VENDIGITAL®

Measuring and Improving
Creative Efficiency

Measuring Efficiency

It is fair to say that 2020 continues to be a disruptive year for businesses. Most of that disruption, unfortunately, has been negative. The property market has proven an exception in recent months, spurred on by government support in the form of the stamp duty 'holiday' and societal change in the form of masses of city-dwellers looking for more green space. Your author is part of said masses.

Whilst going through this process I have been considering the parallels between the property market and my day-to-day experiences within media. For Media operations and house hunting alike, important features include quality, design & creativity, and fit-for-purpose. But one area has particularly piqued my interest: efficiency. In much the same way as houses are awarded Energy Performance Certificates on a A-G scale, could content creators be measured for their creative efficiency?

If you have single-glazed windows, a log-burning stove, a conventional boiler, high ceilings and no loft insulation, you will have a low EPC rating. Importantly, this means it costs you more to run your home or your home is less habitable (think of the conservatory that is unusable in January!). More cost and lower usability & quality; not a great combination.

Drawing the parallel with media, what is the content creation equivalent of a draughty door, how can we measure the impact of that, and what can be done about it?
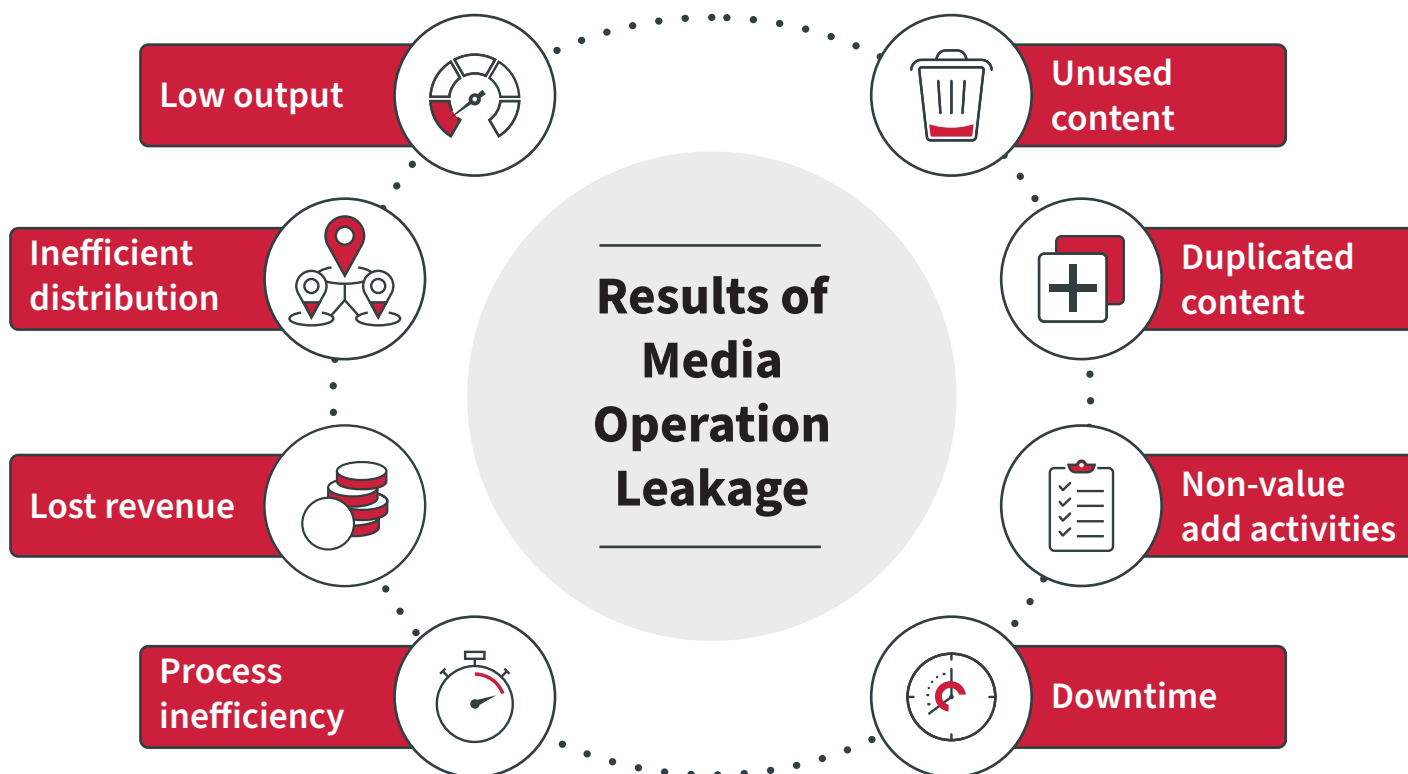

