



## Use an Editorial Calendar Like a Media Boss to Streamline Your Content Marketing

*This transcript was lightly edited for clarity.*

Chris: My guest today is Joan Boyce. Joan is the Vice-President and General Manager of Biocompare who you should all know about. If you don't know already, you will. Biocompare helps life science professionals making informed purchase decisions by offering product information and industry news. She's also a member of the editorial board where we work together at the ACP-LS. Joan Boyce, welcome to the podcast.

Joan: Chris, thank you so much for the opportunity. I'm really looking forward to having a great session.

Chris: Yeah. We were talking before the show. You are the person I have pursued the longest to get on this show.

Joan: Well, I appreciate your patience. Thank you so much.

Chris: Today, we're going to talk about building an editorial calendar. I got this idea when we were talking on the editorial board and thinking, "Here's someone who has to do this as part of your business at Biocompare. Who better to really dive into what an editorial calendar is and how companies could use it in their content marketing." Let's just start with that basic thing, what is an editorial calendar? How do you look at it?

Joan: Yeah. That's a great question. I look at it pretty much as an editorial calendar being a means to organize content and publishing schedules. The elements of a calendar consist of the topics or the categories you wish to publish. You need to think about the publication dates for those topics, the content types that will be used, things like articles, video, white paper, blog posts. Many use good old-fashioned Excel files or Google Drive to organize and store the data.

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There are some editorial plug-ins for Wordpress and if your editorial calendar is pretty advanced and complex, you can use paid software such as Kapost, Contently, Compendium, those are kind of some useful tools, like I said earlier, for managing really, really complex calendars but it's an organizational tool.

Chris: Do you use any of those tools because I know Kapost and Contently. I don't know the other one you mentioned and haven't ...

Joan: Compendium. No, we've looked into them and honestly, we use Excel. Yeah. It works, for our purposes, it works really well.

Chris: Yeah. I think a shared Excel or a Google ...

Joan: Google Drive, yeah.

Chris: Because I imagine they're getting updated by multiple people all the time, right?

Joan: Yes. It's mostly Google Drive, yeah. Absolutely.

Chris: Maybe I've got this down later but since you mentioned all those content types and the question just popped into my head, so I'll ask it now. Do you have an interval for each of those things or topics? I mean, we're going to get into how you think about when you publish certain types of content but there's also something like we want to publish a video at a certain pace and we want to publish articles at a certain interval, is that part of your thinking?

Joan: The broad picture and the broad stroke is that in the editorial calendar, you need to be really, really strategic. In order to answer that, you have to start at the very, very high level in what are you hoping to accomplish. Then, that will drive the types of content, and I can get into that a little bit later or now if you'd like in terms of how to really think through the process of creating the calendar. Because there's a lot of facets of it that you need to think through before you actually get down to the tactical, the mechanics of filling in those cells within the Google Drive.

Chris: Yeah, okay. We will get to that later.

Joan: Yeah. I'll get into that in length.

Chris: You're a publisher and you need a schedule so that you can deliver

something on a regular basis because that is an expectation of publishers. If you listen to Joe Pulizzi in the Content Marketing Institute, consistency is a big deal and consistency of content is it can be difficult. I've been doing this for two and a half years, I had to take one interval off because I didn't have anything and occasionally, I repost things. It definitely takes some effort to put something out every other week. Beyond having the schedule, what other benefits do you see as having a calendar that you're working from? Why is it important?

Joan: Yeah. It's important because it does, like I said earlier, it takes a lot of time and effort and resources to put together a calendar. I think the main benefits are it will help you focus your efforts on your goals and objectives. Referring to that, making sure you don't go astray because it's easy I think sometimes to get off course but if you have a document that you prepared, things are written and people have signed off, it helps you with the focus.

