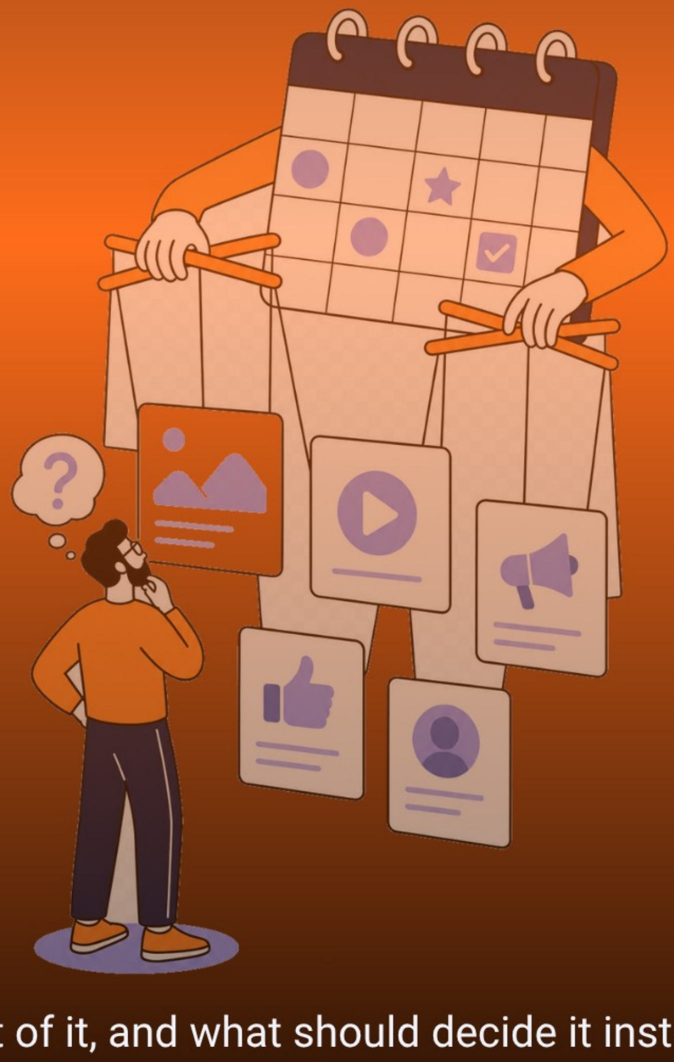
THE DECISION SEQUENCE
MARKETING BUILT AROUND HOW PEOPLE DECIDE

Your content calendar is in charge

How to know what to publish



Why a calendar decides most of it, and what should decide it instead

THEDECISIONSEQUENCE.COM
A J. WORDEN COMPANY · JWORDEN.COM

How to know what to publish

Why a calendar decides most of it, and what should decide instead

Gates. **Relevance: primary.** Credibility: secondary. Proof: secondary. Safety: no. Access: no.

Twelve slots don't make a strategy. Name the one problem the firm wants to be closest to, write down the questions a buyer carrying that problem asks, and give every slot to a question.

The symptom

The editorial calendar has twelve slots and eleven of them are already spoken for.

One group has a piece on the regulation that changed in March. Another wants something tied to the ruling everybody sent around. The partner who has been asking for visibility since last winter finally got a slot, and nobody wanted to be the person who told him no. November is blocked out for the year-end piece, which is the same year-end piece that ran last year with a different headline on it.

Every one of those decisions was defensible on the day it was made. Then ask which buyer question any of them answers. The room goes quiet, or somebody says all of them, which is the same answer wearing a better suit.

The calendar is full. That's the part that makes it hard to see as a problem.

Why it keeps happening

Topics get chosen by supply.

Who has capacity this quarter. Who wants visibility. What regulation just changed. Those are all real inputs, they're the inputs a busy firm can act on, and not one of them is the buyer's question. A calendar is a production schedule that quietly became a strategy because nothing else was competing for the job.

Nobody decided this, which is what makes it durable. The slots existed, the slots needed filling, and the people closest to the slots filled them with what they had.

We've done it. Twelve slots, twelve competent pieces, every one of them accurate and none of them embarrassing, and no way to say afterwards which question any of them answered. The uncomfortable part keeps returning: every line on that calendar could survive its own defense. The damage only shows up in aggregate, which happens to be the only place a body of work exists.

