

Behind the Curtain: Demystifying Content Marketing Metrics

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8 minute read



Do you break out in a cold sweat when people start talking about metrics? I used to.

How can you offer clients evidence that your work is performing when you don't have the technical confidence or experience to back it up?

It's enough to cause a panic. Especially when you just want to write! What if someone asks about performance analytics? How do you respond?

I have learned that you can master understanding and interpreting metrics with practice. The best part? It adds value to your role as a digital content writer.

Although some clients conduct their own analytics, many do not. By learning to use marketing metrics, you can document how your efforts affect their bottom line. So, kick off your shoes — we're going to get our feet wet!

Goals, KPIs, Metrics — Oh My!

Goals, key performance indicators (KPIs), and metrics work together to deliver measurable results that show whether your content marketing strategy is effective. They are three distinct things, but they're often used interchangeably, which can get a little confusing.

If you're questioning what marketing metrics even are, fear not. They're simply different measurements used to track the ways your content is being consumed and shared... or not. Metrics help you answer questions such as these:

- Are people reading your information?
- Is anyone buying the product or service you're promoting?
- Are they leaving your landing page in droves?

This knowledge will make you a better writer and strategic planner. Now, let's talk about goals and KPIs. You need goals before you can determine what data to measure.

Goals Are Not the Same Thing as KPIs.

A goal is an outcome you hope to achieve, and KPIs are the indicators that tell you whether you're on track to achieve your goal.

This leads to the question “Is a KPI the same thing as a metric?” The answer is no. Let's start with a basic tenet:

Metrics support KPIs. KPIs may be made up of multiple different metrics that give you a full picture of the progress toward a goal.