Secondly, it also helps you adhere to a schedule which is really, really important and if you publish it internally and send it off to your writers then there's a commitment that they have to adhere to a schedule so that ensures that the content actually gets written and published on time. Adhering to the calendar as well, also leads to, you mentioned consistency, consistent execution. That can help with staying within the budget because as you know, content efforts can get costly and if things go outside of scope and outside the calendar you can be incurring a lot of expenses that you may be haven't budgeted for. Those are the main reasons why it's important and why it's such a great organizational tool.

Chris: I like that. I hadn't really thought about explicitly the budget aspect of it. This is  
I imagine, especially for someone in your position but even for a company. Going back, I want to tie that to the first one which is that focus on goals and always trying to get companies to think about what are your goals and lay out the content that you're going to create over a long period of time so you know you've got the list in front of you and you know that everything works together and it makes sense.

Doing that and having that calendar saves budget. It saves time and effort because you're not having to get together and hash things out every month, "What are we doing now?" and have long discussion about that that may or may not be relevant to what you're doing next month or last month in a scattered fashion. I think the calendar is ...

Joan: It's the bible.

Chris: ... the manifestation of a good plan.

Joan: Exactly. Exactly.

Chris: Nice. All right. Now, we're going to go a little bit more into it. A lot of publications have a seasonal schedule around, say, sporting events or cooking or fashion. In the spring, you're going to see what the summer fashions are and I don't know why I've used that analogy in a couple of podcasts lately but that's what's come up.

Joan: It's a good one.

Chris: If you are publishing for scientists, what types of things are you looking at to produce content that's timely for whatever scientists might be thinking about at a particular time of the year?

Joan: Yeah. That's a great question. In the media/magazine world, it's really common to align editorial topics with key scientific conferences, especially the ones where the media brand will be exhibiting or distributing their magazines. They want to make sure that they produce content that's going to be relevant to the audience and I think that's ... I'm going to hit upon that a lot, I think, during this podcast. You really need to know your audience.

Industry conferences are a really good way to schedule content related content to the conference. It's like I said earlier, it's a very common practice. Also, what I found to be really, really successful is to also keep the pulse on hot papers that have been published and you can do that by setting Google alerts to the topics that you may have in mind and what you can see is that there are some really hot or seminal papers that have been published. This can give you an idea of how to further refine the content scope so that you can make the best assignments to whomever is going to write the article.

I always like to recommend that we do that when we put together our calendars. Typically, in the publishing world, if you've noticed, if you've read any or seen any editorial calendars, the topics tend to be broad in scope and then, when it gets a little bit closer to the actual publication date maybe like two or three months out, then the editors will sit there and narrow their focus. They'll look at a lot of different tools and resources to do that and like I said, the Google alerts are really, really good way. Focusing on new emerging uses of technology always captures people's attention and of course, you want to write about content that's going to be consumed.

From a content marketing side, for a tool provider, what I've seen is a lot of product launches guide content creation. There's a lot of activity around a product launch and assets that need to be created for the content launch. Certainly, for a tool provider that needs to be taken into consideration when putting together the calendar. I have found and you've probably noticed it too like a lot of companies do tie product launches to key scientific meetings.

Chris: Right.

Joan: Yeah. I totally so I think ...

Chris: Or they try to.

Joan: Yeah. They try to, right. A lot of variables in there.

Chris: The missing piece now is having it all thought out three months ahead of time, right? I think that's...

Joan: Exactly. That's why the calendar is a beautiful thing. It should be part of when you're starting your strategic plan for marketing. It's like you have that stuff identified. That will be the guide then you tie because a lot of that, you could use. What a publication uses to guide the editorial calendar, companies can use that same line of thinking for not only their product launches but then developing the content to support those products.

Chris: Right. The only thing I'd say about that so, first of all, a calendar, the conferences do drive the scheduling science.

Joan: Yeah, lots of times. Yes.

Chris: Then, you're using that and you're setting Google alerts so that at your three-month or minus three-month meeting with respect to the date of that event and the issue you're going to publish, you're starting to say, "All right, what's hot in this area so we can develop those articles and have them come out at the time of the conference."

