

CONTENT + THE POWER OF

PARTNERS

A great content program for your business requires time, thought and careful execution.
Fortunately, you don't have to go it alone.



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Introduction

Thanks to the internet, consumers have morphed from passive recipients of advertising into online investigators seeking educational information to help them solve problems and make smart choices.

Businesses of all sizes are responding with articles, videos, infographics and other pieces aimed at informing rather than overtly selling. Great content builds trust, drives engagement with your brand and can create loyal customers, but it doesn't come easily. In the end, finding experienced partners who can work with you and understand your business and your market may be a cost-effective and productive option.

76%

B2C companies
that use content
marketing¹

“Content is less immediate than advertising

*But can get through to
cynical consumers better*

because the message is focused on information
and entertainment first, ‘buy now’ second.”

— Jay Baer, content strategist and president of Convince & Convert

PART ONE

ESTABLISHING YOUR CONTENT STRATEGY

Your first step is a solid plan taking into account who you want to reach, what you hope to tell them, the types of content that can best convey your message and what you expect your content to achieve.

A formal strategy increases the chances that your investment will pay off, enhancing your reputation and expanding your customer base.



A Winning Strategy Should Consider:

YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE.

Think about your key customers and what their top concerns are, says Liz Buffa, vice president of content at Headline Studio, Advance Local.

THE BEST WAYS TO REACH THEM.

Are they more likely to read a white paper or watch a video? If they spend a lot of time in the car, could podcasts work?

YOUR CONTENT MISSION.

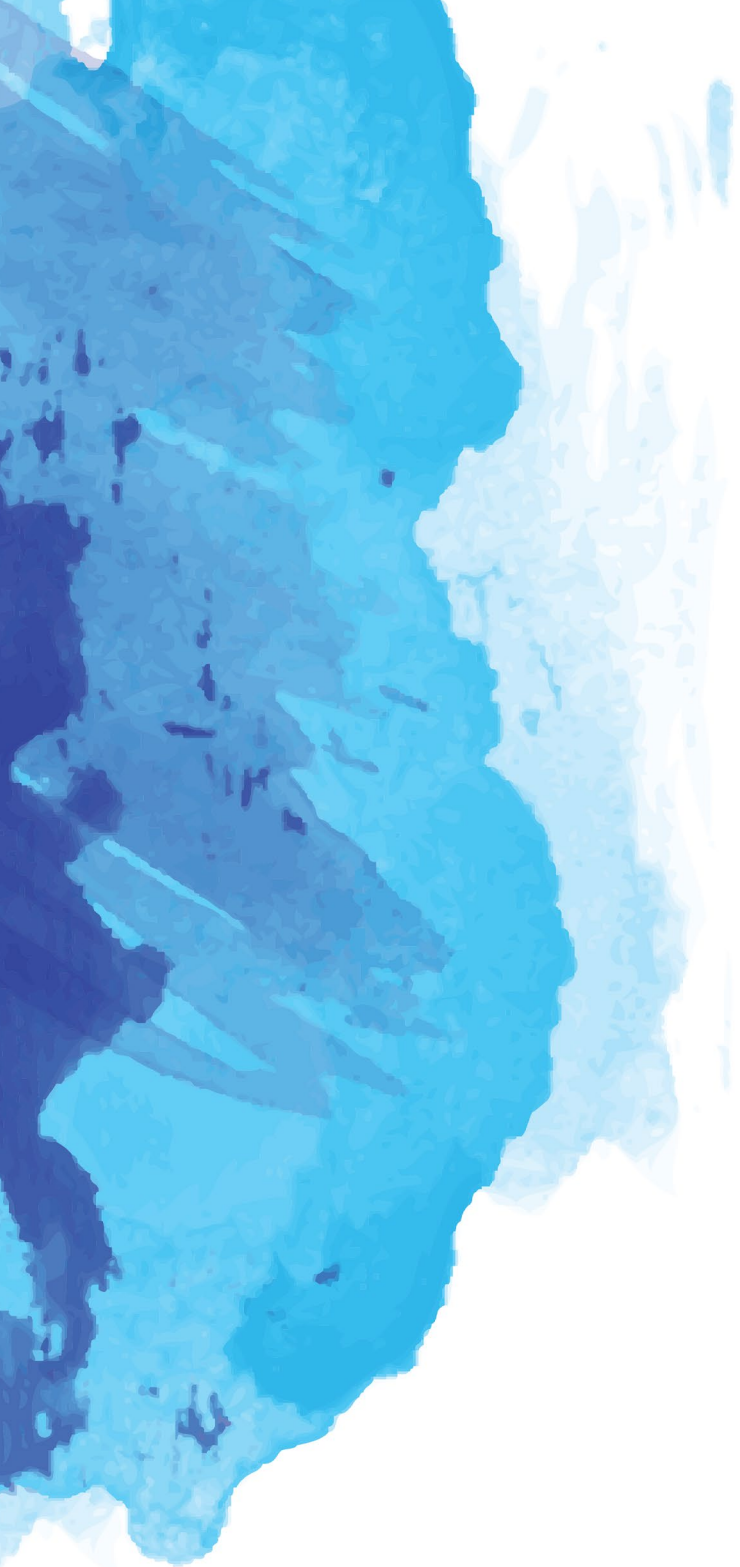
What do you hope to convey? “Ask why the information will matter,” says Joe Pulizzi, founder of the Content Marketing Institute.

