The marketer's guide to composable content

Table of contents

Creating and publishing content shouldn't be this hard

It's frustrating, isn't it? Your team comes up with a great new campaign – or an innovative twist on an existing one – and you're ready to rock. You can't wait to set it live and see how it performs. But the time it takes to get that campaign in market is excruciating. Handoffs between design, marketing, and dev teams seem never-ending. Straightforward projects take weeks, if not months, to execute. And that's just to update web content, nevermind email promotions, social media posts, paid ads, or mobile apps.

It's almost enough to make you long for the good old days of print media and camera-ready art, when no one expected immediate gratification. We may live in an age of omnichannel, pervasive media, but we didn't get here in one go.

Our tools and systems are a testament to how all these channels have emerged and evolved over time. They're disjointed, fragmented, error-prone, and slow. They're so painful to use that we've developed a collective denial about just how limiting these tools really are. If creating content from scratch isn't hard enough, reusing it – easily and quickly – is a manual (and tedious) copy-paste exercise.

> "To launch promotions, a developer [has] to go in and manually change anything related, including the copy and design. Obviously, that's high-pressure – especially with so many dollars at stake. Push the wrong code and the site could go down."
>
> **Dylan Feiner**
> Senior Product Manager at Ruggable
>
> Ruggable

The question now is: how can businesses step firmly and confidently into the omnichannel era, once and for all? How can we overcome operational dysfunction and side step disjointed, haphazard systems in order to produce dynamic, consistent, reusable content? How can we make omnichannel marketing more creative, more efficient, and… well…less painful?

Composability: Clunky content and operations be gone

The answer is a composable content strategy and platform that supports it. Composable content is both the output and the process of orchestrating and structuring digital content from any system, allowing teams to quickly shape dynamic experiences for distinct audiences, across digital channels. It uses a cloud-native, API-first technology architecture that makes it possible for content creators, developers, and machines to easily access and interact with it.

Composable content leans heavily on structured content. It parses text, images, graphics, data, and even sound into small yet meaningful elements that can be readily used in any number of combinations, in any context, across all channels and devices. Great content, created once, can be reused anywhere, for more efficient, speedier content operations.
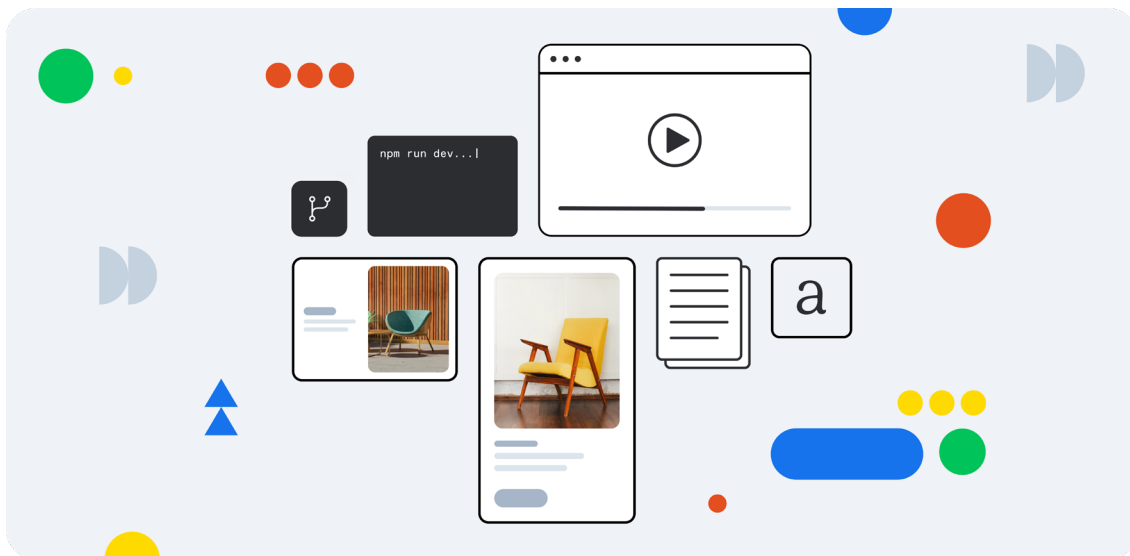
Leveraging the full extent of composable content will require marketers to shift their mindset. And, it's a shift worth making, as day-to-day tasks become faster and easier to manage, ultimately opening up valuable resources to take on other mission critical projects for the organization.

