# 5 Enterprise SEO Priorities CMOs Need To Get Right

By Loren Baker

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By **Loren Baker**

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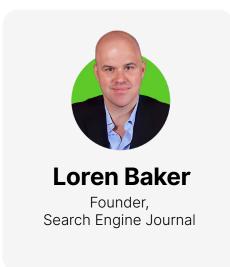
# Introduction

Perhaps your Sales team isn't happy with the quality of leads coming through the website lately.

Your CEO wants to know what you're doing to get ahead of evolving consumer behavior trends – you know, now that a couple of years of data have been forever skewed by the pandemic.

The SEO team is requesting a CDN... but the Dev team doesn't see the need or have time for it.

**Loren Baker**
Founder,
Search Engine Journal

Shareholders are demanding marketing efficiencies via automation you're quite sure they don't even understand. Even so, the pressure is on to reevaluate your stack.

Issues around strategy were a top challenge for 34.8% of respondents to our State of SEO 2021 survey. It's no wonder, given the increasing importance of SEO to the overall marketing organization.

Search has matured from a single promotional channel into an essential source for discovery, lead nurturing, brand building, and fueling business insights. And the demands on CMOs to maximize SEO's value have never been greater or more complex.

Marketing budgets as a percentage of company revenue fell to their lowest levels in recent history in 2021, from 11% to 6.4%, according to Gartner.

And yet 50.5% of marketers we surveyed recently reported that their SEO budget actually increased, while 23.8% stayed the course and held firm on their budget despite the pandemic-related turmoil.

When the chips are down and marketing resources become scarce, organizations overwhelmingly turn to search as the basis for a holistic marketing strategy.

More than any other channel, search is a two-way conversation between the brand and its customers; it feeds discovery and conversion even as it pumps valuable customer data and insights back into the marketing organization.

Search is where customers go to find new products, services, and brands. It's where they turn to solve problems, from an immediate need to a multi-faceted query to finally solving that most persistent challenge they worked through in months or even years of brand interactions.

Search is center stage.

It's a goldmine of consumer behavioral data. A myriad of insightful touchpoints. A destination and resource at various points in your buyer's journey – often multiple times, and for differing reasons.

And as search has grown into this essential and indeed foundational aspect of modern-day marketing, CMOs have increasingly been challenged by stakeholders across the organization to make the best possible use of it.

Today, in mature marketing organizations, search insights inform everything from research and product or service development to sales strategy, customer service, and loyalty.

SEO insights are an integral part of evaluating markets for expansion, user-centric and experience design, pricing strategy, and yes – planning marketing campaigns that drive revenue directly to the bottom line.

With so many SEO priorities competing for your attention, where should marketing leaders focus their resources and attention next for maximum impact?

In this guide, we'll take a high-level look at the top areas of priority for CMOs today and examine how each one contributes to a successful SEO strategy in the current environment.

I've consulted strategic marketing experts from each of the companies that helped make this book possible – InMotion Hosting, Rock Content, and Bridgeline – to share their insight and experience with you, as well. You'll meet them in the next section and find their advice throughout.

And finally, we'll take a look at emerging trends and technologies to have on your radar so you're better positioned for what's coming next, as well.

# Meet Our Experts

**Jeremy LaDuque** is the EVP of Franchise at TruPresence by Bridgeline. With over 15 years of experience in digital marketing, Jeremy expertly guides enterprise customers to grow sales and scale. His record of success includes all sizes of enterprise systems, including UPS Stores, Sport Clips, AlphaGraphics, Neighborly, Luxottica, Snap Fitness, and many more.

**Carrie Smaha** is a Marketing Manager at InMotion Hosting with two decades of experience in demand generation and web development. Her technical background drives data-first marketing strategies and integrated solutions. Carrie's meticulous and detail-oriented approach enables her to deliver exceptional results daily. Before InMotion, Carrie served as President for a digital marketing agency in Virginia Beach.

**Vitor Peçanha** is the co-founder and CMO of Rock Content, a global leader in Content Marketing. Rock Content's blogs have reached over 7 million sessions a month. The company is a success case itself, applying everything to its customers. Peçanha is also a best-selling author, international keynote speaker, and has more than 200 thousand students in his online courses.

