Workshop material for marketing and communications · As of November 2026

From strategy *to topic plan.*

Topic architecture in one day: how to derive a narrative, core messages and prioritized focus topics from company goals and build a 2027 topic plan from them that the team, business units and AI tools can all use.

Levels	Workshop	Tools
4	**1 day**	**5**
from the narrative via focus topics and topic areas to the individual story	with the core team, prepared in around two hours	Message triangle, topic house, scoring, story card, annual grid

The day at a glance

09:00	10:30	13:00	14:30	16:00
Translate strategy	**Messages**	**Topic house**	**Scoring**	**Handover**
2027 goals into communication goals	Narrative and Message triangle	Focus topics and evidence	Make topics comparable	Story cards and annual plan

At the end of the day you will have

- three to five communication goals with a metric
- a two-sentence narrative and a message triangle
- a topic house with at most five focus topics
- a prioritized list of topic areas
- the first story cards for the first quarter
- an annual grid and clear owners

For whom: marketing and communications leaders who want to communicate less on demand and more according to plan in 2027. With a running example and worksheets to print out from page 13.

Contents

Clarity first, *then the calendar.*

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Quick start: if you only have an hour, read chapter 2, fill in the topic house on page 14 and prioritize with the scoring on page 15. That already results in a robust first version.

Chapter 01

Why a topic architecture *pays off.*

Most teams do not have an ideas problem. They have a selection problem: there are more topics, requests and occasions than a team can sensibly cover.

Without a shared structure, whoever asks loudest decides. Sales wants product articles, management thought leadership, HR recruiting content, and every department tells the company's story a little differently. A topic architecture organizes this variety: it defines what you talk about, with which message and with which priority.

Typical signs that it is missing

01 Topics on demand

The editorial calendar fills up with requests, not priorities. What is important gets lost in what is urgent.

02 Many voices, no line

Website, LinkedIn, press and sales convey different images of the same company.

03 No link to goals

Nobody can explain which company goal a piece pays into. Reporting measures output instead of impact.

04 Random AI results

AI tools deliver the average because nobody tells them what the brand stands for and which topics it owns.

What a topic architecture achieves

BENEFIT	WHAT IT MEANS IN EVERYDAY WORK
Orientation	Everyone knows which three to five focus topics have priority in 2027.
Prioritization	New topic suggestions are checked against fixed criteria, not against hierarchy.
Consistency	Core messages apply across channels, for people and for AI.
Steerability	Every piece of content is assigned to a focus topic and can therefore be evaluated.

> In conversations with marketing teams, I rarely hear that ideas are missing. What is almost always missing is a shared basis for decisions. Where it exists, coordination gets shorter because the discussion is no longer about taste but about criteria.
>
> Dennis Gumprich, observation from consulting practice

Important: a topic architecture does not replace corporate strategy. It translates it into communication. Without clarified goals, every architecture remains a collection of nice terms.

Chapter 02

Four levels, *one common thread.*

Each level answers a different question and changes at a different rhythm. At the top is what lasts for years, at the bottom what is created anew every week.

Level 1 **Narrative**	The overarching story: what the company stands for, what change it wants to bring about and what role its customers play in it. The core messages arise from this.	lasts 3 to 5 years
Level 2 **Focus topics**	Three to five strategic topics in which you want to be perceived as competent. Each with its own core message and a clear link to a company goal.	lasts 1 to 2 years
Level 3 **Topic areas**	Subtopics that make a focus topic tangible: audience questions, use cases, products, projects. This is where keywords and prompts dock on.	reviewed annually
Level 4 **Stories**	Concrete content with occasion, format and channel: the specialist article, the customer video, the press release. Every story is assigned to a topic area.	ongoing

Running example in this document

A fictitious mid-sized company, **Sample Drives GmbH** with around 800 employees, builds drives for production lines. Goals for 2027: win new customers in the food industry, expand the service business and find skilled workers for two locations. In each step, the example shows what a completed result can look like.

Who is responsible for which level

LEVEL	DECIDES	CONTRIBUTES
Narrative	Management with head of communications	Marketing, HR, sales
Focus topics	Head of communications or marketing	Business units, product management
Topic areas	Topic owners per focus topic	Editorial team, SEO, sales
Stories	Editorial team	Experts, agencies, AI tools

Rule of thumb: more than five focus topics means no focus topics in practice. Whatever does not fit becomes a topic area under an existing focus topic or is deliberately not covered.

Chapter 03

Well prepared *is half prioritized.*

The workshop succeeds when the right people with the right documents are in the room. Allow around two hours for preparation.

Who should take part

- **Head of communications or marketing** as host and decision-maker
- **Editorial team or content leads** who will implement the plan later
- **Sales** with knowledge of customer questions and objections
- **One or two business units** with the strongest expertise
- **Management** for one hour in the morning

Five to eight people are ideal. More slows down every decision.