With composable content, marketing teams can focus on seeking answers to more valuable questions, like which audiences to engage and which campaigns to run, rather than worrying about how they'll get those great ideas into the world. In other words, composable content is changing the face of marketing and personalization as we know it.

In this guide, we'll articulate how composable content is a game-changing business imperative that will ready your company for the future and set you apart from your competition.

Omnichannel loves composable content

More often than we'd like to admit, content is created once then shelved indefinitely. This is a giant waste of time, budget, and resources – an unsustainable model at any scale. To maximize content investments, you need an omnichannel game plan. Omnichannel marketing requires structured content to work across any digital channel, fitting into any space or format that's needed or required. Composable content makes this possible.

That foundation of structured content is known as a content model. A content model defines small, but meaningful, elements of content. Each content element (or content type, in Contentful terms) contains unique characteristics that tell the user details about what that element contains. For example, think about the distinct attributes that make up a landing page: you have "headline," "subtitle," "hero image," and "body copy" (see Figure 1).
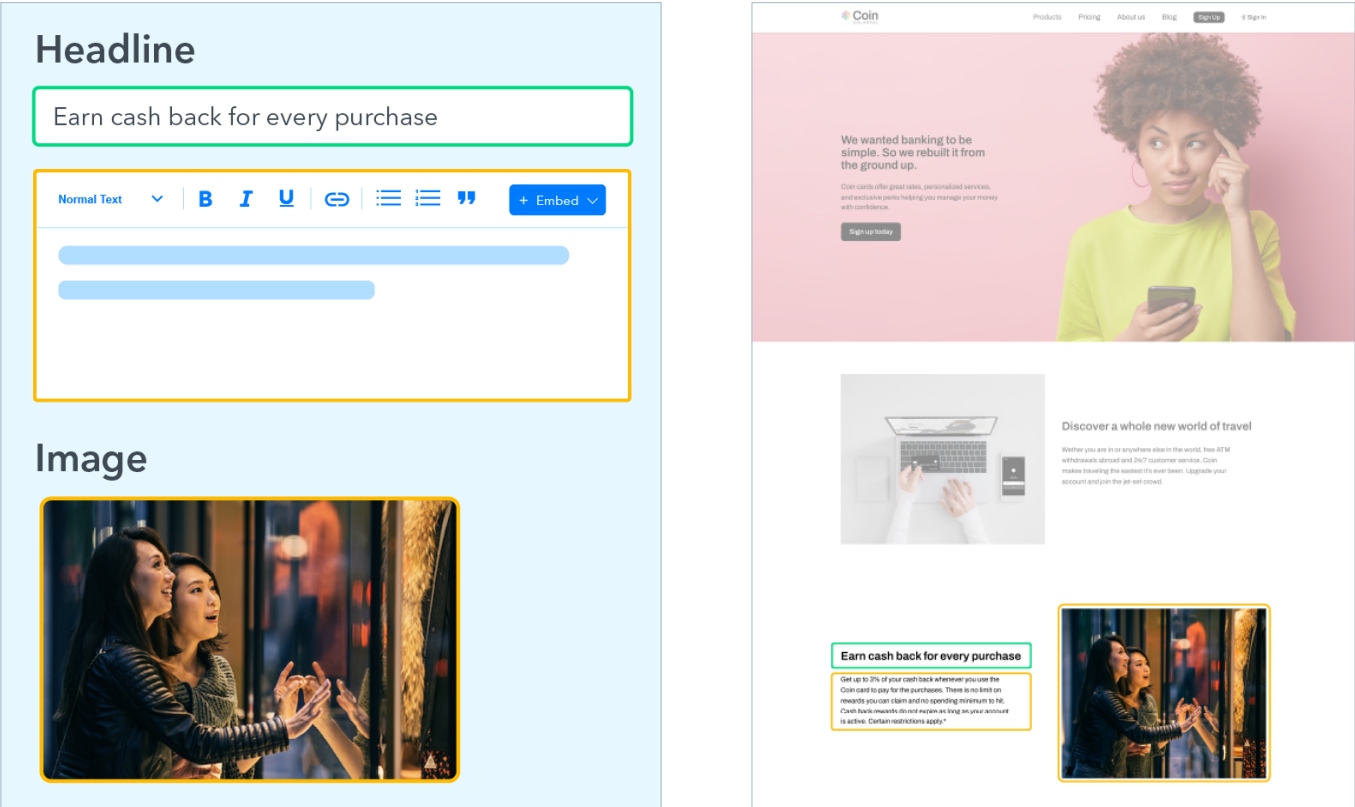

