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AI / BUSINESS GROWTH / CHECKLIST

Content Strategy Builder — Practical Checklist for UK Small Businesses

A practical, evidence-led content strategy checklist for UK small-business owners. It guides readers from a business goal and customer research through content planning, creation, distribution, basic SEO, measurement and a 90-day improvement cycle.



Author: Rob Arnold

ascendea.ai

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Chapter links and PDF bookmarks support navigation. Writing areas are for handwritten or separate notes, not interactive PDF forms.

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Build a focused, manageable content system around the questions your customers actually ask.

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Before you begin

This checklist is for UK small-business owners and managers who want a more deliberate approach to content marketing. It works for a local trade business, professional-services firm, retailer or B2B supplier. You do not need specialist marketing software to begin; a spreadsheet, your website and a calendar are enough.

The aim is not to publish everywhere or promise a particular number of leads. It is to decide who the content is for, what useful question it answers, where it will appear and how you will learn from it. Complete the sections in order for a first 90-day cycle, then keep the parts that help your business.

Examples in this checklist are **illustrative**. They are planning aids, not Ascendea client results, performance benchmarks or guarantees.

Publication and use notice

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How to use the checklist

- Set aside one focused session for each numbered section. Do not try to build a complete marketing department in a weekend.
- Tick an item only when you have made the decision or recorded the evidence. A draft is useful; an assumption should be labelled as an assumption.

- Choose a cadence you can keep when work is busy. One useful piece a month is a better starting point than a daily schedule you abandon.
- Keep the completed tables in one working document. That becomes your content plan, evidence log and improvement record.

1. Establish your strategic foundation

Content works best when it supports a real business priority. Begin with one priority rather than a vague wish to “post more”. For example, a heating engineer may want more suitable boiler-service enquiries before winter; a bookkeeping firm may want existing contacts to understand a new payroll service; a B2B supplier may want buyers to find clear answers before requesting a specification.

Define one to three content goals

- ☐ Write the business priority in one sentence:

- ☐ Turn it into one to three **SMART** content goals: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.
- ☐ Name the customer action that would show useful progress. This might be reading a service guide, using a booking link, requesting a callback, downloading a specification or replying to an existing newsletter.
- ☐ Write what content will **not** be expected to do in this cycle. For example: This guide is not a promise that every reader will book a survey.

Illustrative goal: “Over the next 30 days, publish one plain-English page explaining our kitchen-design process and record the number of enquiries that say they found it useful.” This is clearer than “increase awareness”, and it does not presume an outcome.

Record a baseline before changing anything

A baseline is a dated starting point. It makes later discussions less dependent on memory. Use numbers you can define and retrieve consistently; leave a cell blank rather than inventing one.

Measure	Starting figure and date	Where it came from	Definition or note
Relevant website visits		Website analytics or CMS	Which pages/counting period?
Email subscribers or active contacts		Email platform	Exclude bounced or unsubscribed contacts where possible.

Measure	Starting figure and date	Where it came from	Definition or note
Meaningful engagement		Website, email or social report	For example, replies, saves or completed guides; define it.
Qualified enquiries		CRM, inbox or enquiry log	Decide what counts as qualified.
Commercial influence		Sales record and source notes	Record a content touchpoint; do not assume it caused a sale.

- ☐ Save the baseline with its date and reporting period.
- ☐ Choose **one achievable 30-day process target** that you control, such as publishing a guide, collecting ten customer questions or improving three key service pages. An outcome target is fine too, but label it as a target, not a forecast.

2. Develop evidence-led audience understanding

A customer profile is a working hypothesis, not a fictional biography. It should come from conversations and real customer language, then be updated when the evidence changes.

Gather useful evidence

- ☐ Review recent enquiries, customer-support tickets, product reviews, sales-call notes and frequently asked questions. Remove unnecessary personal details from your notes.
- ☐ Ask current customers or opted-in subscribers one useful question, such as: “What made choosing a [service/product] difficult?” or “What would you have liked to know before you contacted us?”
- ☐ Note the words people actually use. A customer may search for “leaking roof around chimney”, not the internal trade term.
- ☐ Record the source, date and whether each observation is a fact, a quotation or your interpretation.