# Top SEO Priorities For CMOs In 2022

## 1. Plotting Out Your SEO Roadmap

The days of manipulating Google's algorithm and rocketing your way to the top of the rankings are long behind us. This is a very good thing, as that wasn't a sustainable business strategy anyway.

Today, SEO takes time. Gains will be incremental. As Google itself says, "Search engine optimization (SEO) is often about making small modifications to parts of your website. When viewed individually, these changes might seem like incremental improvements, but when combined with other optimizations, they could have a noticeable impact on your site's user experience and performance in organic search results."

How you structure your roadmap is essential. Early results will help prove SEO's value to stakeholders and also lay the foundation for ongoing improvements.

A comprehensive SEO audit is a good first step.

From there, what you prioritize early on can either feed the momentum and incremental growth required to build a sustainable SEO program – or drain your budget and erode the confidence of others in your plans.

Understanding what to expect when and knowing how to communicate that to your executive and team members is crucial for establishing realistic expectations.

"When faced with proving the validity of new SEO strategies, going back to the basics can provide some quick wins. For example, merging duplicate content into one authoritative piece."

- Carrie Smaha, Marketing Manager, InMotion Hosting

Enriching content with references and statistics to improve relevancy is one such example, Smaha says, adding that updating internal links to decrease 404s and redirect loops is another smart tactic.

And because investments in content may take longer to show traffic and conversions, it helps to find other, complementary avenues for it that enable you to demonstrate at least partial ROI. Part of the blog post or whitepaper you created could be used for social or in email drip campaigns in the meantime, for example.

That will only help improve how the piece performs in organic search, as well.

Vitor Peçanha, CMO and Co-founder of Rock Content, notes that it can be difficult to find quick wins, particularly in new strategies.

"I believe that the best quick win a CMO can get is to have the CEO and senior leadership on board. For that, it's necessary for a great plan to be tied to business results. A great hack is to show your competitors' current SEO results as a reference."

- Vitor Peçanha, CMO and Co-founder, Rock Content

If your own SEO strategy lacks structure, you can use SEJ's annual planning blueprint and strategy guide as a template.

Jeremy LaDuque, EVP of Franchise at TruPresence by Bridgeline, notes that "Multi-location brands and franchises can also look inward, benchmarking their own SEO performance metrics from among locations, in addition to using competitor insights."

> "Quick wins can be found in the basics, like improving image optimization and including alt text and geo-tagging. Other areas to prioritize early in your annual planning include website security, improving internal linking, and boosting your site speed."
>
> - Jeremy LaDuque, EVP of Franchise, TruPresence by Bridgeline

Of course, SEO doesn't happen in a vacuum. How will you use other channels to augment organic performance as you implement your SEO plans?

PPC data can be a great source of competitive intelligence, keyword insights, and performance data to fuel SEO projections. But don't stop there.

Paid search ads can be used to shore up your presence on the most competitive search results pages (SERPs) until your organic content catches up.

Remarketing can help maximize the value of the organic traffic you're already attracting.

Highly targeted social ads can give new content a boost in visibility that may attract links, citations, and shares.

Plan to get the best possible results out of your SEO investments by marketing content through other channels that support SEO.

And remember that being able to demonstrate how your long-term investments in SEO benefit other channels and business units can only help support your vision, as well. Rankings, visibility, and other such subjective SEO metrics do not have the staying  power that return on investment enjoys.

Leadership, goals, and missions all change at a company over time, but ROI numbers do not.

📖 **Recommended Resources**

- [The 4 Pillars Of Enterprise SEO Success](#)
- [5 Essential Enterprise SEO Trends To Watch In 2022](#)
- [Enterprise SEO Site Structure: 14 Essential Optimizations](#)

# 2. Winning Internal Support For SEO Initiatives

As their responsibility rises across a broader range of functions, CMOs are increasingly being invited to the leadership table by CEOs or CFOs. According to Deloitte, more than half (53.5%) of senior marketers say they participate in board meetings all or most of the time.

Nearly a third (31.5%) say they participate in earnings calls all or most of the time.

Even so, our State of SEO industry survey found that winning management and stakeholder approval for SEO was a top challenge for 27.3% of marketers in 2021.

You need to think like a consultant, Peçanha says, and avoid focusing on technical details or SEO results only.