Figure 1

With the right content model, you can easily apply the same content across channels and contexts. In practical terms, this means taking the campaign's "promo code" and "terms and conditions" that were originally created for a landing page and reusing them for a banner ad (see Figure 2). Later, that same content model will allow you to remove or update content, say that promo code or the T&C, everywhere it lives in one go. No need to track down and manually update each asset.

"As a content manager, having the option to change content once and have the update populate in the ten or 20 other places it's referenced is a huge benefit. I have peace of mind that there aren't any lingering inaccuracies."

Caroline Durham
Director of Content at Breastcancer.org

BREASTCANCER·ORG

With the right composable content platform, you can combine design elements and content types to create that promo banner that's aligned with design and brand guidelines — no development or design support needed!
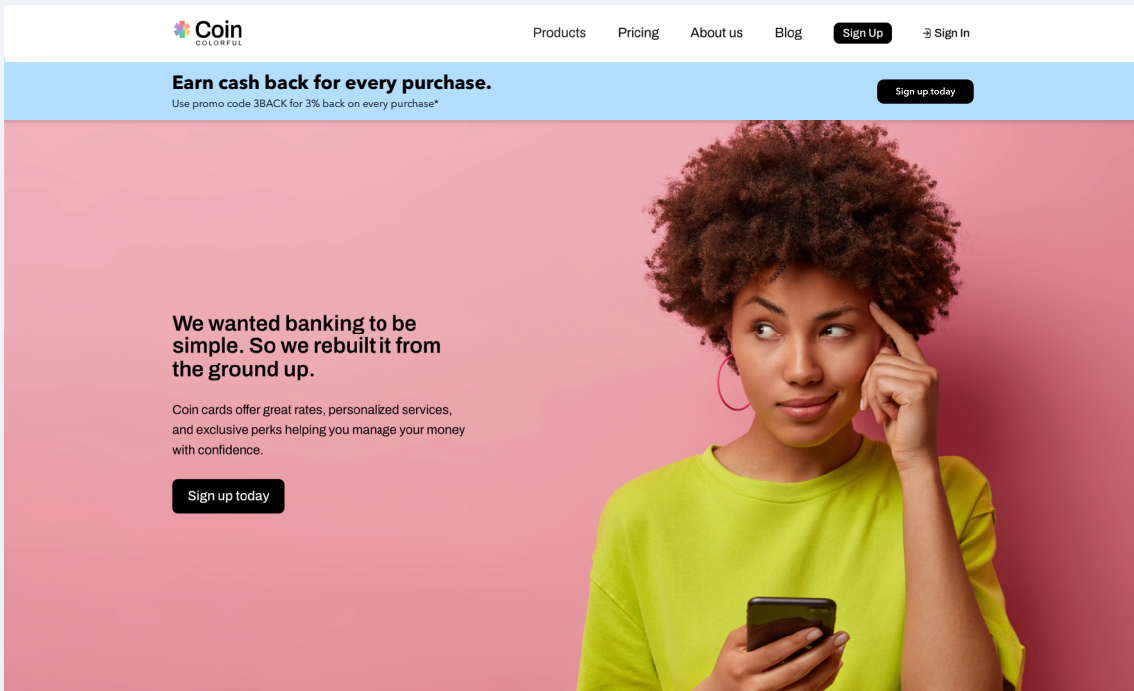

Figure 2

> "One of the things that really sold me is reusability are the references and the content types. As an engineer, that's what we want. We want to create small modules that can be reused in infinite different ways."