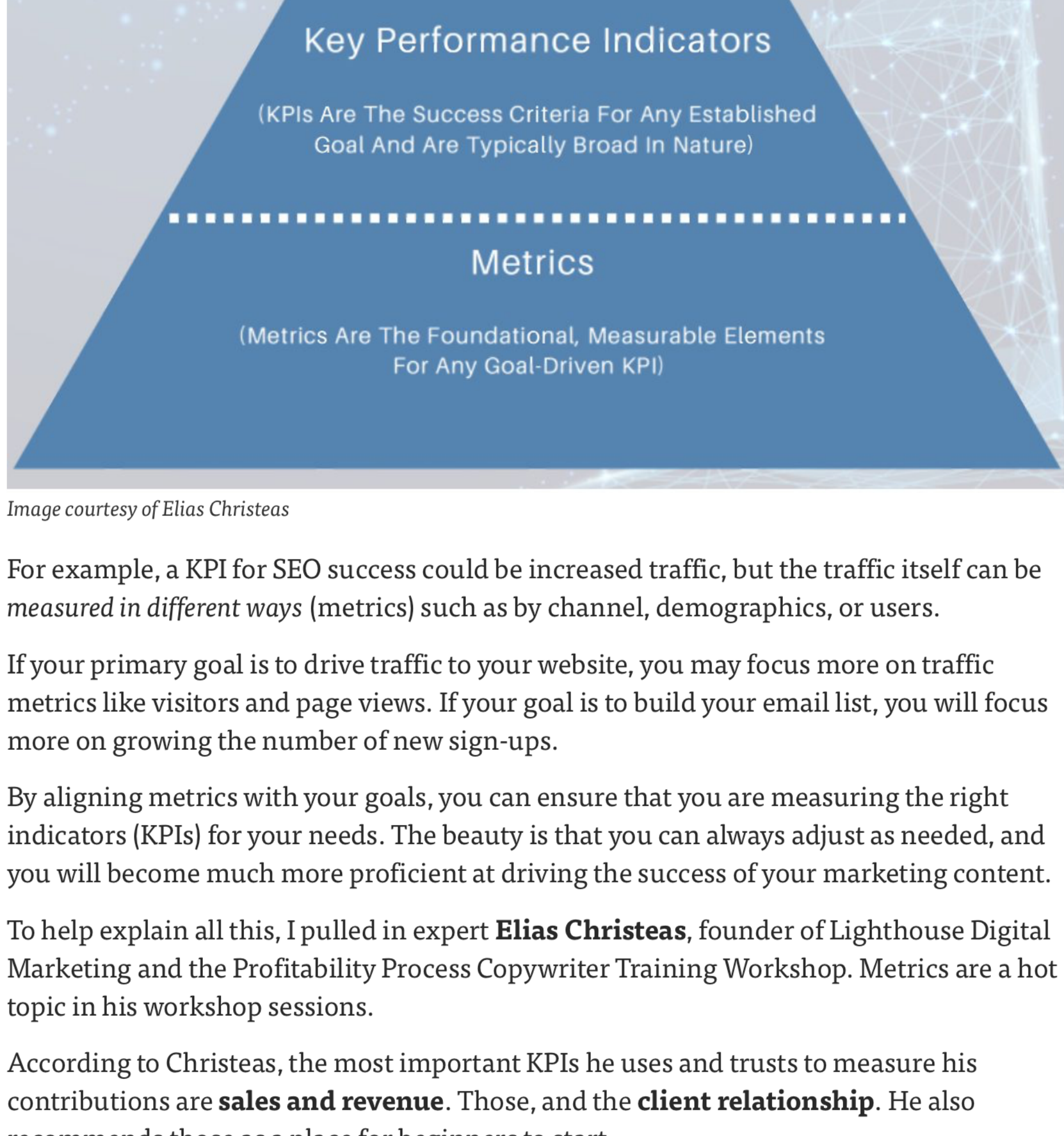


Image courtesy of Elias Christeas

For example, a KPI for SEO success could be increased traffic, but the traffic itself can be measured in different ways (metrics) such as by channel, demographics, or users.

If your primary goal is to drive traffic to your website, you may focus more on traffic metrics like visitors and page views. If your goal is to build your email list, you will focus more on growing the number of new sign-ups.

By aligning metrics with your goals, you can ensure that you are measuring the right indicators (KPIs) for your needs. The beauty is that you can always adjust as needed, and you will become much more proficient at driving the success of your marketing content.

To help explain all this, I pulled in expert **Elias Christeas**, founder of Lighthouse Digital Marketing and the Profitability Process Copywriter Training Workshop. Metrics are a hot topic in his workshop sessions.

According to Christeas, the most important KPIs he uses and trusts to measure his contributions are **sales and revenue**. Those, and the **client relationship**. He also recommends those as a place for beginners to start.

Here's what these particular KPIs should tell you:

- Is your client seeing an increase in customers and sales?
- Are they attracting customers or clients who are excited to work with them or purchase their products?
- Is your work strengthening your client's relationships with their customers — and your relationship with your client?

Measuring metrics for growth in sales and revenue is fairly simple. Are they going up, remaining static, or going down? The client relationship piece looks at the reaction and response from new (and existing) customers, and to get it right takes a bit more than monitoring a single software tool's dashboard.

Christeas cautions writers not to forget about human interactions by drowning in numbers. “One of the best ways to test the climate is going back to the expert in the field. Ask your client for their perception of how things are going.”

Most of us recognize the value of monitoring reactions from target audiences, yet there is another step to take. Paying attention to the satisfaction of the client you work for can offer intuitive insights that no external metric can capture.

Another approach is to speak with a subset of customers. Depending on your access and what your client is comfortable with, this may be via email surveys or phone conversations. Satisfied customers are often happy to speak with you, and dissatisfied customers are likely eager to voice their grievances. Of course, that's not as much fun — but it gives you priceless information.

So based on these three measures, let's look at a process you can use to track success.

Getting Started

Step 1: Define goals

Goals are always the first place to begin with any marketing campaign. What do you want to accomplish? Many professionals use criteria called S.M.A.R.T. to aid in the process of goal setting. You might be thinking, *Well, I'm not going to use S.T.U.P.I.D. goals!*

And of course you aren't! You're going to set goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely.

Goals with all five attributes can be tracked effectively. General goals like “get more clicks” may be simple to measure, but they lack a specific, meaningful objective. How many more? And, by when? Setting a goal like “increase email list by 20% in x days” gives you an easy way to track success.

Step 2: Establish KPIs

Decide which indicators you want to measure, which can bring you closer to achieving your goals. As noted, KPIs are the measures of performance that you have decided are important.

If you want to increase your email list by 20%, an obvious KPI is new sign-ups.