Evidence source	What the customer said, asked or did	What it may mean	Fact, quote or assumption?	Next content opportunity

Evidence source	What the customer said, asked or did	What it may mean	Fact, quote or assumption?	Next content opportunity

Email and privacy note. A research email can still involve direct-marketing and data-protection obligations, especially if it promotes a service or builds a marketing list. The ICO says that companies and LLPs are generally corporate subscribers, while sole traders and some partnerships are individual subscribers with different electronic-marketing protections; UK GDPR can apply when business-contact personal data is processed. The ICO's guidance is under review, so check the current position, identify yourself and honour objections before sending a campaign.³ Do not treat a public email address as a blanket permission to contact someone.

Build a one-page audience profile

- ☐ Choose one priority customer group for this cycle. Avoid “everyone who needs our service”.
- ☐ Describe the person’s job or situation, the practical problem, likely questions, obstacles, information sources and decision triggers.
- ☐ Separate evidence from guesses. Plan one conversation or observation to test each important guess.

Profile field	Evidence-led working answer
Customer group and context	
Practical job or problem	
Questions they ask in their own words	
Frustrations or risks they want to avoid	
Information formats or channels they already use	
What helps them decide or enquire	
Objections or reasons to wait	
Important assumptions to test	

Complete a simple empathy map

This is a way to organise evidence, not a claim to know what a customer privately thinks. Mark uncertain entries as hypotheses.

- ☐ **Says:** What phrases do they use in enquiries, reviews or conversations?
- ☐ **Does:** What do they compare, delay, search for or ask before buying?
- ☐ **Thinks:** What concern might sit behind their question? Mark this as a hypothesis until tested.
- ☐ **Feels:** What emotion is visible in their wording, if any? Do not infer sensitive personal details.
- ☐ Write one content idea that would reduce a real uncertainty without pushing a sale.

Prioritise topics with a serve score

Use this deliberately simple score to compare ideas when time is limited:

$$\text{Serve score} = (\text{audience impact} \times \text{business relevance}) \div \text{effort}$$

Score impact, relevance and effort from 1 to 5. The score is a discussion tool, not a scientific forecast. A topic with a lower score may still be essential for safety, customer service or a seasonal campaign.

Topic or question	Audience impact (1–5)	Business relevance (1–5)	Effort (1–5)	Serve score	Decision and reason

- ☐ Choose the first two or three topics to create, based on the score **and** your judgement.

3. Build a consistency framework

Consistency means that people can recognise the subjects and standard of help they receive from you. It does not mean repeating the same sales message or publishing every day.

Choose three or four content pillars

A pillar is a broad, repeatable area that answers a core customer question and fits your business. A small accountancy practice might choose “keeping records organised”, “understanding deadlines”, “choosing business support” and “working with us”. A decorating company might choose “preparing a room”, “choosing finishes”, “caring for completed work” and “planning a project”.

- ☐ List three or four pillars.
- ☐ For each, write the customer question it serves and the business boundary. Do not publish regulated, legal, medical or technical advice beyond your competence.

Content pillar	Customer question it answers	Useful formats	Boundary or reviewer needed

Turn pillars into monthly or quarterly themes

- ☐ Give each month or quarter one main theme. Use real factors such as seasonality, product availability, common onboarding questions or industry events.
- ☐ Keep room for urgent customer questions. A theme guides choices; it should not prevent a timely update.
- ☐ Avoid attaching a numerical growth promise to the theme.

Period	Theme	Pillar	Customer question	Primary piece	Supporting pieces

Set a sustainable publishing cadence

- ☐ Count the hours you can honestly protect each month for research, drafting, checking, approval and distribution.
- ☐ Choose the smallest cadence that fits that time. For example, one detailed website guide and two short supporting posts a month may be enough for a small team.
- ☐ Assign a named owner and a backup or pause rule. Example: “The office manager gathers questions; the director approves service claims; publication pauses if neither can review.”