"Show that SEO can have a real impact on the business, generating revenue through an owned asset. Remember, too, that FOMO (fear of missing out) is a great way to get people on board. Show that the competitors are already doing it."

- Vitor Peçanha, CMO and Co-founder, Rock Content

SEO forecasting can help, and there are a number of different methods and models you can use.

SEJ columnist and data scientist Andreas Voniatis recently shared a step-by-step process for forecasting traffic and demand using Python, for example.

"Forecasts work best when there is a lot of historical data. The cadence of the data will determine the time frame needed for your forecast," Voniatis advised.

"For example, if you have daily data like you would in your website analytics, then you'll have over 720 data points, which are fine. With Google Trends, which has a weekly cadence, you'll need at least 5 years to get 250 data points," he added.

In any case, Voniatis wrote, "You should aim for a timeframe that gives you at least 200 data points," which he noted was a number plucked from his personal experience.

Columnist John McAlpin shared a forecasting method using Google Data Studio in this column that you might like to check out, as well.

From there, it's important that you identify the problem you're trying to solve and are able to present data to show that the problem exists, Smaha says.

"Create a framework or checklist to work from to execute the plan and track results. Reference authoritative SEO sites and Google Search Central to validate your strategy to decision-makers."

- Carrie Smaha, Marketing Manager, InMotion Hosting

Demonstrate to C-suite and other decision-making stakeholders that you are positioned to measure what matters, then activate SEO data as business insights that will drive revenue.

Constant cross-device connection is creating myriad touchpoints and an overwhelming amount of consumer data, all of which is useless unless it can be captured, analyzed, and activated at scale.

SEO data informs personalization and future marketing campaigns, sure. But be prepared to explain how it can also feed product development, customer service, and sales.

And of course, leadership are going to need convincing that your team has the ability to execute. Show them that you have educated your team about specific SEO tasks that have a huge impact so you can move quickly and efficiently, LaDuque advises.

"For example, GA4 is very complex but has significant impact, so ensuring your team knows how to implement the concepts and what real-life results to expect get everyone onboard quicker."

- Jeremy LaDuque, EVP of Franchise, TruPresence by Bridgeline

📖 **Recommended Resources**

- [SEO Cost Calculator: How Much Should You Budget For SEO?](#)
- [How To Evangelize Enterprise SEO Success & Communicate With The C-Suite](#)
- [Why Top Of Funnel Matters & How To Win Buy-In For It](#)

# 3. Ensuring Cross-Departmental Collaboration

With the C-suite's blessing on budget and vision, it's time to put your plans in motion. And to succeed here, you're going to have to get a little help from your friends.

It's easier said than done, in a lot of cases. Alignment with other departments was a top SEO challenge for 26.9% of marketers who responded to our State of SEO 2021 survey.

The relationship between IT and SEO is particularly important – and has historically been among the most difficult interdepartmental relationships, as well. It's an area you need to get right, as SEO's success hinges on the support it receives from the company's development team.

"Collaboration is key to ensuring all teams follow SEO best practices," Smaha advises.

"Methods should be consistent so everyone is working towards the same goals. This will result in strategies that produce high-quality content and technical SEO implementation, all of which can be tracked and benchmarked."

- Carrie Smaha, Marketing Manager, InMotion Hosting

When it comes to getting IT and developers on board with website architecture and SEO initiatives, SEJ columnist Ludwig Makhyan advocates for a symbiotic relationship in which the two teams and their leaders:

- Create and nurture positive working relationships.
- Learn from one another.
- Create collateral goals.
- Share achievements.
- Present ideas in ways that work for the recipient.

Learn more in his recent column, *The Enterprise Architect & SEO: Why You Still Need Friends In IT*.

IT isn't your only important partner, though.

"SEO is all about understanding your customers' needs and providing the best answer to their questions," Peçanha reminds us.

Customer feedback and behavioral insights gleaned from surveys, online reviews, reputation monitoring software, site analytics, chat logs, call tracking analysis, and more can be used to inform SEO and other marketing campaigns.

Every department in a company, especially the customer-facing ones, can provide valuable insights about these customers to support content creation."

- Vitor Peçanha, CMO and Co-founder, Rock Content

Data supports narratives and business cases. The larger the organization, the greater the need for business cases on every project.

Education is another important element in cross-departmental relationships.