Joan: Correct.

Chris: For a company, this just crossed my mind, what I would suggest is setting your alerts a little earlier because if you're going to launch a product at the conference, you ought to be creating content relevant to that topic for a couple of months in advance, to warm up the audience. To get them paying attention to you on that topic so that when your launch comes out, they're

already looking and it's not just, "Hey, we've got our product, check this thing out." You want to gather the people who would be interested early.

Joan: Yeah, absolutely. That's a really good point. You want to especially if it's setting the goals and that's where the goals come in when you think through the editorial calendar but yeah, if you want to start with that thought leadership content before to establish yourself as a thought leader in that specific area well in advance of the product, that makes perfect sense.

Chris: Really, you should be doing that all the time. I mean, you should be gathering that audience with non-product related content so that when it comes time for your launch in that event, you have your list.

Joan: Correct.

Chris: Now, we're getting into the process, what does the process of creating the calendar look like?

Joan: That's a good question. Okay. It's a long answer because it's very in depth.

Chris: That's what we're here for.

Joan: Actually, I just wrote an article about this for an upcoming e-newsletter that we called Biocompare Insights. This is very timely. Really, like I said earlier, the first step that I find to be useful is to create an editorial mission statement. I notice that ...

Chris: Yay!

Joan: Yay! I know this sounds really basic but I can't tell you how important it is. The statement should really articulate your goals, okay? Why are you creating the content in the first place? What do you hope to accomplish with it and most importantly, how you measure success? You need to think about that stuff upfront. Once you've had that all mapped out, in conjunction with that thinking, you really need to pinpoint the desired audience and the personas of that audience. Who are you creating this content for? What are their biggest pain points?

What I find to be really useful obviously in the media world, the magazine world, we have editorial advisory boards. I always like to validate everything through boards, through colleagues. For a company, I recommend that tapping into their customers or their sales organization. One resource that I think is really underutilized is technical support. Ask your technical support

group, "Hey, what are the top 10 challenges that you're or questions that you're getting," because those are the pain points. If you focus on those, it can help you understand your desired audience a little bit better.

Once you do that high-level thinking, what you then need to do is to determine the budget that you can allocate for content creation because that's really going to drive a lot of the decision making such as like frequency. Once you've determined those high-level things, then you can start creating the editorial calendar tactical plan. You have your budget, you have your goals, how are you going to measure success, your personas and the next thing to decide is the frequency, how often will you publish the content because that's really important, that's going to tie very directly into the budget. Then, you need to think about the distribution channels that you have to disseminate the content and the reason why the distribution channels are important to consider early on is because how and where the content is consumed may give insights into where that person is or could potentially be within the purchasing journey. Let me give an example.

An example could be the channel is your website, right? The content type is a blog. You can ask yourself, when during the buying journey is a blog post most likely to be consumed? You can say, "Maybe it's going to be read early on in the buying cycle. Therefore, I need to think about maybe establishing or creating thought leadership content for that." The editorial calendar's a really good way to just keep that all really nicely organized but those are really important considerations to think of upfront.

Once you've given that a lot of thought, the next thing to think about is to who actually create the content. Is this something you'll write? Do you need to hire a freelancer? That will then determine your expenses and resource requirements. Then, after that, then you have to get down to deciding on the topics and some of the great sources of potential topics, again, based on the goals so if it's a product launch or if you want to really establish yourself in a specific given area is first take a look at your own website. Your website, look at your analytics, start by seeing which types of content are consumed most. This is something that a lot of publishers do on a regular and routine basis.

Always start with your own audience and your own site. Those are really good places but other topic ideas can come from ... A little secret is we typically tap into conference producer websites for ideas on what's hot within the subject matter you want to cover. Some of them have really great agendas. They're covering some of the cutting edge stuff so that's a really good resource to tap into for some topic considerations. Then, of course, there are always publication editorial calendars. Those are typically published a year

in advance so you can check those out as well and I've always found, like I said earlier, that vetting the topics with our editorial advisory board can provide really meaningful feedback and a company can do this with their best customers and their sales teams.