- ☐ Put the cadence into your calendar for the next 90 days.

Create an editorial calendar

A spreadsheet is sufficient. Add every item before production starts so work does not disappear in email threads.

Publish date	Theme and pillar	Customer question	Format and channel	Call to action	Owner	Status	Evidence/ learning
						Idea / draft / review / live	
						Idea / draft / review / live	
						Idea / draft / review / live	

4. Develop a content-creation system

A small system makes quality easier to repeat. It should help you check facts, protect the business voice and avoid starting from a blank page each time.

Write simple voice guidelines

- ☐ Finish this statement: “We sound **[three adjectives]** because our customers need **[practical benefit]**.”
- ☐ List three things the business does. Example: “Explain jargon; state limitations; use short, direct sentences.”
- ☐ List three things it does not do. Example: “Promise an outcome; imitate personal familiarity; make claims we cannot check.”
- ☐ Add spelling, terminology and approval preferences. Use UK English consistently unless a customer-facing need requires otherwise.

Choose one core format and two support formats

Choose the format that best fits the question and your capacity. The point is easy reuse, not maximum channel coverage.

- ☐ **Core format:** a detailed guide, service page, email newsletter, short video or another format you can produce well.
- ☐ **Support format 1:** a short post, checklist, carousel, FAQ or quote card that points to the core piece.
- ☐ **Support format 2:** an email, follow-up FAQ, short video clip or sales-team note built from the same material.
- ☐ Define where the accurate, approved “source of truth” will live. For many businesses, this is a page on the website or a controlled document.

Illustrative example: A small HR consultancy writes one checked guide on preparing for a probation review. It turns the guide into a subscriber email and a short LinkedIn post that links back to the guide. The supporting items do not introduce new employment-law claims without review.

Create reusable templates

- ☐ **Guide or blog template:** customer question → short answer → practical steps → limitations or when to seek help → relevant next step.
- ☐ **Email template:** useful subject line → one customer problem → one practical point → one link or next step → accurate business identity and opt-out process where required.
- ☐ **Social-post template:** real question or observation → one useful answer → simple example → one clear next action.
- ☐ Add a final check: accuracy, dates, prices, availability, permissions, links, image descriptions and approval.

Use a story structure where it clarifies the point

A structure helps the reader follow the logic. It is not a licence to exaggerate the problem.

- ☐ **Before–After–Bridge:** explain the current situation, the more useful future situation and the practical bridge between them.
- ☐ **Problem–Agitate–Solution:** describe a genuine problem, explain its real consequence without drama, then offer a proportionate solution or next step.
- ☐ Check that the example is fictional, anonymised with permission, or supported by evidence. Never turn a hypothetical scenario into a client story.

If you use AI to assist drafting

- ☐ Treat AI output as an unapproved draft. Give it a clear task, verified source notes, intended audience and a requested format.
- ☐ Do not paste customer personal data, confidential quotations, passwords, invoices or unpublished commercial information into a tool unless your business has approved the provider, settings and data handling for that use.
- ☐ Check every factual claim, price, date, quote, legal statement and link against the original source before publication. A person who knows the business must approve the final content.
- ☐ Keep the original notes and final approved version. AI can help with a first draft; it does not replace editorial judgement.

The NCSC recommends that security be considered through the design, development, deployment and operation of AI systems. Its guidance is aimed at organisations and is not a compliance certificate; use it as a starting point when deciding how your business will use an AI tool.⁴

5. Design a distribution approach

Distribution is how the right people get a reasonable chance to find useful content. Start with channels you control before adding more platforms.

Check your owned channels first

- ☐ **Website:** confirm that the core piece has a clear URL, readable title, relevant internal links and a visible next step.
- ☐ **Email list:** confirm who can send, which list is appropriate and how unsubscribes or objections are handled.
- ☐ **Resource library or sales materials:** add the approved guide where a customer or colleague can find the current version.
- ☐ **Front-line team:** give reception, sales or account staff a short note on when the content is useful. Do not ask them to make claims beyond the approved wording.