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Content creation **inefficiency**

Within a media operation the leakages will manifest themselves in the following ways:

Low output

Inefficient distribution

Lost revenue

Process inefficiency

Results of Media Operation Leakage

Unused content

Duplicated content

Non-value add activities

Downtime

Unused content

There will often be a general acceptance of unused or "killed" content as necessary to drive competition (often internal) to ensure the highest quality content possible. The key is optimising the extent of unused content to avoid slipping into diminishing returns where too much content is created with limited impact of the quality of the final product. However, in many cases a robust, up-front triage process embedded at commission / green light stage can help keep unused content levels as near to zero as possible.

Duplicated content

There will be occasions where multiple people from the same media organisation are working to similar, if not identical briefs. This may be as obvious as two news teams attending the same event to more subtle examples, such as not taking advantage of potential efficiencies from renting the same studio space or buying the same multimedia. In a similar vein, there are inherent inefficiencies in the lack of content re-purposing, for example commissioning new film and photography where stock media could be easily re-purposed.

Non-value add activities

Content will often go through multiple revisions and edits before it is deemed final and it is reasonable to question if all these touches are adding value or if the value added is worth the effort. These could be as simple as revisions that are reversed (and maybe then reinstated) through the creative process, to minor changes that add little value but create extra steps and time in the process.

Downtime

An obvious example of leaked efficiency is resource downtime. Having the right resources ready and available to contribute at the right time is a challenge for all industries and media is no different in this regard. Whether it be a crew on set without the talent present, or a sub-editor on shift waiting for copy to land, aligning resource availability to the peaks and troughs of workload is crucial.

Process inefficiency

An optimised process from planning and commissioning through to post-production and distribution will mean that the maximum amount of creative effort goes into the final output seen by the consumer. Inefficiency here could be from needless bureaucracy, complex approval loops or simply from having to navigate between multiple I.T. systems.

Lost revenue

There is obviously a monetary opportunity cost to not maximising the value of content created and produced, whether this be referring to multiplatform sharing, exploitation of content and / or rights, subscription / advertising monetisation opportunities or syndication arrangements. Creating great content but not optimising all revenue opportunities is as real as inefficiency from creating content that is never used.

Inefficient distribution

Through the content creation process, consideration must be given to whether the right content is getting to the right people at the right time. For example, is digital content written with the right tone and angle, and then published at a time that captures the maximum possible audience whilst also potentially surfacing on other platforms within the portfolio to maximise the exposure. This all needs to happen with the minimum of friction and effort, perhaps by using the latest features from social media optimisation tools such as SocialFlow.

Low output

The efficacy and efficiency of the workforce will determine the volume and quality of content that is served to consumers. An inefficient workforce will mean that either volume requirements are missed (or are compensated for by over resourcing) and / or the quality of the content is less than its potential / expected level. Of course, setting targets that motivate and drive the desired behaviour without unintended consequences is a fine art. We have seen both excellent and terrible demonstrations of this, with a perfect example of the latter being the growth in 'click bate' culture.

What are the **main causes of the leakage** within a media operation?

Now we know where to look within a media organisation for leaked effort, the next task is to understand the underlying causes of that leakage. We have identified five root causes:

1. Planning

Insufficient up-front planning of content, from poor briefs to lack of ownership or unclear targets, causes four main leaks:

• Over creation of unused content

• Multiple duplicate activities

• Lost revenue from content created for which there low audience demand, or that has a short lifetime value

• Downtime as content creators are reliant on having commissioned work to produce during working hours.

2. Deadline management

The sub-optimal or non-existent setting of deadlines on content causes two main leaks:

• Production downtime: not allocating deadlines for content based on its time sensitivity causes peaks in the demand on the production team, therefore, media operations are resourcing up to the peak with downtime either side.