Jamie Kelly
Software Engineer at Plaid

PLAID

Exploring the content model

Text: Header
Text: Body, promo code
Text: CTA
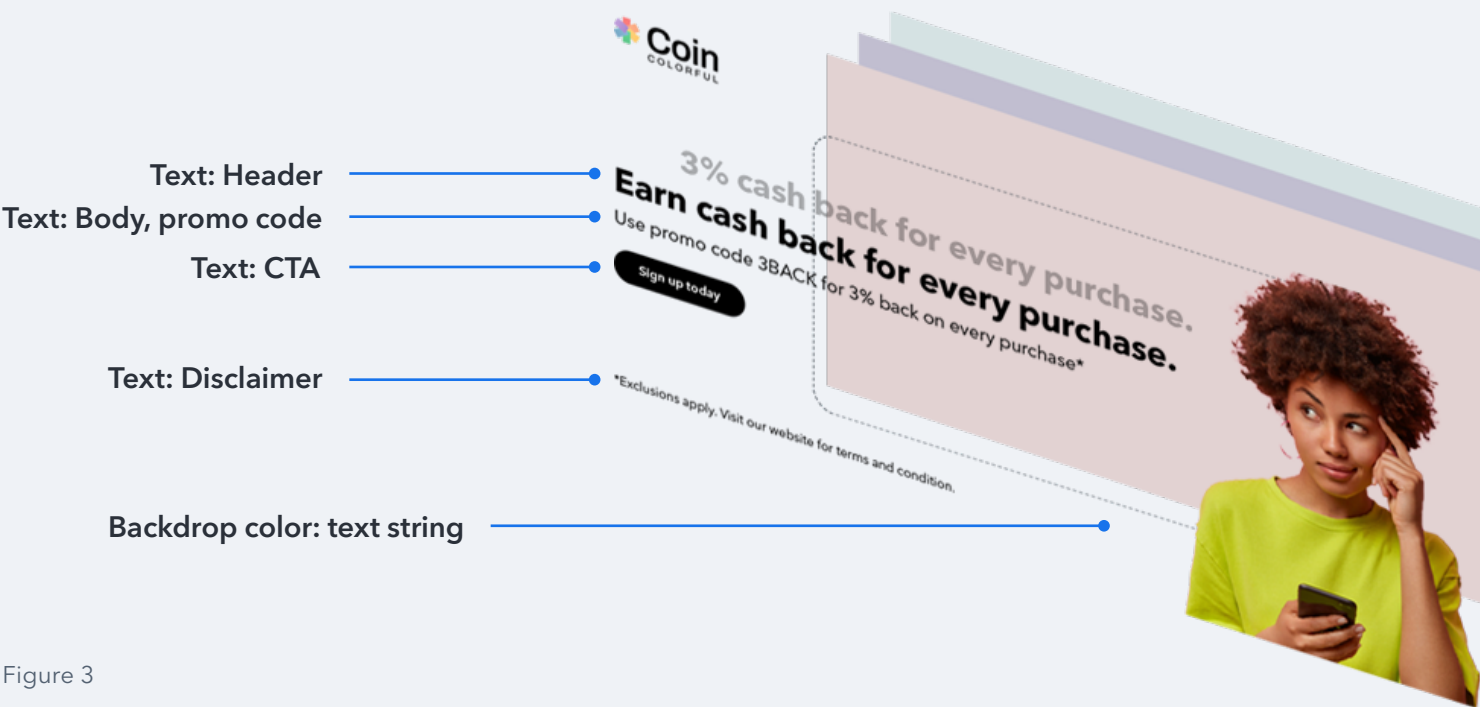Text: Disclaimer
Backdrop color: text string

Figure 3

Instead of thinking of content in relation to web pages alone, composable content allows us to consider how content types can be mixed and matched endlessly (see Figure 3). This gives marketers the ability to quickly and easily create new content experiences based on the models, or templates, their design and dev teams have implemented. And those models can change and adapt as needed. They're not set forevermore.

> "One-third of our development time went toward updating content for these marketing initiatives. We needed a tool that would enable editorial independence, ultimately removing blockers and bringing ideas to production more quickly."

Sheri Kruzel
Head of Digital Product at Ace & Tate

ace & tate

With these new content superpowers, marketers can see their visions come to life across brands, geographies, and channels, almost as quickly as they dream them up. In effect, marketers can magnify the impact of their work in ways that weren't possible before.

CHAPTER TWO

Ease of use – and reuse

WYSIWYG editors and strictly defined fields in traditional content management systems are great – until they're not. Sure, you know exactly what goes where and you can see what it's going to look like as you work. Pretty nifty. Unless you need to make a significant change to the structure of a page as part of a new initiative. Or, perish the thought, work simultaneously across the same content in multiple web pages, a mobile app, and social promotions.