What should be available

- Company goals and strategy for 2027
- Audiences or personas, even if incomplete
- A rough content inventory: which topics are already covered today
- Search data from Search Console and a first list of questions customers ask AI systems
- Fixed dates in 2027: trade fairs, product launches, anniversaries

Schedule of the day

TIME	BLOCK	RESULT	TOOL
09:00	Translate strategy	Three to five communication goals for 2027	Key questions p. 6
10:30	Narrative and messages	Two-sentence narrative, message triangle	Worksheet A
12:00	Lunch break	Time for management to confirm the narrative	
13:00	Topic house	Focus topics with core message and evidence	Worksheet B
14:30	Scoring	Prioritized list of topic areas	Worksheet C
16:00	Handover	First story cards, annual grid, owners	Worksheet C
17:00	Conclusion	Open points, next dates	

Tip for facilitation: consistently keep discussions about individual pieces out of the morning. Whoever talks about stories before the focus topics are set shifts the decision about priorities into everyday work.

Chapter 04 · Step 1

Translate strategy into *communication goals.*

Communication cannot achieve company goals on its own. But it can influence awareness, understanding, trust and willingness to act. That is exactly what a communication goal describes.

The five guiding questions

01 **Where does the company want to be in 2027?** Which two or three goals are at the top of strategy and budget planning?

02 **Whose behavior needs to change for this?** Which audiences need to know, believe or do something they do not know, believe or do today?

03 **What stands in the way?** Is awareness, understanding, trust or a reason to act missing?

04 **What do we know that others do not?** Where do you have your own data, experience or people who can speak credibly?

05 **How will we notice at the end of 2027 that it worked?** Which key figure or observation would convince you?

Example: Sample Drives GmbH

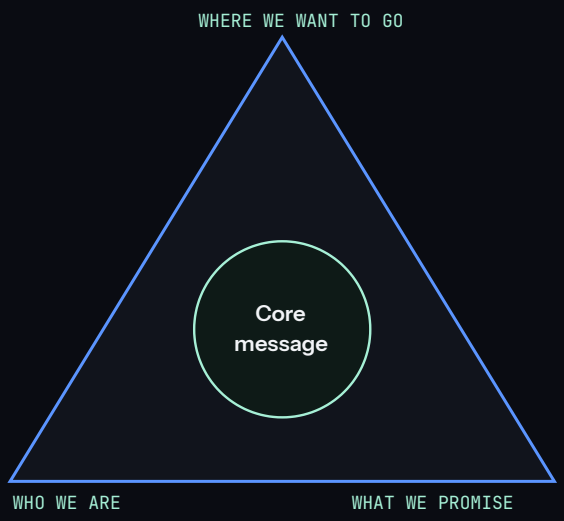
COMPANY GOAL 2027	COMMUNICATION GOAL	METRIC
New customers in the food industry	Become known among production managers in the industry as a specialist in hygienic drives	Inquiries from the industry, mentions in AI answers to five industry questions
Expand the service business	Existing customers understand the benefits of data-based maintenance	Webinar attendance, service inquiries
Skilled workers for two locations	Be perceived as an attractive employer in the region	Applications per position, reach of employee posts

Result of this step: three to five communication goals, each linked to a company goal, an audience and a metric. They form the basis for checking all following steps.

Chapter 05 · Step 2

Narrative and *message triangle.*

The narrative is the sentence that everything else refers to. The message triangle breaks it down into three statements that together form a complete picture.



A Who we are

Origin, competence and attitude. What makes you credible?

B What we promise

The benefit for your audiences, as concretely as possible.

C Where we want to go

Vision and ambition: what change you want to set in motion in your market.

Example

Narrative	Production only becomes affordable and sustainable when drives use less energy and never stop unexpectedly. That is why we have been building drives that measure what they do since 1962.
A · Who we are	Family business with over 60 years of experience in drive technology and in-house development in Germany.
B · What we promise	Drives that measurably save energy and predict failures before they happen.
C · Where we want to go	Factories in which energy and downtime are no longer a source of uncertainty.

Check questions for every message

- Does an outsider understand the statement without explanation?
- Is there evidence: a figure, a project, a customer voice?
- Could a competitor say the same sentence? Then it is not sharp enough yet.

Chapter 06 · Step 3

Build the topic house.

The topic house makes the architecture visible on one page: the narrative as the roof, the focus topics with their core messages as pillars, evidence and values as the foundation.



How to fill the house

01 **Adopt the roof:** the narrative from step 2 in one sentence.

02 **Derive the pillars:** one focus topic per communication goal, at most five. Each gets a one-sentence core message.