Step 3: Identify metrics

Metrics are the data types you will need to measure these KPIs. Anytime you measure anything, you are using a metric, whether that's the number of customers or the average number of those customers with an allergy to acronyms.

Keep in mind the difference in metrics. Vanity metrics (e.g., followers, page views) are superficial and don't affect the bottom line, whereas performance metrics (e.g., conversion rates, sales) directly impact business success and should be prioritized.

Using the email list example, the metrics you track could include site traffic and percentage of traffic that signs up for your email list. Increasing either of those metrics can get you closer to your goal.

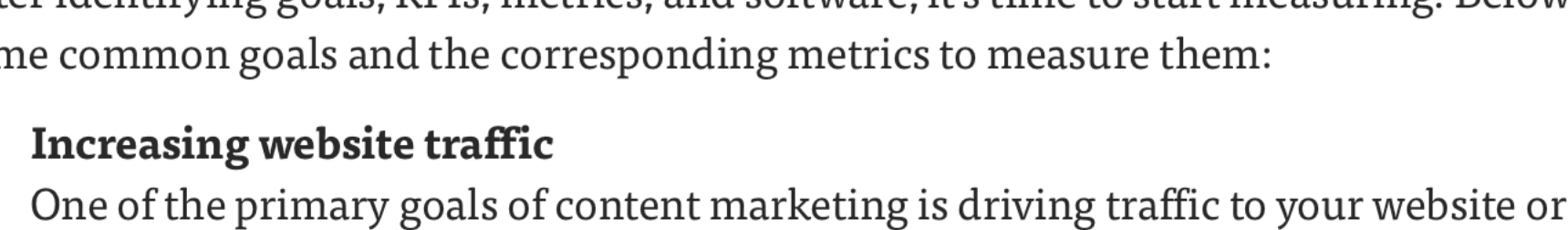
Step 4: Select software tools

Choosing software tools from the vast sea of options requires patience and experimentation. It's also going to be affected by what you want to accomplish and measure.

Elias Christeas emphasizes the importance of using the right tool for the right job. For measuring content performance, he recommends [Google Analytics](#) as a great place to start based on ease of use and its ability to deliver relevant data.

Christeas says, “Google Analytics 4 (GA4) provides easy access to important metrics like traffic numbers, users, and session time through a simple dashboard — even for those without technical expertise. Setting up an account takes less than 10 minutes. And, if you can cut and paste, you can easily add the JavaScript code to monitor a website. Google provides strong customer support and [online tutorials](#). Google also has the credibility factor of being a known entity in the business world.”

The following is an example of a report in Google Analytics:



1. Apply a filter to see a subset of your report data. [Learn more](#)
2. Apply a comparison to see different sets of data side-by-side. [Learn more](#)
3. Identify how much of your data appears in the report. [Learn more](#)
4. [Adjust the date range](#) for all your reports. You won't find this option in the Realtime report.
5. [Customize the report](#), [share or export the report](#), and [get insights about your data](#).

Christeas also suggests investing in a keyword research tool if you're a search engine optimization (SEO) creator striving to craft value-rich content. Software suites such as Ahrefs or SEMrush contain tools for link building, keyword research, competitor analysis, rank tracking, and site audits. These SEO tools are designed to help people get higher Google rankings and increase traffic.

Your client may already have software tools in place. If they don't, you can make your mark by helping them incorporate one or more. Avoid programs so complicated that you need a 3,000-page manual to decode them.

Before making any software investment, it's wise to take advantage of free trials. Google Analytics is free and has beginner [training demos](#). SEMrush offers a seven-day trial, and [Ahrefs](#) has a free trial for website owners. If you're on a budget, less expensive alternatives include [WordStream](#), [SE Ranking](#), [Serpstat](#), and [SpyFu](#).

Choose what feels most intuitive to you. If operating instructions require you to say four Hail Marys, click your heels three times, and upgrade to the next level to download your data, it's time to move on.