That's when those rigidly pre-defined structures become more like constricting straightjackets than guidelines. Suddenly you're stuck in an infinite loop of back-and-forths with designers and developers to define and code new layouts. Uploading new imagery and assets becomes a mammoth task. The content you're building may look great in one place, but you still need to repeat your efforts everywhere else you plan to use it, working across not just multiple web pages but multiple tools to implement the full scope of work. It's tedious and time consuming for everyone involved.

What is WYSIWYG?

Also known as "what you see is what you get," WYSIWYG editors allow users to view how text and images will look on a published web page as they build it in real-time.

With a composable content platform, by contrast, you have a work environment that's tailored to seamlessly delivering content across channels. It's tuned to function the way you want and need it to. You can preview your work across multiple endpoints or channels as you go, or work in intuitive visual models of content structures, without being tied to any one place that content is being displayed.

Manual tasks can be automated and dramatically accelerated. The various tools needed to get the job done — like digital asset management, translation and localization, product information, or personalization tools, for example — are all available in one place, right where you need them.
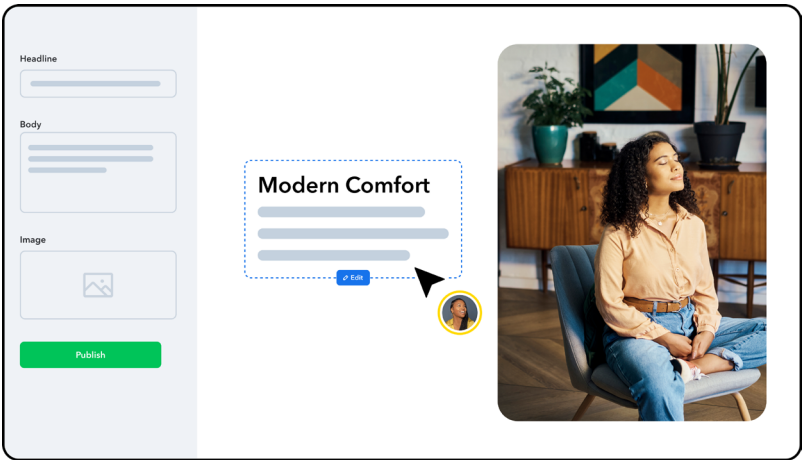
"Without automation through Contentful, it would take at least an hour, — perhaps more — to enter a video, podcast, or book, and related information. With the platform, we've gotten it down to about five minutes of human work — the rest is automated via webhooks."

Marcos Athanasoulis
Chief Technology Officer at CredibleMind

You can also tailor the editorial interface to support how you and your organization work best, setting you up for success on any project.

"We've used the app to construct an interface where everything is on one page — it's quick and simple, editors don't have to click between content types. Our Marketing team reports greater accessibility, and there's evidence of that in the quality of content being shipped to players."

Alasdair Macrae
Senior Web Developer at Jagex

Best of all, the building blocks your organization creates within a composable content platform mean marketers are free to build what they need without being dependent on their dev teams — for small changes or entirely new creations.

"We can train anyone to go in and build pages or components — and that's something we couldn't say of our previous CMS."

Ben Lempert
Director of Web and Content at Heap

Homepage

Publish ⌄

Shop the collection

+
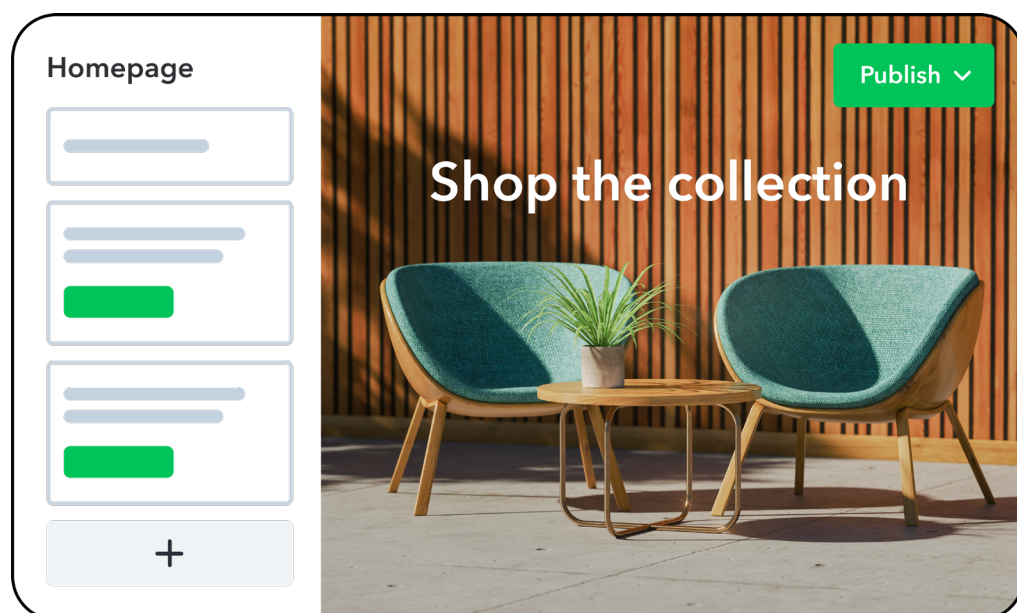
Guardrails and workflows power structured creativity