YOUR SPECIAL EXPERTISE.

Concentrate on areas where you have the authority to impart real knowledge, Pulizzi suggests.

YOUR PACE.

How much content can you realistically create while still concentrating on your business?



“When your strategy is in order,
figure out what you can execute internally and

*what would be done
better by an expert,*

whether distribution, writing or creative.

Once you know specifically what you need,
you can find ways to fill the gap.”

— Joe Pulizzi, founder of the Content Marketing Institute

Understanding Your Market

How well do you really know the customers in your area, and what could you do to reach more of them?



HAVE CONVERSATIONS.

Existing customers may be your most valuable source of information. Ask them what problems they have that your products, services or expertise may help them address. The answers could provide clues on niches you can fill.



TAKE SURVEYS.

Ask customers what social media platforms they find most helpful. What are their favorite ways of searching for information?



FIND KNOWLEDGEABLE PARTNERS.

Businesses that have been operating in your area for years or decades often have keen insights and statistics to share about tastes and preferences of local customers.



Setting a Manageable Pace

An effective program offers new content at least once a month; weekly is even better. The important thing is to be consistent. Keep in mind that each new piece requires time and care. To avoid burnout, be realistic about the demands on your staff and what external support you need. These tips can help you maintain a steady pace:


FIND A FORMULA. A running “Three Questions” or “Five Tips” feature can attract a following and is simpler than always reinventing your approach.

REPURPOSE. Periodically featuring your best pieces from the past gives them new life and reduces creative pressures.

SHARE. Writing a short intro and linking to an external piece you admire can be a great way to celebrate the thinking of a key customer or partner.

60%

Companies that outsource at least part of their content creation³



Finding a Content Strategist: 3 Questions to Ask

If you seek outside help to create your program, a strategist who knows both the latest approaches and the underlying aims of content may be the answer. Ask:

1 HOW WILL YOU HELP MY BUSINESS GROW?

Find out whether the strategist truly understands the big picture, says Jay Baer, content strategist and president of Convince & Convert. “The best strategists have an unrelenting focus on how content builds business.”

2 HOW HAS YOUR APPROACH TO CONTENT CHANGED IN THE PAST YEAR?

The content business is constantly reinventing itself, so make sure your strategist is changing with the times and not relying on outmoded approaches, Baer suggests.

3 HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?

The answer can help align your goals and give you measurable ways to assess whether the strategy has succeeded.

PART TWO

CREATING CONTENT THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

With your strategy in place, now all you need is a stream of great pieces. While you may know exactly what you're looking for, keep in mind that the best content—pieces that connect effortlessly with an audience and smoothly get the results you're seeking—can be the most difficult to produce. Depending on your in-house expertise and time constraints, you may need creative help. Here's where to look.

Content Comes in Many Forms:



Articles



Videos



White papers



Infographics



Newsletters



Checklists



Expert Q&As



Quizzes



Customer case studies



Blogs



eBooks



Podcasts

“When it comes to creating content,
*the killer app
is relevancy.*”

Understanding your customers and their needs is hugely important. The more relevant and useful your content is, the better it will succeed.”