Choose channels realistically

Pick one primary channel where your audience is already reachable. Add a second channel only when it has a clear purpose. The original “3–2–1” pattern can be a starting experiment: three useful posts on a primary channel, two on a secondary channel and one limited test. It is **not** a universal rule or a promise of reach. Scale it down if your capacity does not support it.

- ☐ Name the primary channel: _____

- ☐ Name the purpose: awareness, customer education, returning visitors, existing-customer support or another defined purpose.
- ☐ Choose a secondary channel only if an owner can maintain it.
- ☐ Record the experimental channel or activity and what you want to learn. Stop if it is irrelevant, unsafe or not worth the effort.

Set a repeatable repurposing workflow

- ☐ Start with the approved core piece and list its three strongest customer questions or practical points.
- ☐ Match one point to each support format. Keep the meaning and limitations intact.
- ☐ Link support items back to the core piece where appropriate. Do not publish several contradictory versions of the same advice.
- ☐ Check each channel's formatting, image sizes, links and accessibility before publishing.
- ☐ Record where and when each version appeared in the editorial calendar.

Apply basic search and accessibility checks

Google's current beginner guide recommends writing clear, concise, accurate titles, using descriptive image alt text and linking to relevant resources with meaningful link text.¹ These are useful reader and website-maintenance practices; they do **not** guarantee rankings or traffic.

- ☐ Start with the search question in a customer's words. Answer it directly and accurately on the page.
- ☐ Write a unique, descriptive title that reflects the content. Most content-management systems handle the technical title element when you enter the page title, but check your system's preview or ask its support documentation if unsure.¹
- ☐ Add an image only when it helps. Write short alt text that describes the image's relationship to the page, rather than stuffing in keywords.¹
- ☐ Add internal links that genuinely help a reader move to a related service, guide or contact page. Make the link text meaningful, such as “read our boiler service checklist”, not “click here”.¹
- ☐ Check the page on a phone, test each link and remove anything outdated before sharing it.

6. Set up a measurement and review system

Measure enough to make a better next decision, not so much that reporting replaces useful work. Keep traffic, engagement, enquiries and commercial influence separate: they answer different questions.

Build a four-block dashboard

Use a spreadsheet or existing reporting tool. Record the reporting period and definitions next to the numbers.

Dashboard block	Question it answers	Possible evidence	Caution
Traffic	Did people reach the content?	Page views, visitors, search impressions	A visit does not show understanding or commercial value.
Engagement	Did they use or respond to it?	Scroll depth, replies, saves, clicks, time on page	Use the same definition over time.
Enquiries	Did a suitable next conversation begin?	Form completions, calls, booked consultations	Check quality, not only volume.
Commercial influence	Was content one recorded touchpoint in a sales journey?	CRM source notes, enquiry comments, sales records	Do not claim content caused a sale without sound evidence.

- ☐ Choose one or two measures for each block.
- ☐ Write the data source, owner and reporting period.
- ☐ Record missing or unreliable data as a limitation rather than turning it into a conclusion.

Add website analytics only if it is appropriate for your site

If you choose Google Analytics, Google's current setup guidance says to create or select an account, create a property, add a web data stream, and then set up data collection through the website builder/ CMS, a Google tag or Google Tag Manager.²

1. Confirm who owns the website and analytics account. Use a business-controlled account rather than an individual employee's personal account where possible.
2. Sign in at [Google Analytics](#). In **Admin**, choose **Create**, then **Property**; name it and select the appropriate reporting time zone and currency.²
3. In **Admin**, open **Data Streams**, choose **Add stream**, then **Web**. Follow the official route that fits your site: website builder/CMS, a directly installed Google tag or Google Tag Manager.²
4. If you do not manage the website, send the official setup guide to your web developer or provider rather than pasting code into an unfamiliar area.
5. Visit your own site after implementation and check the reporting setup with the person responsible for the website. Record the installation date and access owner.

6. Check your cookie, privacy and data-protection responsibilities before collecting analytics data. Provider settings and UK requirements can change; obtain appropriate advice for your implementation.