Too often, SEO is asking for cooperation in a way that explains the "what" by simply assigning what it is that needs done.

However, support requests and Jira tickets lack the context to get others as passionate about what SEO is trying to accomplish as your team are.

SEJ columnist and SEO consultant Eli Schwartz shared some great tips on winning support for SEO initiatives when he joined my colleague, Brent Csutoras, on our podcast a while back.

Choosing your battles is essential.

"You really have to take the long view," Schwartz said at the time. "I use the 301 versus 302 as an example. That's a fight I can never win. There are smaller fights that are winnable, like building navigation."

Putting the work into relationship-building is also key.

"People are willing to do things for their friends," Schwartz said. "Meet people over lunch. Share what you do and share what you're passionate about outside of work. Those people that you are working with may just take a risk on something you want and then help you get to that success."

LaDuque explains that teaching and advocating for the value of SEO allows seamless workflows between the marketing, content, SEO, and production teams.

"With education and down-to-earth explanations, your team (and your clients) will learn the value of SEO and its direct impact on the top of the sales funnel and gain deeper insights into customer acquisition."

- Jeremy LaDuque, EVP of Franchise,TruPresence at Bridgeline

Jennie Baird, EVP & Managing Director of BBC Global News, stated that SEO is "a second language that everyone in the organization needs to be conversant in."

How will you get the teams with whom yours interacts most speaking the same language?

- Avoid technical jargon and complex language.

- Think about how your desired outcomes support interdepartmental goals and be ready to communicate that.

- Ask other department leaders what information SEO can provide that would help them most.

- Bridge those gaps between what SEO wants to share and what other stakeholders want to hear.

- Share SEO wins and convey in clear language how the initiative supported shared business goals.

- Use visualizations and video whenever possible to reinforce SEO concepts, keep learners engaged, and add visual interest to reporting.

These additional resources can help.

📖 **Recommended Resources**

- [5 Ways To Better Communicate Your SEO Work](#)
- [Impactful SEO Reporting: My Most Difficult Lessons Learned](#)
- [11 Stunning SEO Data Visualizations To Inspire Your Reporting](#)

# 4. Maximizing The Value Of SEO Technology With AI

Evaluating your marketing and SEO technology can seem like an exercise that never ends – and perhaps it shouldn't. The competitive landscape, search algorithms, and consumer behaviors are evolving faster now than ever before.

Which tools you use and how you ensure you're getting the greatest possible value from each one is an ongoing priority. In fact, an August 2021 survey of U.S. CMOs found that pinpointed marketing technology, data, and analytics as their top priority for the upcoming 12 months.

If the pandemic taught us anything, it is that agility is imperative. Today, CMOs must have the right technological infrastructure in place to pivot quickly and make intelligent decisions backed by real-time data.

New technologies can help as they themselves adapt to change faster than before, LaDuque notes and shares a look at how his company is evolving to meet these needs.

"I'm personally excited that our company is launching a new technology that can report on the SEO attributes of subdirectories, at scale, for more specific reporting capabilities."

- Jeremy LaDuque, EVP of Franchise, TruPresence by Bridgeline

Marketers are being given more time to prepare for updates, too, such as the
sunsetting of Universal Analytics.

"The stack" has become unwieldy for some, though. There's been a shift to
SEO platforms as some marketers have grown tired of cobbling together
workarounds between tools that don't play well together. Making the most of
the data available to you and protecting its integrity requires cohesion
and consistency.

All-in-one platforms can bring in various offerings from other partners and as
CMO/CTO, you're able to manage all of that within one budget.

However, the downfall is that there can be limitations and unexpected costs.
Pulling reports from platforms can cost credits and quickly run through
the budget.

Having a backup that is cost-effective can be used to corroborate what your
SEO platform is telling you.

Key questions you want to ask either way include:

- Where is data coming from and which partners are feeding into this solution?
- What restrictions are there on your data?
- How much can we customize dashboards and reports?
- What backup plans do you have in place to bridge those gaps?
- Which search engines are represented in tracking?

Whether you prefer standalone tools or an all-in-one platform, we're seeing
these technologies we use in SEO becoming smarter, faster, and a lot more
independent thanks to AI and machine learning.

That AI enables us to automate repetitive tasks and get predictive analysis is nothing new. But today, layered machine learning is teaching our tools and platforms to make decisions and even public-facing content optimizations in real-time.

