content types, relationships, components, inheritance, composition and more.