That's kind of all the upfront thinking that has to go into it and then, you have to think about how do you organize all these data, right? Take your Google Drive, set up columns. The key things that I like to capture on the editorial calendar, I mean, obviously, the topic, the content headline, what else, desired persona, the content type. Is it going to be a blog, a video, an article, even a webinar? The channel used for dissemination, the due date, the publish date, tying in any kind of key strategic meetings, the person responsible for creating the content.

Another really important thing I like to keep tidy on the editorial calendars is the metadata tags for SEO. Some editors like to use it to keep track of the status, the metrics and then finally, what kind of call-to-action. That's my long-winded answer but I found that great editorial calendars really do require a lot of thought and planning but it's totally well worth it.

Chris: There you go, drop the mic.

Joan: Yeah, really. That's the secret sauce.

Chris: I mean, there's a lot more in there than I think most people would think of. All the way down to the call-to-action but certainly, if you're making content, you should have a call-to-action for something at the end of it and that can be, it's easy to overlook. You say, "We create the content, we put it out there and we just hope that somebody does something based on that." It's really important even if it's just "Read this other piece" or there's some link in it or ask for information, whatever you want them to do.

Joan: Or download for Demand Gen.

Chris: Exactly. Yeah.

Joan: Yup.

Chris: You're publishing a media kit every year and you do that to sell advertising and other services for Biocompare. Somewhere near the end of one year, you've got your calendar ready for the next year so you can go out and say, "This is what we're going to be talking about next year. Which of these slots do you want?" or "Which of these packages do you want? And here's how



what we're going to be publishing so people interested in certain topic will see your content or your product release at the right time.”

What do you think the idea of marketers in a company using an editorial calendar to sell management on a fixed program of content marketing? In other words - sell the idea. Let's say, "We're going to build this calendar and with the intent that this is our plan and this is why we're going to publish this at this time." My goal would be to minimize people coming and saying, "Hey, we should do an article on this or we should do the ad hoc request that disrupt the flow of a content marketing system."

Joan: Definitely. I'm smiling right now because I really do feel that since the editorial calendar is such a great organizational tool, that if it's put together properly and used effectively, it will result in marketing efforts that are more organized and aligned with key strategic goals and as you astutely thought about when you're writing this question, it's an awesome way to present the ideas to management, really. It really is because it shows that you're going to be organized. You have your goals, you have success metrics, you have a budget. I really do feel that the best content marketing efforts all start with an editorial calendar because it really does force that deeper level of thinking as I alluded to earlier on in another question.

What I recommend is starting actually with a small effort to use it as a proof of concept, right? If you want to sell it to management, they always like to do what works. Start with like a three to four-month plan. Again, I can't stress the importance of setting metric goals and having them laid out within the calendar, goals that are measurable and set them for every piece of content you create. Then, measure early and often. AB tests things like design, titles, to ensure that when you roll out your full-on campaigns you're using what's worked and what will get management's attention is the ability to show ROI as you know because content marketing isn't really a one-time effort.

Yeah. I recommend like always analyzing the data, always optimize and adapt your editorial strategy. The beauty of the digital media is things that could be tracked. If you're company has content engagement metrics that they've already signed off on with your plan like strive to beat them, measure early and often and, for example, if demand gen is part of the main goal of your content campaign, tracking whether or not the lead's generated through the content downloads and subsequent nurturing, actually convert into a sale opportunity would be really a key. Being able to show that level ROI to upper management should really command attention and gain that acceptance.

Having an editorial calendar where that's all mapped out will really help

organize the effort and stay focused. That's that's what I think about how it could be used to help sell management.

Chris: That's good advice even though I know I led you on that one a little bit. I felt like I was a senator questioning something like, "Here's my statement, please say yes."