"I don't think it will replace content creators any time soon but AI will support them in incredible ways such as research, topic suggestion, analyzing results, etc., so that SEOs can focus on what matters: creating awesome content. I'm already using AI to suggest topics and even the main structure of articles, which saves a good amount of time."

- Vitor Peçanha, CMO and Co-founder, Rock Content

We're also seeing a great deal of convergence through mergers and acquisitions as SEO tool companies look to make their offerings more robust. Conductor's recent acquisition of SEO auditing and monitoring tool ContentKing and BrightEdge's foray into data science with its acquisition of Oncrawl are two such examples.

Not every toolmaker is in the market to acquire, but the importance of seamless integration with other SEO tools clients want to use has become clear. This will continue to factor into CMOs' technology decisions – how seamless a process can we make this?

Full site crawlers, for example, are a must-have tool, Smaha says. But they are only one piece of the puzzle.

"Technical SEO is complex and site audits are labor-intensive. While website crawlers like Screaming Frog automate the process and remove the guesswork, it is connecting the crawler to other services that paints a bigger picture."

- Carrie Smaha, Marketing Manager,  InMotion Hosting

Smaha recommends that CMOs invest in AI & ML tools that save time and output high-quality work. "To hone in on SEO research, content outlines, keyword densities, and writing authoritative content, Frase.io gets the job done. It's a game-changer for SEO-first content strategy and process," she says.

Machine learning can help boost business productivity by up to 40%, according to Accenture.

But CMOs are on the hunt now for SEO technology that augments human performance more than simply automating repetitive tasks. Now, your tools and platforms can scale campaign optimization, fuel decision-making with data-backed insights, and even create and personalize content on the fly, in real-time.

How can AI help you deepen your understanding of a topic?

How can technology improve the experience of discovering and engaging with your brand's content?

The emphasis on natural language and style has forced SEOs to ditch keyword stuffing for clearly written content, LaDuque says.

"AI allows realistic tools that understand SEO writing and flow together (rather than those that only analyze arbitrary values) to understand trending topics, search term relevancy, content volume, and effective personalization," he adds.

In short, AI is table stakes for SEO strategy and execution from this point on.

📖 **Recommended Resources**

- [The Role Of SEO In The Modern-Day Enterprise Martech Stack](#)
- [How To Use Machine Learning For SEO Competitor Research](#)
- [Does Content Marketing's Love For AI Make Writers Obsolete?](#)

# 5. Finding, Retaining & Developing SEO Talent

The SEO job market is fiercely competitive and there are good reasons top tech and SEO talent are considered "unicorns."

Today, you're looking for that rare breed of professional with near-equal parts creativity and analytical prowess; with a healthy mix of orderly, logical left-brain and innovative right-brain thinking.

Even where SEOs have chosen a technical or more creative specialization, having at least a base understanding of what their colleagues are doing and how it supports SEO as a whole is critical. This creates empathy and fosters collaboration as opposed to competition between teams.

Ryan Jones, VP of SEO at Razorfish, recently shared what he's looking for as the top skills in any new SEO hire:

- Critical thinking
- Speaking and writing ability
- Technical and programming skills
- Social skills
- Analytics knowledge
- The ability to work with data
- Drive, motivation, and adaptability

Somewhat surprisingly, Google itself has offered a bit of advice on how to hire SEO professionals. The interview, reference checks, and a technical audit are all essential, the search engine says.

Your company (and your marketing) must have a purpose that goes beyond making money, Peçanha points out. How you communicate this is key in attracting the best and most qualified candidates.

"Pay attention and dedicate yourself to the growth of each individual on your team – they need to feel that they are growing personally. And, of course, all of this is only valid if you pay a decent salary and/or offer great benefits."

- Vitor Peçanha, CMO and Co-founder, Rock Content

There are uniquely enterprise SEO skills you'll want to see in your team, as well, whether they come with the hire or are developed in-house:

- Inherent knowledge of the business and the space in which it operates.

- A multidisciplinary mindset with a collaborative nature.

- SEO reporting mastery and the ability to communicate results in ways that matter to each audience.

- A solid foundational understanding of how search engines crawl, index, and rank content.

- Experience creating and maintaining technical documentation.

- Deep experience with AI-assisted SEO tools and platforms.