03 **Collect topic areas:** three to six subtopics per pillar from customer questions, search data and sales.

04 **Check the foundation:** which evidence, data and people support the pillars? A pillar without a foundation is a promise without backing.

All content in the example is invented and serves as an illustration.

Chapter 07 · Step 4

Prioritize topics with a scoring.

A scoring makes topics comparable and takes the heat out of discussions. What matters is not the decimal place but that everyone rates with the same criteria.

CRITERION	REVIEW QUESTION	WEIGHT
Strategic contribution	Does the topic pay directly into a communication goal?	30%
Audience relevance	Does the topic actually concern our audiences?	25%
Credibility	Do we have our own data, experience or people on it?	20%
Demand	Is it searched for, in search engines and AI systems?	15%
Feasibility	Can we cover it with existing resources?	10%

Weighting as a working model. Adapt it to your goals, but not for individual topics.

Each criterion is rated from 1 (does not apply) to 5 (fully applies). The score is the weighted sum, converted to 100 points: **sum of rating times weight, divided by 5, times 100**.

Example

TOPIC AREA	STRAT.	REL.	CRED.	DEMAND	FEAS.	SCORE
Cutting energy costs with efficient drives	5	5	4	4	4	91
Hygienic cleaning in food production	5	4	4	3	3	81
Retrofitting predictive maintenance	4	4	5	3	3	79
Apprenticeship as a mechatronics technician	3	4	4	3	5	73
Company anniversary and history	2	2	5	1	4	53

How to facilitate the scoring

- **First individually, then together:** everyone first rates silently. Large deviations show where you need to talk about assumptions.
- **Evidence instead of opinions:** for demand, search data and real customer questions count, not gut feeling.
- **Set the weighting in advance:** it applies equally to all topics and is not adjusted during the discussion.

Decision rule as a suggestion: from 75 points a fixed place in the annual plan, between 60 and 74 points as a supplement, below 60 points only with a good occasion. The anniversary in the example therefore does not become a focus topic but can serve as an occasion for stories on the pillars.

Chapter 08 · Step 5

Story cards and *annual plan 2027.*

Prioritized topic areas become concrete stories. A story card records what a story needs so that everyone can work without follow-up questions.

Structure of a story card

Focus topic / area	Where does the story sit in the architecture?
Audience	Who exactly should read it?
Message	What should stick, in one sentence?
Evidence	Figure, project, person, quote
Occasion	Date, event or audience question
Formats and channels	Lead format plus derivatives
Responsibility	Who writes, who approves?
Success	How do we measure the impact?

Example

Area: cutting energy costs
Audience: production managers in the food industry
Message: efficient drives often pay for themselves in the first year of operation.
Evidence: measurement data from a customer plant, calculation with real electricity prices
Occasion: budget planning in autumn, trade fair in May
Formats: specialist article as lead format, derived from it LinkedIn series, calculator on the website, sales document
Responsibility: editorial team writes, product management checks figures
Success: inquiries via the calculator, mentions in AI answers

Invented example

The annual grid

FOCUS TOPIC	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Energy efficiency	Basic article	Trade fair, user report	Calculator, webinar	Budget planning
Data-driven maintenance	Service survey	Retrofit series	Case study	Annual review
Hygienic design	Standards update	Trade fair	Cleaning guide	Customer voices
Working with us	Plan the apprenticeship start	Girls' Day	Apprenticeship start	Team portraits

Two rules for the annual plan

- **One lead format per story:** first the detailed content, then the derivatives for the channels.
- **Leave room:** plan at most 70 percent of capacity firmly; the rest belongs to current occasions.

Matching resource: the free **editorial calendar template 2027** with public holidays and occasions for Germany, Austria and Switzerland takes the story cards directly into monthly planning: dennis-gumprich.de/en/resources/editorial-calendar-template-2027

Chapter 09 · Step 6

Make the architecture *usable for AI.*

A topic architecture that only exists as a presentation reaches neither the team nor the AI. Only when it is stored where content is created does it have an effect every day.

AI tools deliver generic results when they lack context. With narrative, focus topics, messages and evidence stored, they check drafts against your strategy, suggest suitable topic areas and keep core messages stable across channels. That turns the architecture into a working instrument instead of a document.

What belongs in your knowledge base

BUILDING BLOCK	WHAT THE AI USES IT FOR
Narrative and core messages	Telling drafts in the same direction, recognizing deviations
Focus topics with topic areas	Classifying topic suggestions, showing gaps in the plan
Evidence and contact persons	Backing statements with your figures and projects
Audiences and personas	Adapting tone and depth per audience
Scoring criteria	Rating new topics in advance, before they come up for discussion
Exclusion list	Avoiding terms and statements that you deliberately do not use

Three check questions for every AI draft

- Can the content be clearly assigned to a focus topic?
- Does it convey the core message of this topic, with its own evidence?
- Could a competitor publish it without change? Then context is missing.

