

South Dakota Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Newsletter

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Announcements

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) has implemented an [*Interim Final Rule*](#) (IFR), effective October 3, 2025, that immediately changes how a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Airport Concessions DBE (ACDBE) certifications are assessed.

Key Changes:

- All DBE and ACDBE firms are now effectively decertified. Race and gender no longer automatically qualify as proof of disadvantage.
- To maintain program participation, all certified owners must submit a Personal Narrative and a current Personal Net Worth statement.
- The Personal Narrative should detail personal barriers faced (e.g., limited access to education, financing, or business opportunities) and the resulting financial impact.
- The definitions of race-conscious and race-neutral measures are removed and replaced with “DBE-conscious” and “DBE-neutral.”
- Existing certified DBE/ACDBE firms will be reevaluated under this new rule upon submission of the required documentation.
- Goal setting and other program elements are suspended until reevaluations are finalized.
- SDDOT DBE Program will provide instructions for securely submitting the necessary documents.

Additionally, as the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) is the Unified Certification Program (UCP) for South Dakota, the IFR provides that we must complete the reevaluation process outlined above and as described in § 26.111 of the IFR. An existing recipient may not: (1) set DBE contract goals or concession-specific ACDBE goals or (2) count any participation toward overall DBE or ACDBE goals until the UCP has completed the reevaluation process.

As the Unified Certification Program (UCP) for South Dakota, the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) will be requiring each firm to complete a Personal Narrative (PN) establishing the existence of disadvantage on an individual basis. Some examples could include instances of economic hardship and/or denied opportunities that impeded the owner’s access to or progression in education, employment, or business ventures. Each firm will also need to complete a new Personal Net Worth (PNW) statement and include any other financial information considered relevant.

SDDOT will be sending more information regarding the PN and PNW once we receive further guidance from USDOT. The preliminary guidance issued by USDOT is attached. There is no deadline to submit the necessary documents at this point. However, when that deadline is established, you will be notified. The DBE program is **in suspension** until the reevaluation process is completed. Accordingly, the annual Declaration of Eligibility (DOE) will not need to be submitted at this time.

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Crafting an Authentic Brand Story



As the global market expands, it is becoming more and more difficult for businesses to make their product offerings stand out from the crowd. At the same time, as customers become increasingly inundated with an ever-expanding list of purchasing options it can be difficult for them to decide which businesses deserve their money. A strong brand story solves both problems simultaneously by giving your business something it can offer beyond its products while also giving customers a reason to care. In this article, we will discuss how you can create a brand story that works for you, no matter what your business is.

Step 1 – Understanding Your Customers and Yourself

No business can be everything to everyone. To draft a story that will connect you to your audience, you first need to understand your audience and the ways in which your business serves them. To draft a truly effective story, you should understand who your audience is, what challenges they are facing, and how your company and its products fit into the solution to those challenges, because understanding your customers allows you to draft a story that caters specifically to them. Tracking demographic information for your customers, how they find your products, and what they have to say about them afterwards can be a great starting point for developing that understanding and distributing surveys or asking for other forms of personal feedback can help nail it down.

At the same time, you need to understand your business. Before you begin writing, make sure you have a clear understanding of your company's values and goals. Why does your company exist? What does it stand for? How does it help the world? What are its values? If you aren't sure what the answers to these questions are, you won't be able to write a story that's specific and relatable enough to resonate with your audience. During this part of the process, you also need to establish your brand's voice, which will define the tone and style of your story. It should be tailored to your brand specifically, but keep in mind that it needs to be consistent and authentic.

You want the voice you tell your brand story in to be the same one used when posting on LinkedIn, drafting replies to customer service requests, or advertising products, so make it something that you can maintain long term. If your brand's voice varies across platforms or between conversations, it creates friction for the customer, and makes your story feel inauthentic.

Once you have a clear vision of your customers, your company, and your goals, it's time to start writing.

Step 2 – Developing Your Origin Story

The driving force behind the establishment of your company can resonate with and inspire your customers, providing them with a sense of connection and motivation. As you begin your brand story, explain how your company came to be. Did you have a frustrating experience where a product you needed was unavailable and decide to fill that gap? Did you have a goal for a future where more people would have access to a service that was once prohibitively expensive? Explaining the reasoning behind the decision to start your business can put your values on display draw in customers and investors alike and build loyalty and trust in your business by positioning your brand as a problem solver. This is also a chance to describe the hard work it took to get your foot in the door in your industry. Did your business start out of your garage? Did you work those first years while holding down a full-time job elsewhere? Details like these humanize your business, display your devotion to it, and highlight the progress you have made so far. If the process of starting your business was simple and easy, that's great, too, but do not make up mythologized origins. People will find out, and it will hurt your credibility in the long run.