The beauty of composable content is that it isn't just the content that's composable. The way we work with it is too. From within the platform, content models and templates let marketers work independently with structures they created in collaboration with designers and developers.

"Because of how we've set up our templates and models, marketers find it quite easy to use. They're able to build sites, grow them and respond to needs autonomously. Over time they gain confidence and can begin creating and adjusting at pace. I think that's really important for scaling."

Sezin Cagil
Agile Delivery Manager at Costa Coffee

COSTA
COFFEE

Marketers are free to do everything from making small copy changes to creating new websites on their own, without fear of breaking anything. Even "non-traditional" content creators, like members from legal and HR teams, can produce and manage their own content, and let everyone in the company who needs to, use it. No need to worry about inadvertently changing the legal terms and conditions on a promotional offer, or missing key information on a job posting. When the teams closest to the content have the ability to maintain, edit, or delete it, everyone reliant on that content benefits.

With guardrails that give everyone freedom to operate within their rightful scope, teams can innovate and experiment at unprecedented speeds. This allows a little something we like to call "structured creativity" to take effect.

"MoneyLion business users — who largely sit in product and marketing — gained control over what was happening in their world. They were able to create faster, whether that be a complete copy change or a minor adjustment to the CTA location."

Sarah Gerber
Director of Product at MoneyLion

MoneyLion®

Workflows, when paired with these with guardrails, multiply productivity, streamlining how teams produce, review, plan, and approve all kinds of content. When the correct user roles are applied for content managers, editors, designers, and other roles, the right things happen at just the right time.

We've spoken to hundreds of developers over the years. When asked what the number one thing they'd like to change about their jobs would be, there was complete agreement: manage fewer (if any) tickets submitted by marketers. In all honesty, we'd also prefer to live in a world where submitting tickets for web updates is a thing of the past.

When guardrails and workflows are built into your content platform, marketers have the ability to make changes to content and publish it without having to involve an iota of developer time. Content is maintained by those closest to its strategy and composition, and marketer-developer relations remain smooth as glass. Wins all around.
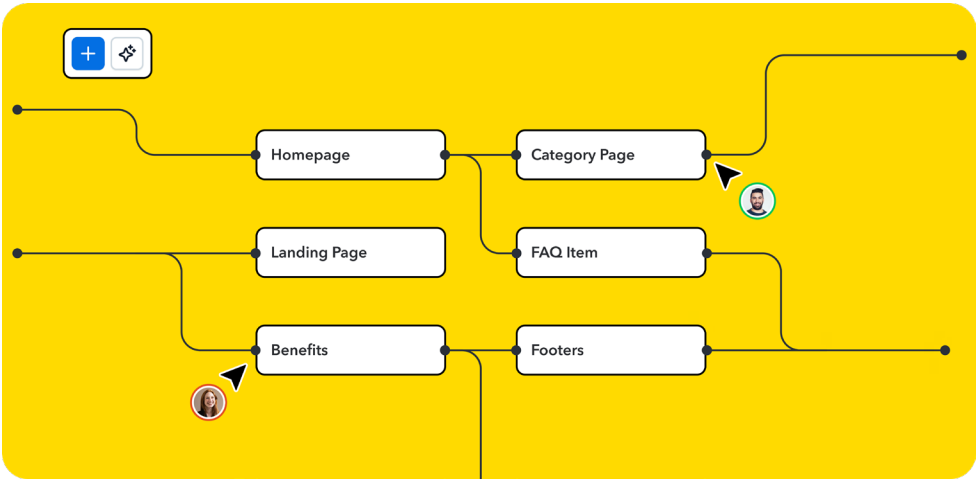
Consistent structure, endless possibilities

As composable content becomes a more familiar practice in your marketing org, so too does the natural benefit of structured content. By this we mean consistent messaging and visual identity delivered with layers of localized content to appeal to distinct audiences around the world. Often, this looks like reaching your audiences where they naturally gravitate to, whether that be developer-friendly platforms like Discord, social media, or good-old-fashioned email.