— Jay Baer, content strategist and president of Convince & Convert





How Journalists Can Help You Find Your Story

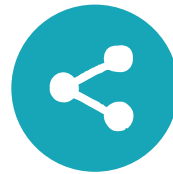
The best content connects at a human level by entertaining, delighting and educating readers on subjects they care about. These same qualities have always driven great journalism, notes Liz Buffa, vice president of content at Headline Studio, Advance Local's custom publishing unit.

“Journalists who have worked for consumer magazines or newspapers know how to source a story and tell it well. They understand the difference between simply explaining a topic and creating a narrative that engages a reader. They think about what’s going to grab people’s attention and create a bigger value.”

– Liz Buffa, Advance Local

5 Qualities That Make You Shareable

Content pay dirt comes when people share it with family or friends, becoming advocates for your brand. While nobody can predict the next viral sensation, creative partners can help make your content shareable through:



1

CLARITY.

Clear headlines that communicate a single, powerful idea of what the reader will learn.

2

EMOTION.

Don't be afraid to appeal to the human side of your customers.

3

READABILITY.

Substance is key, but breaking pieces into lists and adding sub-headlines help make pieces easier to navigate.

4

OPTIMISM.

Pieces that uplift and educate readers on improving some aspect of their lives will play better than those that scold or criticize.

5

BREVITY.

Go long if the subject demands it, but keep in mind that consumers are impatient. While two-thirds will watch 30 seconds of a video, just 17% stay engaged for three minutes.⁴



Embracing Video...the Right Way

With 85% of U.S. internet users watching videos and a billion viewers on YouTube alone, it's no surprise that 87% of marketers now make video a part of their strategy.⁵ Whether you develop videos in-house or work with a skilled outside videographer, give your video program time to build momentum, advises Joe Pulizzi, of the Content Marketing Institute. "Too many businesses waste time creating a video here and there." Think carefully about what you want to communicate, he adds. The best videos "are telling a different, valuable story."

87%
Marketers who
make video a part
of their strategy⁶

Your Secret Weapon: the Gig Economy

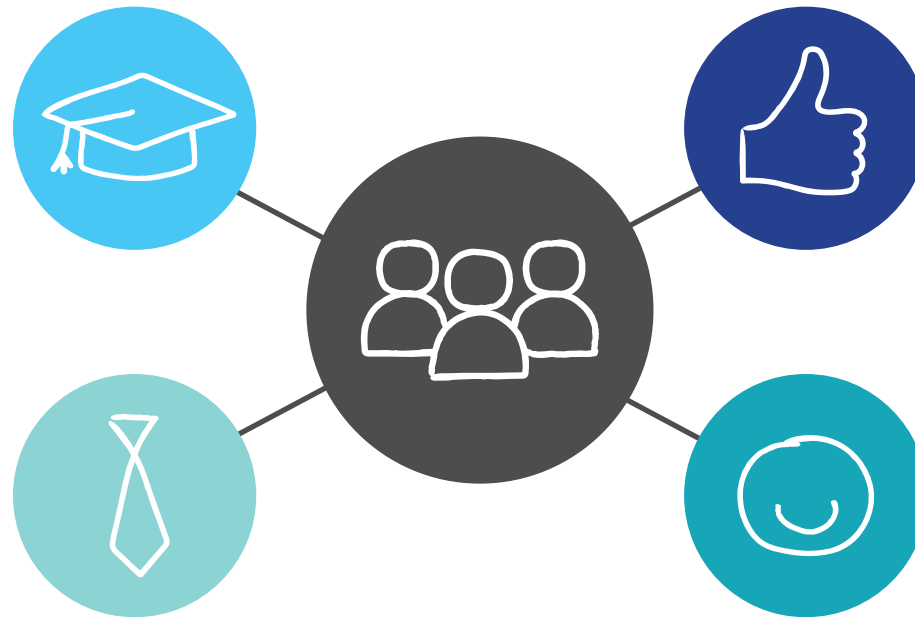
Technology has unleashed a labor force of nearly 41 million⁷ motivated, cost-effective freelancers, many with the skills to help you create great content. They are:

EDUCATED.

41% have four-year college degrees and 19% have advanced degrees, compared with 33% and 12% for the U.S. overall.⁸

SUCCESSFUL.

3.2 million earn at least \$100,000 per year.⁹



CONFIDENT.

37% see little or no risk in freelancing; just 17% see big risks.¹⁰

HAPPY.