Keep in mind, too, that the composition of your business and its online properties may call for specific types of SEO professionals. Multi-location brands and franchises will most certainly require local SEO specialists, for example, while large ecommerce sites need SEOs who are skilled in user-centric design, security, ecommerce site structure, and conversion optimization.

Stoney deGeyter, SEJ Contributor and Director of Digital Marketing at Socket Mobile, Inc., put together over 40 potential interview questions you can use to assess your candidate's SEO knowledge here.

Of course, you may be working with freelancers, as well, in which case these tips may come in handy, instead.

SEO is such a fast-moving space that hiring the best talent today provides no assurances they'll succeed tomorrow. This is where your ongoing training programs and developing the right team culture can make or break your SEO goals.

Keith Goode joined me for an episode of The SEJ Show while he was still with IBM as Senior SEO Strategist. I highly recommend that you download that podcast episode here and tune in to his insights and tips on hiring, training, and developing top SEO talent.

For his part, LaDuque says that giving SEO a voice at the senior level and incorporating SEO best practices into the workflow of other teams must be a priority.

"This includes internal SEO training, experimentation, and recognizing the value of SEO to your sales strategy. Assign research and development deadlines that give talent enough time to implement their expertise."

- Jeremy LaDuque, EVP of Franchise, TruPresence by Bridgeline

Claudia Higgins, Solutions Consultant at Conductor, recently shared important lessons she learned in building an enterprise SEO team within her organization.

Setting your team up for success means creating a culture of shared values, Higgins says. She explains, "In order to create this environment, you need to practice mentorship over micromanagement, focusing on developing and guiding your colleagues through their careers, and running a fulfilled and effective team in which individuals feel valued."

Many of the same qualities that make SEO professionals great at their job – inquisitiveness, independent thinking, and a tendency to challenge the status quo – are the same traits that can make them inherently resistant to overbearing leadership.

You can read more on that here.

📖 **Recommended Resources**

- How To Hire An Enterprise SEO Expert For Your Marketing Team
- Searchmetrics' CMO Talks Enterprise Volatility & SEO Careers
- Growing Into In-House SEO Leadership With Tessa Nadik

# What's Next?

**Keep your eye on [how Google's algorithms are changing](#)** – and the impact each update has on SERPs composition, rankings, and searcher behavior. Your opportunities to appear and engage in search are constantly evolving, and as with so many other parts of the business, being a first-mover can bring outsized advantages.

**Plan for where you want to be 12 and 24 months from now**. What data gaps exist in your current setup? What opportunities exist to streamline operations and create efficiencies? How can AI and ML technology augment your team's performance and help you scale? Do the investigative work and plot out the resource requirements now, so you can gather data to make the business case for future needs along the way.

**Nurture relationships with the C-suite and departmental leadership**. Look for opportunities to better understand their needs and how SEO can support their goals. Advocate SEO success and evangelize the program by sharing results tailored to each stakeholder's interests.

**Focus on creating a culture of innovation**. Give your team license to experiment often and fail fast, ensuring they are documenting what works along the way. SEO is not a formula or an exact recipe. It requires the solid underpinning of a technically sound site and solid marketing strategy but from there is largely fluid.

And if you're still looking for insights to help inform your SEO strategy, these resources may help:

- [4 Key Enterprise SEO Workstreams To Fast-Track Digital Success](#)
- [A Guide To Local SEO For Large Enterprises & Franchises](#)
- [Enterprise SEO Site Structure: 14 Essential Optimizations](#)

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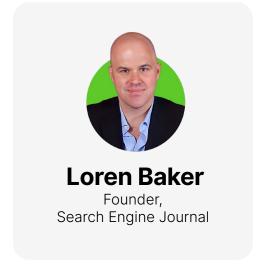


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# About The Author

**Loren Baker** is the founder of Search Engine Journal, an advisor at Alpha Brand Media, and runs Foundation Digital, a digital marketing strategy & development agency. He dove head-first into the digital marketing pool in 1999, developing organic search, content marketing, and advertising strategies for businesses and not-for-profit organizations. Today, Baker drives strategy and digital development for clients such as ESPN, Apartments.com, Rakuten, Groundworks and American Eagle Outfitters. He and wife Janna reside in sunny California, where they're raising a future basketball superstar.

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