• Lost revenue: deadlines need to be set using market data and then subsequently managed to and hit in order to optimise revenue opportunities from the widest possible channel exposure.

3. System architecture

Ineffective or out of date technology will drive leakage into the processes for both the content creators and production teams. For the content creators it will mean that they have less time in the day to be channelling creative energy into the final output and the production teams will have less time before deadline to concentrate solely on value added activities.

4. Structural deficiencies

The separation of activities across platforms, departments, and functions primarily leads to leakage manifesting itself in the form of duplicate activities. Duplication of activities can take the form of tasks; resource; cost, to name but a few of the potential duplications. Furthermore, structures that perhaps place the right resources in the wrong place or make it difficult for teams to work together will create process inefficiency.

5. Output

The lack of visibility regarding the quantity and quality of published output can lead to leakage, primarily in the form of lost revenue. This lost revenue is apparent where content is not effectively shared (internally and externally) to promote maximum usage. It is also apparent where content / ideas created are not tracked through success parameters such as volume of dismissed pitches, engagement from online content, perceived quality of content produced, and quantity of output compared to peers / benchmarks.

What can be done to **improve creative efficiency?**

First and foremost, quality content is the product of a creative process. However, it is a creative process operating within a commercial business environment that has been revolutionised in recent years. This change is set to continue; viewing across all traditional platforms (from print circulations to linear TV) trend down, advertising yields are pressured and more and more advertising revenue is going to the digital platforms. Covid has exacerbated this in 2020, with industry body PACT estimating that productions are costing 10-30% more as social distancing adds complexity into shoots. This will continue to put pressure on cost and the ongoing sustainability of traditional media.

However, revolutions present opportunity if we engage in positive solutions. This is not the moment to lower content quality; if anything, it is the moment to improve it. Good quality content that engages an audience and has both longevity and reach across multi-platforms and audiences, and re-usability, is increasingly important.

So, what if you could reduce cost and improve quality?

