



Storytelling tips from the experts

Insights from content strategy professionals inside and outside the utility industry

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Utilities may not think they have stories to tell, but they do. And those stories are what resonate with your customers.

But how do you identify, plan, deliver, manage, and measure the success of those stories? And how do you use them to support your utility's business goals and brand?

At the [2018 E Source Forum](#), we interviewed Caroline Aoyagi-Stom, digital content strategist at Southern California Edison (SCE), and Blaine Kyлло, senior strategist at [Content Strategy Inc.](#), on best practices for utility content strategy.

Getting started with a content strategy at your utility

When you're developing or improving a content strategy, it's important to:

- Align each piece of content with corporate goals to deliver clear results to your leadership team.
- Build a team of strong writers and storytellers, and make sure you loop in your web team or a web vendor early in the process.
- Start with your most important corporate priority, figure out how content can support that priority, and then build a strategy to create, promote, and govern that content.

Kyllo and Aoyagi-Stom explained content strategy basics (**figure 1**); how to build a content team when you have limited resources and budget (**figure 2**); and the importance of finding team members who can ensure the accuracy, quality, and efficiency of content (**figure 3**).

Figure 1: What is content strategy?

In this Forum 2018 video clip, Blaine Kyllo advises that you start your content strategy journey by addressing the one thing that's most important to you. For example, maybe you need to fine-tune your voice and tone. Maybe you need to archive outdated web pages. Once you've matured in that area of content strategy, you can move on to others.



Figure 2: How do you start a corporate content site?

If you're starting a corporate content site, Caroline Aoyagi-Stom suggests maximizing your budget by looking for resources within the organization. You might be surprised by how much in-house talent exists at your utility.



Figure 3: How do you assemble a content team?

According to Blaine Kylo, content teams should consist of writers, subject matter experts, designers, project managers, and others who ensure that content is created and distributed as efficiently as possible.



Finding compelling stories

Good content should be meaningful to your audience. The goal should be to develop a relationship with your customers so they keep coming back. Your fellow employees across the utility have amazing stories. Find out what they're talking about, set up interviews with them, and meet with your content team regularly to discuss which stories will engage your audience and bolster your brand. Use an editorial calendar to plan your content and keep it fresh and relevant. And be sure to publish new stories at least weekly.

Aoyagi-Stom talked about how SCE mines employee stories and publishes content that resonates with the utility's audience (**figures 4 and 5**).

Figure 4: How do you determine good content?

At SCE, Caroline Aoyagi-Stom creates content that's meaningful to the utility's audience. And she publishes articles at a regular cadence to ensure that customers are rewarded with new content when they return to the SCE site.



Figure 5: How do you get story ideas for the site?

To get content ideas, meet regularly with your content team and talk to utility employees in other departments. According to Aoyagi-Stom, “The stories are there. You just have to mine them.”



Customizing content for your audience

Utilities' external audience includes residential and business customers, local organizations, the media, and others. A good story can cut across interests and lifestyles, so you don't need to segment your content. Instead, target readers by channel and deliver content to them where you know they are.

At our Forum conference, Aoyagi-Stom told us that "human beings are human beings. Everybody appreciates good content." So SCE writes and publishes good stories that all of its audiences can relate to and consume (**figure 6**). Kylo reminded us that even though utilities serve everyone in their territory, they're not publishing web content, direct mailers, commercials, or radio ads for everyone. He advises that you deliver your content through the channel that you know your specific audience is using (**figure 7**).

Figure 6: How do you customize content for your audience?

SCE's new branded website—Energized by Edison—caters to employees, media, customers, and stakeholders. According to Aoyagi-Stom, there's no need to segment the content for audiences because "everybody likes a good story."



Figure 7: Are you really creating content for everyone?

Utilities often think their content audience is everybody. But Kyлло warns, “You can’t talk to everybody at the same time and in the same way.” He suggests identifying audiences that are priorities for you and communicating to them in the channels they prefer.



Managing content

Using an editorial calendar for scheduling what to publish when is an effective way to plan stories. Digital tools can help keep track of your calendar details, but you should also hold regular content meetings to float new ideas, understand what other departments are working on, and look for ways to reuse content.

For regulated utilities that need to stay within a certain set of rules and processes, a strict framework may help to keep your content consistent and provide a better web experience for your customers.

In **figure 8**, Aoyagi-Stom says she plans her content a year ahead. She makes sure SCE's content corresponds with holidays, events, and national days. The utility also publishes content that supports its overall objectives, such as promoting clean energy. In **figure 9**, Kylo suggests that regulated utilities have an easier time managing content because strict guidelines help standardize their content.

Figure 8: What tools do you use to plan and manage content?

SCE uses an editorial calendar, Microsoft Office Sharepoint, Percolate enterprise content marketing software, and iPR Software digital asset management tools. Aoyagi-Stom recommends using tools to improve your content team's efficiency, but she also stresses the importance of relationships in the content management life cycle.



Figure 9: How do you manage content within a regulatory environment?

Developing content in a regulatory environment can be a good thing! Kylo says that by incorporating strict guidelines into your content processes, you'll create a more consistent content experience for your audience.



Measuring success with your content site

You can easily measure the success of a content site with page views, unique visitors, time spent on a page, and the percentage of visitors who leave the site after viewing just one page (known as bounce rate). At SCE, Aoyagi-Stom says her team looks for upticks in customer satisfaction in brand resonance surveys, such as those conducted by J.D. Power and the Marketing Science Institute (**figure 10**). Kyllö noted that you can also measure the return on investment for content by looking at how long it took to publish a piece of content and how many errors that piece has, which can affect how well the content performs (**figure 11**). Demonstrate the value of your content strategy by reporting back to your leadership team with how you're improving and adjusting content and the processes you use to create it.

Figure 10: How do you measure content performance?

SCE uses Google Analytics and its own proprietary vendor statistics to measure its content's performance. The utility also uses the functionality built into Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to measure its social activity. Based on the data, SCE tweaks its content strategy to better reflect its brand and make it more relatable to customers. According to Aoyagi-Stom, the utility gets 70,000 page views per month.



Figure 11: How do you measure content effectiveness?

You can determine the return on investment of a piece of web content by looking at page view, the amount of time people spend on the page, and bounce rates. But according to Kylo, you can also gauge content effectiveness by measuring how well and how efficiently it was created. Was it written to be compliant with US Americans with Disabilities Act usability standards? Can search engines find it? Is it easy to read? How many employee hours were spent writing, editing, designing, coding, promoting, and managing it? He recommends measuring both content performance and process performance.



Getting more information from E Source about content strategy

If you're a member of the E Source Corporate Communications Service, you can use our Ask E Source service to ask more-specific questions about content strategy. If you're an E Source E-Channel Service member, use our [Ask E Source](#) service to ask questions about web design.

Our report [Why Utilities Tell Their Stories Through Blogs and Other Owned-Content Sites](#) talks about how utilities can use these sites to tell their stories internally and externally.

Our report [Strategies for Effective Internal Communications: How to Inform and Engage Employees](#) includes information on internal communication strategies and suggests techniques for engaging employees.

Our blog post [Your Prescription for Content Strategy](#) explains how to write a content strategy statement.

Our 2017 blog post [Simple Websites Lead the Way in Utility Marketing and Brand Storytelling](#) shows examples of how utilities have redesigned their websites to better convey their brand and to set the stage for high-impact storytelling.