Step 3 – Opening Up About Your Struggles and Your Victories

Regardless of the way your business began, every company faces hardships. Highlighting those struggles humanizes your business and further builds relatability. However, this is not a chance to complain or wallow in self-pity. The challenges your business has faced are important because they give you a chance to show how you overcame them. When describing challenges, frame the narrative around how you overcame them and why that's valuable rather than how miserable they were in the moment.

Along with the challenges you've faced, you want to highlight the victories you've earned. It's important to show that your business is doing well, but make sure that you are not simply bragging about revenue. Focus on how you are solving problems and display metrics of success in values other than profit. If your company manages paving projects, talk about how many miles of paving you have overseen, the accolades and positive testimonials you have received, and the increasing size of the projects you have been entrusted.

Make it clear that your success isn't just benefiting you, it's making their roads safer and their commutes more pleasant. Making money is awesome, but what matters to customers is that you are improving their lives. A great way to highlight this is by including feedback from your customers themselves through testimonials. In addition to showing victories on a macro scale, zoom in to focus on one or two key moments that were important wins for you and your company and made you realize your business was going to last.

Step 4 – Discussing Where You Are Now and Where You Plan to Be

Once you have provided a picture of your company's history, it's time to discuss your company's current situation. How many people does your company employ? What is it working on right now? How is it making a positive impact on its community and its industry? How does its current state show adherence to the original vision that inspired you to start it? Have you remained true to your original vision or has that vision evolved? Answering these questions helps demonstrate the immediate relevance of your business to customers and clarifies what they are endorsing by choosing your services.

Finally, you can round your story off with visions of the future. What's next for your brand? What does it hope to achieve? Let your audience know where you see your business in 10 years, how their current support helps you get there, and why that's good for them. Remember, you can't be everything for everyone. Make your goals specific and achievable for your company and valuable for its customers.



Step 5 – Show the World

Now that you have written your brand story, it's important to package it effectively. Depending on your brand and its voice, that might be posting it to your company's website in text, preparing a video with a speech, or something else. It might include infographics, pictures of your work, or audio testimonials. Ensure that any communication accurately reflects your brand's image and resonates with your audience. Share it widely to inform everyone that supporting your brand means backing something unique and valuable.

Upcoming Training & Events

Oct. 23 How to Register and Maintain Your [SAM.gov](#) and SBA's SBS Profiles (2025 Update)

Webinar

Thurs., October 23, 2025

12:00 P.M. CT | Cost: \$85

[Learn More>](#)

Oct. 28 Save Thousands with Smart Bookkeeping – Profit & Loss Statements, Balance Sheets, and More Explained

Webinar

Tues., October 28, 2025

12:00 P.M. CT | Cost: \$15

[Learn More>](#)

Oct. 30 Insurance Basics for Small Businesses

Webinar

Thurs., October 30, 2025

12:00 P.M. CT | Cost: \$10

[Learn More>](#)

Nov. 12 Effectively Managing Subcontractors in an Evolving Landscape

Webinar

Wed., November 12, 2025

2:00 P.M. CT | Cost: Free

[Learn More>](#)

Nov. 18 Connecting Occupational & Process Safety: Strategies for Managing Catastrophic Risk in Industrial Operations

Webinar

Tues., November 18, 2025

1:00 P.M. CT | Cost: Free

[Learn More>](#)

Content Marketing 101

In today's hyper-connected world, where consumers are bombarded with information at every click and swipe, many companies are finding that content marketing can offer a powerful addition to modern marketing strategies that enhances the impact of existing advertising material and helps build relationships between companies and customers. In this article, we'll look at what content marketing is, why it's valuable, and what you can do to incorporate it into your business's marketing strategy.

What is Content Marketing?

Traditional advertising focuses its efforts on offering reminders of the existence and value of a company's products. Content marketing, in contrast, focuses on providing content that is valuable to customers and relevant to issues that business can help them solve with the intention of creating a connection with those customers. For example, while a company selling reusable water bottles via traditional advertising might put out a commercial talking about their bottles' affordability and quality craftsmanship in the hope that customers will see the value they offer, a company selling those bottles via content marketing might develop an article explaining the damage that plastic water bottles do to the environment and the ways in which that damage can end up impacting readers' quality of life.