The solution is to improve creative efficiency. But to improve creative efficiency, you first need to measure it. At Vendigital, we have created our own EPC – Editorial Performance Certificate. This is our objective way of measuring the efficiency of creative content creation process.
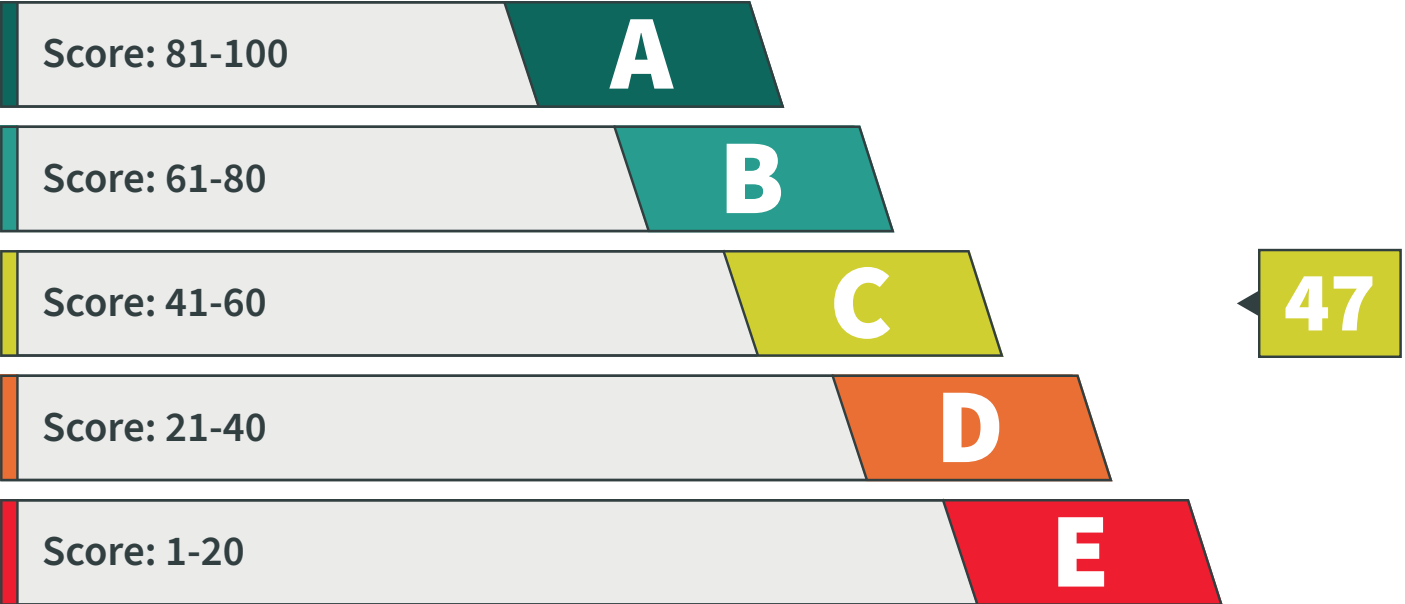
> **"**
>
> Vendigital's approach to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the creative process within news publishing has been game-changing; they bring logic and data-led insight whilst being sensitive to the creative process and have helped us achieve the near impossible balance of managing costs whilst improving quality and all the time safeguarding the value of content delivered to our customers.
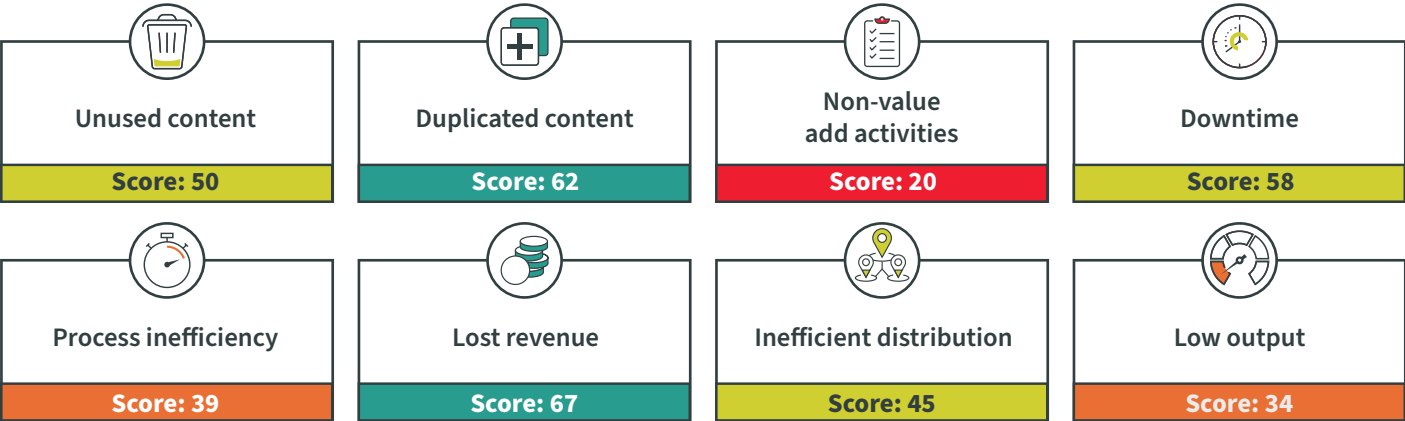>
> **CEO, Large UK National and Regional News Publisher**
>
> **"**

Example Editorial Performance Certificate

	Grade
Score: 81-100	**A**
Score: 61-80	**B**
Score: 41-60	**C**
Score: 21-40	**D**
Score: 1-20	**E**

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Individual Category Scores

Unused content	Duplicated content	Non-value add activities	Downtime
Score: 50	**Score: 62**	**Score: 20**	**Score: 58**

Process inefficiency	Lost revenue	Inefficient distribution	Low output
Score: 39	**Score: 67**	**Score: 45**	**Score: 34**

Want to learn more?

By gathering some initial data points and engaging with a small handful of key stakeholders, we can calculate your EPC score within a matter of days and provide feedback and improvement options free of charge.

Contact:

Ben Bird
Partner
e: ben.bird@vendigital.com
t: +44(0)776 607 4771

Simon Woodcock
Director
e: simon.woodcock@vendigital.com
t: +44(0)786 741 6612

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