Joan: Well, but I loved it because there's a lot of thought that goes into and if it's done well and executed properly and honestly, management will, I think, really respect that. How it will help minimize frequent changes and direction, that's a really good question. It's interesting. That's why I recommend to start early. I mean start with a smaller program because one thing that I've heard from many of the awesome editors I've had the privilege to work with over the years is they actually dislike how restrictive an editorial calendar can be, especially one that spans across 12 months and is published, right?

We have to do in the media world because people want to ... they want to see, they want to plan their schedules, they want to plan what types of ads they may be publishing in a magazine. Honestly, editors really don't like to be tied in for that period of time.

Chris: I'm sure.

Joan: It's like a little secret but we do have the beauty of being in an industry that's like constantly changing, constantly advancing so that's why I suggest and recommend starting out with a calendar that necessarily isn't published externally for customers that's too far out in advance and that allows the flexibility of being tweaked slightly to accommodate hot emerging topics. It's not really about switching up the plan but having the ability to maybe shift the focus of the article if you see something hot that's coming about. I do think that calendar can really help minimize frequent changes and direction as well.

Chris: Yeah. You don't have to publish it to customers. You can publish it to management and you're counting on them to realize the value of staying on a fixed program and hopefully, not having to create things that are off plan just because they happen to be popular right now. Honestly, things come up and it seems like, "Oh, we should do an article on that," but by the time you actually got it out, no one would be paying attention anymore. Yeah. I think a company should stick with their story and go. You mentioned this as a little aside but you mentioned AB testing. Do you do a lot of AB testing on what you publish?

Joan: We do that more with channels so email blasts. We do more of that. What we do is just really very closely monitor page views and activity and then, if there are any kind of links, that's where the call-to-action, if there are any links within the content. The most of the AB testing that we do is within the delivery channels. If we want to send something out by e-mail, we'll test different subject lines. We do AB testing with news more because the headlines for news, that's the one thing that where a lot of publishers do AB testing. There may be a new story and they want to see okay, this headline may be a little bit more provocative or not provocative, that's where you know when the persona is going to be important."

That's where I think timely new stories. We have done AB testing with headlines or subject lines for new stories.

Chris: Right. Now I have a followup question. I'm sure you have a relatively large list. What fraction of your list do you do your test on?

Joan: Probably about 20%, 20% to 25%.

Chris: Yeah. That would have been my guess but I just thought for people who are not doing it... Obviously, if you test too much you've already sent it to too many people with the wrong one and if you don't do enough, you don't get any data.

All right. What about tying your editorial calendar to your other marketing efforts? Your non-content efforts, is there a way to do that?

Joan: Well, in the media world the basis of our marketing to get more eyeballs and audience is really around audience development. Our marketing efforts are very, very closely tied to our editorial strategy. An example of this is late last year we launched interactive content hubs that we named Future Lab. Each Future Lab is created around a particular subject area. We currently have of six of them on topics like next gen sequencing flow, immunodetection and each future lab has its own editorial calendar and that editorial calendar really does drive the audience development or the marketing plan.

The two are very, very closely aligned and we typically use every available channel to drive traffic and engagement with the Future Lab platform and we track everything that we do. Every piece of marketing that was used to drive the engagement, we collect and then we use the data to make tweaks on both the marketing campaigns that we do and the content that we create along the

way. I think for a publisher, the editorial strategy really does drive the marketing very much so.

Chris: Now, my ears are perking up. You've created these platforms, your Future Lab platforms around things like NGS and so on. I'm imagining, with the intent of building specific audiences.

Joan: That's correct.

Chris: You're using content relevant to those audiences. Somehow you're engaging and you're getting people to sign up for something so you get a piece of data about them and then you publish content that would be of interest to that persona and you're just trying to develop that audience. I'm guessing, in the long run a strategy for a publisher is to be able to go to a company and say, "Here's the audience we have that we know is highly engaged in next gen sequencing.