The Value of Content Marketing

The fact that the company using content marketing in that example doesn't focus on the fact that they're selling reusable water bottles makes it easy to wonder what the point of their article is as a marketing strategy. To understand how it's effective, it is necessary to understand the way content marketing creates value. The goal of content marketing is to generate revenue through relationships, trust, and loyalty. Creating valuable content on a regular basis positions your company as a voice of authority, drives engagement by positioning your marketing material as a useful addition to customers' lives instead of a noisy interruption, and improves your SEO so that your company is more likely to appear when customers look for information about your market.

The point of the example article, at least in terms of advertisement, is to create brand awareness and trust. It might not say much about the company's bottles, but it says a lot about the importance of those bottles. The article positions the company as a source of trustworthy information and value to the consumer and then uses that relationship to create sales by being a likely result when customers look up information on the topic or the product online and linking their content to their storefront. Content marketing creates additional value due to its relatively low cost. Because content is generally housed on preexisting websites or archives and relies on word of mouth and search engines to generate views, it can be significantly cheaper to produce than traditional advertising material.

It's also important to recognize that the two approaches described are not mutually exclusive, they can, and should, be used in tandem. If someone reads an article about the damage caused by plastic bottles and then sees an advertisement about how great your reusable bottles are, they are more likely to make a purchase because the two approaches combine to present your company as a voice of authority and a source of high-quality goods.

How to Create a Content Marketing Strategy

Content marketing strategies can vary wildly from business to business, so there isn't a single best way to develop your strategy. However, the rest of this article will provide a simple guide with steps that you can follow as you decide what content marketing looks like for your business.



1. **Define your Audience:** Because content marketing is all about gaining and maintaining the attention and loyalty of your audience, the material you create needs to be generated with that audience in mind. Before you begin developing content, develop an image of the audience you want it to appeal to. A great way to do this is to create a profile for a hypothetical customer you can cater to. Try to answer key questions like: who is my audience currently? What demographics do I want to cater to? What sources of tension are they facing that are relevant to my product and how can my business help ease those tensions? Once you understand what your audience wants and what kind of content they are likely to respond well to, you can work on developing content that speaks to them.
2. **Define your Goals:** The content you make risks becoming less relevant if it isn't designed to accomplish something specific, so as you begin developing your strategy, develop it with a goal in mind. That might be introducing a new product, increasing customer loyalty, generating new leads, or something else entirely, but whatever it is will ground your content, give it purpose, and give you guidance on what kinds of content to make. For example, a whitepaper about a topic relevant to your customers might be better at drawing in new customers, while an instructional video that provides a demonstration of your new product will give that item a stronger introduction.
3. **Define your Voice:** Once you know what you're saying and who you're saying it to, you need to decide how to say it. Developing the right voice is vital to a successful campaign. What that voice is will be unique to your company and your current marketing strategy. What matters is that it feels on-brand, resonates with your audience, can be maintained consistently across platforms, and is appropriate for the kind of content you're making.

4. **Define your Space:** Next, you need to decide where you are housing the content you produce. If it's a video, you'll need to decide whether to host it on your site or on a video platform. If you choose the latter, you'll need to decide whether your content would work best on a longform service like YouTube or something shorter like TikTok. If it's a blog, do you post it on a company website or social media platforms? Do you publish your own white papers or sponsor papers published elsewhere? These don't have to be mutually exclusive, and you should try to broadcast your content through as many avenues as possible and develop content that caters to multiple outlets and formats to increase your exposure, but figuring out which platforms you will use ahead of time will define the shapes your content takes and will inform the audience you can speak to.
5. **Define your Schedule:** To achieve its maximum effectiveness, content marketing should be consistently paced over a long period of time. Modern search algorithms value consistency, so keeping your content flowing at a regular pace improves your search engine placement. At the same time, it helps keep your brand in the minds of its customers, since they know when to look forward to new content. At the same time, it's important not to move too quickly. Posting too much content too fast will make it more likely that customers will begin to find it annoying, and the whole point is to make your marketing material something they want to see. Posting material also means creating that material, and there is a limit on how much high-quality material your company will be able to produce within any given amount of time. Putting out low quality content will reduce the effectiveness of your marketing, so it's better to create one really good article a month, for example, than daily articles no one wants to read.



Once you have a clear definition of your audience, goals, voice, space, and schedule, you should be ready to start developing and releasing content. Don't assume your content marketing strategy will be an immediate viral hit, though. It will likely take time to build up momentum and develop a backlog of evergreen content that new customers can look through. Your strategy will also probably need some fine tuning, so track your content's performance over time and adjust as needed until you feel that your content speaks to your customers and benefits your company in the ways you want it to.