A firm can publish for two years, hit every deadline, and produce nothing a buyer would recognize as a position.

What the buyer is doing at the Relevance gate

Scanning for whether the subject belongs to their world.

That happens before anything about the firm gets read. The credentials and the results are sitting further down the page, waiting on a conclusion the buyer hasn't reached yet. The buyer is deciding whether this issue is one of theirs, and the whole event is over in a few seconds. The market can't value what it can't see, and at this gate the thing it needs to see is its own problem described in language it uses.

Recognition is the transaction. The issue has to feel close enough to what the buyer is carrying that looking further seems worth the time. When that conclusion doesn't land, everything downstream supports a decision the buyer never agreed to make. You send proof to somebody who hasn't accepted that the subject applies to them.

Which is why the technically excellent piece on the regulatory amendment gets no traction. It's correct. It's well argued. It arrived at somebody who hasn't yet concluded that the topic is theirs to worry about.

The correction

Replace the calendar with a question list. This takes an afternoon and one difficult conversation.

Name the problem first. One problem, narrow enough to be recognizable. That means giving the market a clear signal about where your experience becomes unusually useful. Put it another way: decide which problem you want to feel close to. Firms resist this because narrowing feels like turning away work, and because the choice commits you for longer than a positioning exercise you revisit every January.

Write down the questions. Eight to twelve of them. The questions a buyer carrying that problem asks out loud, in the buyer's own words. Closer to what somebody says in the car on the way home than to anything with the word *developments* in it. If the list reads like a table of contents, it was written from the inside and it needs to be written again.

Assign each slot to one question. One question per piece. When two slots point at the same question, one of them is arguing for its life.

Kill anything that doesn't map. All of it. This is where the afternoon stops being pleasant.

Then the coherence rule, which is the part firms skip: several angles on one defined problem beats one angle on several. Consistency gets misread as repetition, as though posting the same claim under a new headline every week counts as sticking to a subject. What it means is returning to the same defined problem from several useful angles. One piece explains the risk. Another shows a common decision mistake. A later one questions the standard industry response.

Disconnected content proves you're publishing. A coherent body of work creates recognition.

There's a second reader now, and it sorts the same way. A body of work that keeps returning to one defined problem reads as a firm that owns something. Twelve disconnected pieces read as a firm that publishes.

Before and after

Before. *October slot, Regulatory Practice: "Key Amendments to the Uniform Act and What They Mean for Your Business."*

After. *October slot, question 6 on the list: "If we move the entity to another state, do we lose the protection we set this up for in the first place?"*

Same underlying material. The first one was assigned to a practice group. The second was assigned to something a buyer said.

The hard call

The question list takes slots away from people who have been waiting for them, and it does that on the record. Somebody's amendment piece doesn't run. That's a real internal cost and it's the reason most firms keep the calendar, because the calendar distributes visibility fairly and the question list distributes it according to one problem you chose on purpose.

Fair is doing a lot of work in that sentence. Fair to whom, exactly...

Run this on your own material

List everything the firm published in the last twelve months. Every piece, one line each.

Beside each one, write the single buyer question it answers, in the buyer's words. Not the topic. The question. If it takes more than a sentence, or if you find yourself writing *general awareness*, leave the line blank and move on.

Now read the column. Most firms find three or four pieces answering the same question in slightly different ways, and two or three questions that matter enormously to their buyers with nothing written beside them at all.

The blanks are next year's calendar.

Signals you've cleared it

Advance when you can describe the body of work in one sentence and a buyer would recognize their own situation in it. When inbound questions arrive already framed in your language. When somebody references a piece by its subject rather than its headline. When a new topic proposal gets tested against the question list before anybody argues about it.

Hold when the calendar fills before the question list exists. When a slot gets assigned to a person instead of a question. When you can defend every piece individually and can't say what the collection is about. When the honest answer to "which question does this answer" is that it performs well in search.

Where this connects

Engagement Success in an AI World · Proximity Is No Longer Measured in Miles, on becoming the firm closest to the problem.

Research Library · Entry 02, heuristics and cognitive biases.

Next move · Once the subject is chosen, go to *How to tell whether your content is generic* before anything gets published.