Joan: Correct. Actually, each Future Lab has a sponsor. It's an exclusive sponsorship so what we do is we and the sponsor, it's like a really nice native and contextual advertising opportunity. What we do is we intersperse the sponsor content in with our own content and when we launched a Future Lab we used a strategy like, okay, what tradeshows are we going to be at? Where can we launch future labs around a specific meeting so we were at Cancer and we recently launched the NGS one.

At the tradeshow, we'll drive registrants to the Future Lab. People can come up to the booth, sign up to be a registered or a subscriber to that NGS Future Lab and we update content at a minimum on a monthly basis. Those people that sign up will then get placed on an email blast to get our content alerts. Then, we also use all of our available channels in addition to the in e-blast to drive people to the content. Along the way, we are absolutely augmenting our audiences in those areas where we have the Future Lab. It's a really nice platform and we're learning along the way.

We just recently launched this so we're very data driven so we're absolutely looking at all of our data to say, "You know what, we're really finding that this type of content is resonating well," and for some of our sponsors, some of the content is gated and we're definitely seeing that. Some content types are more gate-worthy than others and that's a really great learning because...

Chris: Yeah.

Joan: ... posters do really well. White papers not as much, so we're learning along

the way and we're educating as we learn and replaying or providing the sponsors with that kind of feedback for their own efforts as well. Another good example of marketing around a bellweather piece of content, for example, we're about to tomorrow, I'm very excited. We're going to be launching a documentary that we produced around reproducibility. It's a film, it's 37 minutes. It's a pretty long film but we interviewed about 20 KOLs from around the world and we embarked upon a huge marketing effort to drive people to view the video. Yeah, all in all ...

Chris: I saw those on LinkedIn yesterday.

Joan: Yeah. Good. I'm glad you saw that. Yes, it was a sneak preview but certainly, if you create a bellweather piece of content and we mapped out a whole plan just around one piece of content because we feel it's going to be that important. Yeah, within the publishing world, definitely, our editorial really drives our marketing.

Chris: Yeah. Wow! That's, I mean, this has been so much more than what even I anticipated when I thought, let's just talk about how to build a marketing editorial calendar so you can do better and now, you've really ...

Joan: Well, I'm glad you found it useful.

Chris: ... set this standard. I mean, you're talking about all the things that you know but then from the media company perspective, Joe Pulizzi and Robert Rose are always talking about thinking like a media company to do your marketing and you really see now how you're in the business of building an audience and that's how a company should think about it as well. And you've laid out the why and the what and the how really well for us. For marketers listening to this, do you have any advice on getting started, I mean, there's probably a little activation energy it takes to get people to say, "All right, I'm going to do this." How do you make the first small step?

Joan: Yeah. I think really, it's just really being sure to align your goals with the content you produce. That's going to be key and then get as organized as soon as possible and start off with a modest effort. Set metrics, assess metrics and be diligent about monitoring them and let the data guide your future efforts. I mean, that's in a nutshell what I would recommend. If you do that hard work and thinking upfront, everything else falls into place very nicely. Start up with a small effort.

Chris: Yeah. The small effort, that's the thing. Like you say, don't make a calendar for a year that you know no one's going to stick to and it's like a diet like, "Oh

my gosh, you're looking down the road. I can't do that." You can probably pull something off on a three-month basis and then go, "Wow, that really worked well. Let's do that again."

Joan: That's correct, yup. That would be my advice.

Chris: I love it. Joan Boyce, thank you so much for all this fantastic advice. I mean it's just been a, what do they call it? - a value bomb. I'm making up words. I'm doing a mash up of stuff right here.

Joan: I like that word. That's cool, value bomb. I'm going to use that. Can I use that?

Chris: A value bomb for the podcast.

Joan: Nice. Well, it was my pleasure. Thank you so much for the opportunity and thanks for being patient with me.

Chris: No problem. It was worth the wait.

Joan: Well, awesome. Thanks so much, Chris.

Chris: You bet.

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