Example: review prompt for a draft

```
Check the following draft against our topic architecture. 1. Which focus topic
does it belong to? Justify in one sentence. 2. Does it convey the core message
of this topic? Quote the passage. 3. Which statement needs evidence from our
foundation?
4. What could a competitor write just the same? Suggest a sharpening. Draft: [insert
text]
```

Plan for maintenance: an architecture becomes outdated when goals, products or markets change. Review it every six months and after major events. Otherwise contradictory or outdated information in the knowledge base leads to exactly the interchangeable content you want to avoid.

Chapter 10

Pitfalls *and self-check.*

Six common mistakes

01 Too many focus topics

Whoever gives every department a pillar ends up with an organization chart instead of an architecture.

02 Messages without evidence

Sentences nobody can verify work neither with people nor with AI systems searching for sources.

03 Inside view only

Topics that are important internally but answer no audience question remain unread.

04 No link to everyday work

The architecture sits in a folder as a slide; the editorial calendar continues to be filled on demand.

05 Once and never again

Without a six-monthly review, plan and strategy quietly drift apart.

06 Scoring as an alibi

Whoever changes the weighting per topic until the desired result comes out may as well skip the scoring.

Self-check: how robust is your topic architecture?

	STATEMENT
☐	Our narrative fits into two sentences, and management has confirmed it.
☐	We have at most five focus topics, each with a core message and evidence.
☐	Every focus topic pays into a communication goal with a metric.
☐	New topic suggestions are rated with fixed criteria.
☐	Every planned piece of content is assigned to a focus topic.
☐	The architecture is stored where the team and AI create content.
☐	A fixed review date is in the calendar.

Evaluation: up to three ticks: start with chapters 4 and 5 before you plan. Four to five ticks: the foundation is in place; embed it in everyday work. Six to seven ticks: your architecture is a steering instrument; maintain it.

Worksheet A

Communication goals and message triangle

Fill in the sheet together in the workshop. One sentence per field is enough. Check question for every field: could a competitor say the same sentence?

COMPANY GOAL 2027	COMMUNICATION GOAL	AUDIENCE	METRIC

Narrative in two sentences

What do we stand for, what change do we want to bring about, what role do our customers play?

Message triangle

A · Who we are: origin, competence, attitude

B · What we promise: benefit for the audience

C · Where we want to go: vision and ambition

Core message: the sentence that connects A, B and C

Worksheet B

Your topic house

Roof, at most five pillars, foundation. Whatever does not fit becomes a topic area or is deliberately not covered.

ROOF: NARRATIVE

Focus topic 1	Focus topic 2	Focus topic 3	Focus topic 4	Focus topic 5
Core message	Core message	Core message	Core message	Core message
Topic areas	Topic areas	Topic areas	Topic areas	Topic areas
Evidence	Evidence	Evidence	Evidence	Evidence

FOUNDATION: own data, projects, people, values

AUDIENCES: who are we building this house for?

Worksheet C

Scoring and story card

Rating from 1 to 5. Score: sum of rating times weight, divided by 5, times 100.

TOPIC AREA	STRATEGY 30 %	RELEVANCE 25 %	CRED. 20 %	DEMAND 15 %	FEAS. 10 %	SCORE

Story card

Focus topic / area	
Audience	
Message	
Evidence	
Occasion and date	
Lead format	
Derivatives and channels	
Writes / checks / approves	
Measuring success	

Next steps

From workshop *to everyday work.*

01 **Within one week:** write up the results properly and have them confirmed by management.

02 **Within two weeks:** store the topic house and messages where your team and your AI tools work.

03 **By the end of the year:** work out the first ten story cards for the first quarter of 2027 and transfer them into the editorial calendar.

04 **After six months:** review scoring and focus topics with reporting data.

Free analysis

Where does your content process lose *time today?*

In 30 minutes, we look together at where unnecessary coordination, manual tasks, tool switching or recurring content work cost you time today, and how your topic architecture can work in everyday practice.

Analyze your content process in 30 minutes

dennis-gumprich.de/en/analysis

Read more on dennis-gumprich.de

- Developing a content strategy: from goal to a steerable topic plan
- Topic scoring: the criteria that make topics comparable
- From editorial calendar to topic plan: what actually changes
- Building a knowledge base: what to feed the AI so that it sounds like you

DG

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Transparency note: Dennis works for contentbird, a provider of AI-supported content software. This workshop material is vendor-neutral. It was created using AI, reviewed for accuracy and is the responsibility of Dennis Gumprich. As of: November 2026.