79% say freelancing beats a traditional job.¹¹



Finding Creative Partners: 3 Questions to Ask

In a world of freelancers with creative chops, how can you choose those who will devote the time to understand your company and enhance your profile? Start with these questions.

1 HOW DOES CONTENT ADVANCE YOUR OWN BUSINESS?

Professionals who develop superlative content to promote themselves “will usually have an easier time creating it for you,” notes Pulizzi.

2 HOW MANY PROJECTS LIKE MINE HAVE YOU WORKED ON?

“Editing one podcast doesn’t make someone a podcast expert,” says Jay Baer, of Convince & Convert. “Look for people who have a bulk of experience.”

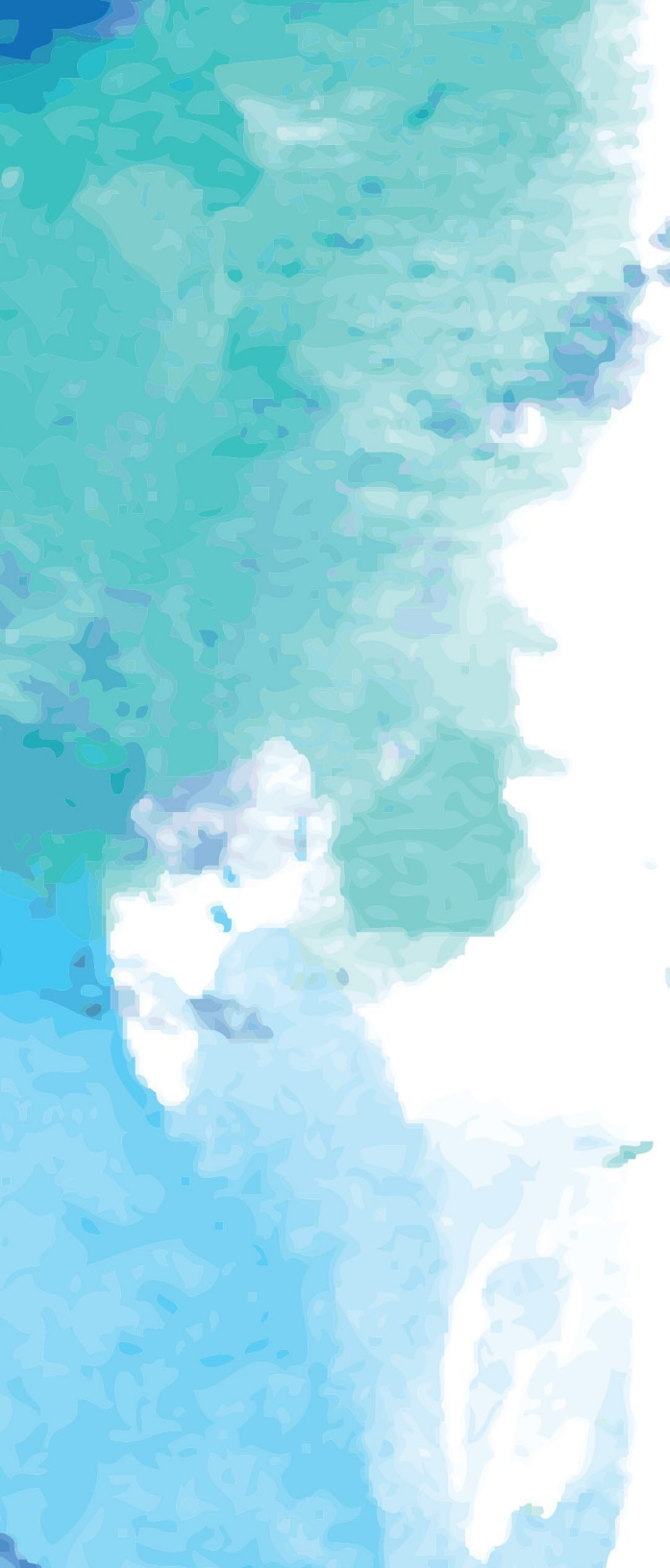
3 HOW WILL YOU SUPPORT MY BRAND?

Skilled writing or design that contradicts your voice or brand image won’t help. Look for evidence that a prospective partner knows how to work within brand guidelines.