Step 5: Putting it all together

After identifying goals, KPIs, metrics, and software, it's time to start measuring. Below are some common goals and the corresponding metrics to measure them:

- **Increasing website traffic**
One of the primary goals of content marketing is driving traffic to your website or other digital channels. Metrics like page views, visitors, and pages viewed per session provide insights into the effectiveness of your content.
- **Acquiring more backlinks**
Backlinks from other websites can boost your website's authority, search engine rankings, and traffic. Tracking backlinks — how many a page earns as well as where they come from — can indicate how well your content is being shared and promoted by others.
- **Time on page**
Monitoring the time visitors spend on your pages helps determine if your content resonates with them. High bounce rates on certain pages can also indicate a need for improvement.
- **Growing your email list**
If generating leads is a focus, you'll want to measure new sign-ups, such as email subscribers and followers on social media channels. You can use a customer relationship management (CRM) system to assess these activities. [Constant Contact](#), [ConvertKit](#), [HubSpot](#), and [Mailchimp](#) are popular CRM platforms.
- **New conversions**
The ultimate goal of content marketing is to drive conversions. Whether that's a growing email list, more leads, increased sales, or some other call to action, measuring conversions can help you calculate the return on investment for your efforts.

Use the performance insights from analytics such as these to make data-driven recommendations that educate your clients on how to optimize their strategy. Seriously, they will be so impressed with you for listening to what they have to say, then backing it up with concrete results.

The “King” of Metrics

As valuable as these goal-oriented metrics are, it's also important to track overall marketing metrics that tie back to brand awareness. While working on a specific content or campaign, it's easy to overlook this, but it should always be a consideration.

Brand Awareness

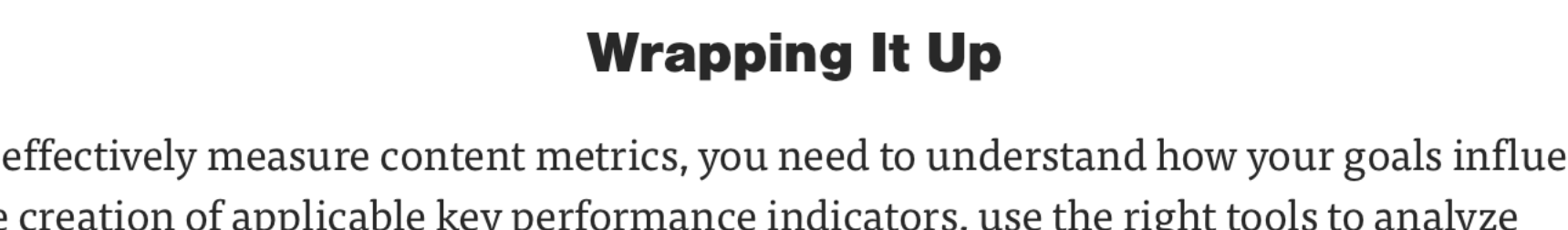
Your client/customer relationships and customer behaviors provide valuable insights into the health of your brand. By keeping track of customer behavior and feedback through personalized surveys, social media engagement, website analytics, and search engine rankings via your CRM and analytics software, you can stay informed about how your customers are interacting with your brand.

Focusing on brand identity helps you make clearer decisions about your target audience, overall messaging, and marketing strategy — optimizing your efforts to deliver the best possible results for your organization over time.

All content creation and messaging should be aligned with and reinforce your brand, which is the core of your online presence and directly impacts your search engine ranking.

SERPs 101

Search engine results pages (SERPs) are not only about your rankings for a variety of keywords. Other factors to monitor include whether you're earning **rich snippets** (organic copy that has a high click-through rate), **featured snippets** (copy/images that are picked up from webpage content to answer a user query), and **knowledge panels** (information boxes containing data about an entity — a person, place, or thing).



Where you rank — and how you rank — is intimately tied to your content. The best way to achieve visibility and any of the above goals for your clients is to create unique, relevant, engaging, and carefully planned content. What this content will consist of depends on your goals.

Wrapping It Up

To effectively measure content metrics, you need to understand how your goals influence the creation of applicable key performance indicators, use the right tools to analyze metric results, and apply the data you collect to improve your content strategy. Staying updated on industry trends can also help keep your brand on point.

With practice, you'll become more comfortable using metrics to improve your content marketing strategies, and with any luck you'll no longer experience a Pavlovian response of terror when you hear the words “metrics” or “analytics.” In the end, you'll find it to be a simple task compared with your high school chemistry class — and far more applicable to your writing career!