With a composable content platform, marketers get more than the basics of pushing content to different channels: they can control the message, ensuring that all customer-facing assets are not only accurate and up to date but also support the latest in accessible, inclusive design.

Consistency isn't limited to brand guidelines or specific assets. In some ways, consistency is only visible to your internal teams. Sometimes it takes the form of localization, where you're not only translating content into local languages but adapting how and where you present content according to the preferences of individual markets.

> "Each site follows the same brand guidelines but they are unique to each market. For example, the Japanese market – we're technical about their coffee. They want to see the details of where it's sourced and the nutritional information. In Germany, it's all about the experience – the smell and sound. Teams working for each market have the ability to customize the content and modules to these market-specific preferences."
>
> **Sezin Cagil**
> Agile Delivery Manager at Costa Coffee
>
> COSTA
> COFFEE

Sometimes consistency comes in the structures and content models rather than the content itself. One content model, for example, can support a range of individual brand properties that each have their own look, feel, and experience. Having a standard set of components means even small teams can quickly design and rollout distinctive experiences because they can focus on building the assets they need to create, not wondering where to start.

The intersection of art and science

"Everything we do comes back to build a brand people will love — a big part of that is storytelling. What is your story? What types of content are you telling it with? How is that content displayed? The more flexible your technology is, the better you can tell that story.

Sheri Kruzel
Head of Digital Product at Ace & Tate

ace & tate

The speed, flexibility, and ease of working in a composable content platform open up new possibilities for creative thinking and execution. That's the *art*. The *science* comes from the rapidly emerging technologies that can be readily integrated into the platform — whether it's visual content modeling or tools like AI that change the way we create content and personalize it for customers.

Composable content is a step change in our ability to define and execute truly omnichannel marketing strategies. It's designed to work beyond channels, and in the process, is forcing us to think beyond just web pages. We're limited only by our imaginations. And that's never been a real limit for motivated marketers.

"Successful companies must be where their customers are and reach them in creative and appealing ways within those platforms and places. Customers are not satisfied with being on the receiving end of advertising or broadcasts; they expect to be part of the action, the experience, and an ongoing conversation."

"The Art and Science of Storytelling"

Composable content isn't a trend. It's a lasting strategy shaping what the next era of content – and marketing – will look like

Excited yet? Composable content is the modern marketer's answer to today's biggest challenges: giving digital teams the power to compose and publish content, from a single place, using content pulled in from different sources and organizations, faster than ever before. (See ya never, ticketing intake forms that take a lifetime – and a half – to fill out!)

Implementing a composable content strategy isn't a journey a marketer can embark on alone, however. You'll need buy-in and support from design and dev teams to properly integrate your composable content platform into your company's tech stack.

We understand how tricky it can be to have this conversation with limited technical know-how, which is why we created a handy checklist of questions to run by those key technical stakeholders. This checklist will ensure you hit on key topics, benefits, and outcomes, leading to faster procurement and implementation and moving up content creation and launch timelines. The dream!

We'd be remiss to overlook our team of Contentful experts who bring their own expertise in content structure, design, and deployment to the table.

Ready to kick off your journey with composable content?

Drop us a line
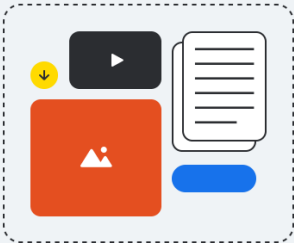
Now, go forth and spread the word about composable content! Claim your freedom. Freedom to build content without fear of breaking code. Freedom to iterate on that content at pace with changing customer preferences. Freedom to explore new digital spaces – perhaps even those unheard of today (bring it on, Zuck!). And, best of all, your marketing peers (and developers) will thank you.