PART THREE

GETTING THE WORD OUT

Your strategy is strong and you're starting to turn out terrific content. Don't let it wither on the vine of your website, where few visitors may look for it. Whether their expertise is in social media or search engines, specialists can help you find the best ways to distribute your content, assess your results and adjust your strategy.



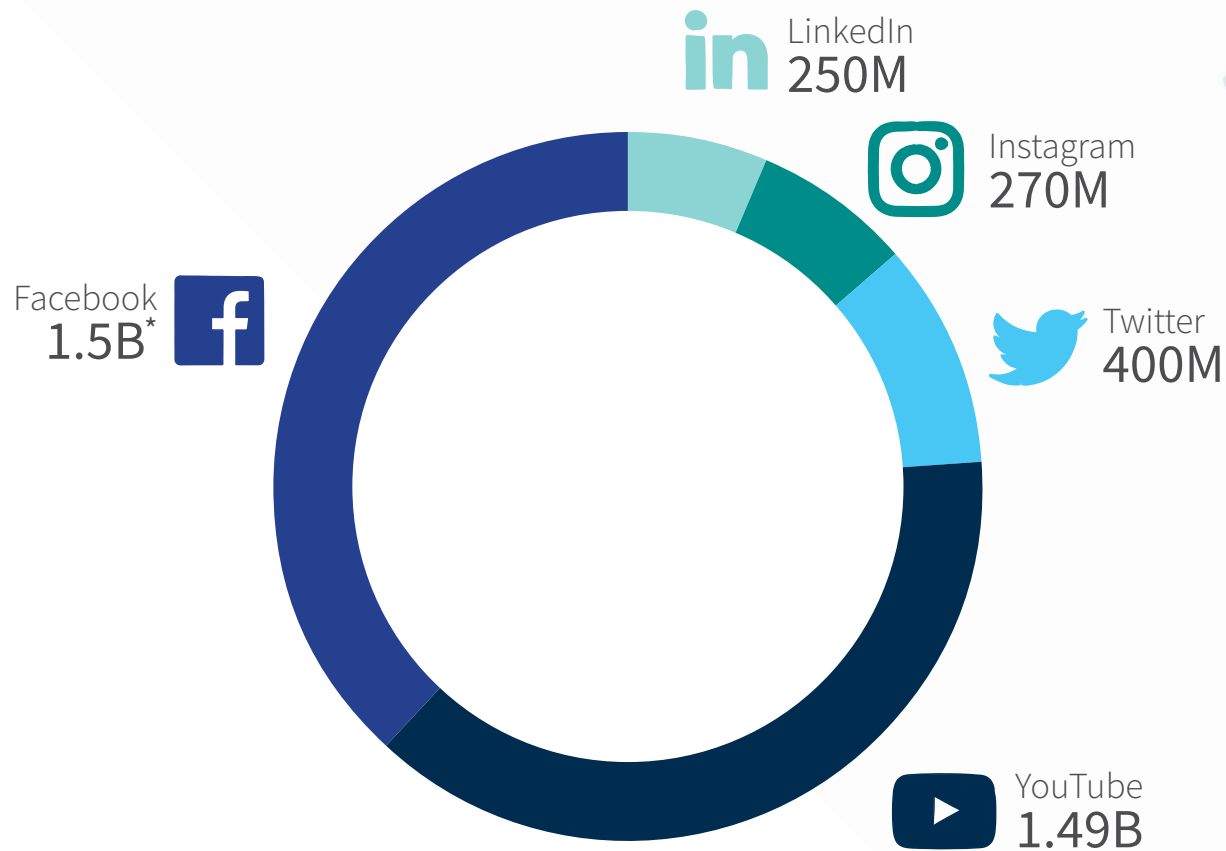
“Part of any content marketing approach needs to be a distribution strategy, especially if you haven’t built up your own audience yet. Working with publishers that have the audience you are targeting

is essential to making the plan work.”

— Joe Pulizzi, founder of the Content Marketing Institute.

Getting Social

A distribution strategy must involve delivering content through the social media sites where consumers spend the most time. Following are the top five, based on estimated unique monthly visitors as of July 1, 2017.¹²





A Fresh Look at Email

Even in a rapidly evolving tech landscape, few marketing tools can match the ability of good old email to target content to specific customers and prospects. Customer management software can help you deliver content that is:

OPTIMIZED FOR MOBILE.