A spreadsheet-only dashboard is a valid starting point if analytics is not ready or appropriate.

Establish a review cadence

- ☐ Schedule a **weekly 15-minute scan**: check whether planned items were published, links work, questions have changed and any replies need a response.
- ☐ Schedule a **monthly 45-minute review**: update the dashboard, compare it with the baseline, note one useful learning and choose one adjustment.
- ☐ Add the learning directly to the editorial calendar. Example: “The installation-cost FAQ prompted recurring questions about survey visits; next month, add a clear survey-expectations guide.”
- ☐ Do not treat a single busy week as proof that a format works or fails. Note the sample and context.

Run a lightweight content audit every six months

- ☐ List every published guide, service page, email sequence and important social asset.
- ☐ Check factual accuracy, dates, prices, links, branding, permissions, accessibility and relevance to the current audience questions.
- ☐ Choose one status: **keep**, **refresh**, **combine**, **redirect/archive** or **remove**.
- ☐ Record the owner and decision date. Do not delete a page with useful links or search history without checking the website implications with the person who manages it.

Content item	Purpose and audience	Last checked	Evidence or issue	Decision	Owner and due date
				Keep / refresh / combine / redirect/ archive / remove	
				Keep / refresh / combine / redirect/ archive / remove	

7. Improve deliberately and protect consistency

Improvement is a controlled habit: change one thing, record what happened, then decide what to do next. It is not a reason to rewrite the whole strategy whenever a platform changes.

Test one meaningful element each month

- ☐ Choose one element with a clear purpose: a page headline, email subject line, call to action, guide format or publishing time.
- ☐ State the comparison and the measure before publishing. For example: “Which of two subject lines earns more opens from a permitted, comparable subscriber segment?”
- ☐ Keep the audience, timing and content as comparable as practical. Do not run a test that conflicts with consent, opt-out or customer-service obligations.
- ☐ Record the result, sample size, context and limitation. A small difference in a small sample is not a universal lesson.
- ☐ Make one decision: adopt, retest, stop or gather more evidence.

Review the process quarterly

- ☐ Ask where work was delayed: idea selection, evidence gathering, drafting, approval, design, website changes or distribution.
- ☐ Remove a bottleneck before adding another channel. For example, create a fact-check step if last-minute approval is always the issue.
- ☐ Confirm the owners, available time, tools and approval rules still match reality.
- ☐ Update the content pillars or cadence only when evidence supports the change.

Build a 90-day action plan

This sequence is a planning structure, not a launch timetable or performance promise.

Period	Focus	Minimum practical output	Review question
Days 1–30	Foundation and audience evidence	Baseline, evidence log, audience profile, three topic choices	What do we know, and what are we assuming?
Days 31–60	Create and distribute	One approved core piece plus proportionate support items	Is the content accurate, useful and easy to find?

Period	Focus	Minimum practical output	Review question
Days 61–90	Measure and improve	Updated dashboard, one controlled test and one process decision	What should we keep, change or stop next quarter?

- ☐ Name the owner: _____
- ☐ Write the next review date: _____
- ☐ Write the one decision needed at the end of 90 days: _____

Maintain a content bank

A content bank protects consistency when a busy period interrupts the plan. Keep it in the same spreadsheet or a simple document.

Customer question or observation	Pillar	Evidence source	Starter outline or first sentence	Priority	Ready for review?
					Yes / no
					Yes / no
					Yes / no

- ☐ Add ideas as they arise, but do not promise publication until you have checked the evidence, capacity and approval needs.
- ☐ Review the bank in the monthly session and select the next most useful, feasible item.

Your next action

Choose one audience group and one question they already ask. Record a baseline, gather real language, then put one useful piece of content into a simple calendar. Review what happens, including what remains uncertain. A smaller system that your team can maintain is more useful than a complicated plan that never reaches a customer.

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Editorial check date: 9 October 2026. Technical products, provider terms and UK guidance can change. Recheck the linked primary sources before implementation.