Nearly 80% of smartphone users cite checking email as a top priority.¹³

PERSONALIZED.

Adding recipients' names to the subject line gives you a 26% higher chance they'll open it.¹⁴

TARGETED.

Analyze customers' past behavior to send content they might be especially interested in.

Becoming a Search Marketer

With global consumers conducting some 6.6 billion searches each day (4.5 billion on Google alone),¹⁵ marketers use search engine optimization (SEO) to increase the chances their site or content will appear on the first page of results. Yet some familiar SEO tactics such as loading pieces with “keywords” are less and less effective as search engines get better at assessing the quality of content.


These days, “You have to create content that real people like,” says Jay Baer, of Convince & Convert. “If people like it, search engines will too.” The good news is that a single, highly effective piece may pay off in positive publicity for years to come. Joe Pulizzi, of the Content Marketing Institute, says,

“One of our best-performing blog posts is 10 years old. We still get about 500 people a day finding it through search engines.”



81%

Consumers who search online before making a purchase¹⁶



“People don’t go to Google to search a company name,
*they go to answer a
question, solve a problem or
find out more information.*”

If you’re there with that information, that’s when you
can form connections and create better customers.”

— Liz Buffa, vice president of content, Headline Studio, Advance Local



Measure Your Performance—and Respond

Free software such as Google Analytics, Bitly and Piwik can help you gauge the effectiveness of your content using key performance indicators (KPIs). You can learn:



HOW MUCH TIME viewers spent watching your latest video.



WHETHER THOSE ARTICLES are driving readers to find out more about your company.



WHICH SOCIAL MEDIA SITES are driving the most traffic, and where, geographically, most of your readers come from.

Don't let that valuable info sit there. Tweak your content and concentrate your limited resources on the formats and channels having the greatest impact.



Finding Help With Distribution: 3 Questions to Ask

A publisher or other content specialist can help you decide the best ways to get your pieces in front of your key customers and prospects. To see if they know their stuff, ask:

1 HOW DO YOU DISTRIBUTE YOUR OWN CONTENT?

Look for evidence of a concerted, thoughtful plan.

2 IS YOUR PLATFORM CUSTOMIZABLE?

Find out if they use an off-the-shelf approach or will take into account your company's specific needs.

3 HOW CAN YOU HELP TARGET MY AUDIENCE?

Can they help you deliver targeted email to individual customers or prospects?

CONTACT ADVANCE OHIO TODAY!

As a leading provider of news, business and cultural information in Ohio, we've developed a deep trust with those who call this area home.

And, as part of Advance Local, one of the largest media groups in the U.S., we're leaders in strategic innovation and customized solutions that help our customers grow. We can help you create campaigns that engage audiences, increase your brand's visibility and deliver results.

Let's talk about how we can put those capabilities to work for your business, helping you create campaigns that engage audiences, increase your brand's visibility and deliver results.

- Content Strategy
- Branded Content
- Graphics & Data Visualization
- Native Sponsored Content
- Social media management
- Custom branded videos
- Thought leadership
- Original illustration

Advance Ohio employs over 100 marketers in Cleveland manage local, statewide, national and global campaigns for hundreds of companies across Ohio.

We help clients imagine the best they can be, write their stories and deliver those stories to the right audiences. We're a successful media company with its roots in storytelling and building audiences. We bring that expertise to our clients. What's your dream? We'll help you get there. What's your story? We'll help you write it and make sure more people know it. We work on one of the most sophisticated data management platforms in the industry, offering our advertising partners access to unique customer insights and audience targeting capabilities. We drive insights that inform every aspect of our marketing plans and build custom audiences—people ready to hear your message. We do it every day, for our advertisers and for ourselves. The strategy and tactics we use to grow our widely successful trusted, premium website (Cleveland.com) are the same tools we use to drive ROI for your business. We're ready to meet with you, any time, any place. We're backed by Advance Local, one of the largest media companies in the US, with headquarters in One World Trade Center, and media groups in every region of the country. Advance's portfolio of businesses include the #1 news and information companies in multiple US markets, along with Conde Nast magazines and American Business Journals. Advance also has extensive interests in a broad range of leading technology, media and marketing companies including Reddit and 1010 Data.



Learn more about how to measure and assess your digital marketing strategy by contacting us at 216-999-3900 or email marketing@advance-ohio.com.

ENDNOTES

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