

# HOW TO MAKE CONTENT THAT STANDS OUT (WITHOUT TRYING TOO HARD)

27 million pieces of content  
are shared every day\* – here's how to  
make sure yours gets noticed.

Contently

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\* Probably way more than that

BY **CONTENTLY**

# IT'S THE SAME OLD SONG, WITH A DIFFERENT HEADLINE SINCE YOU'VE BEEN GONE.

Repackaging, re-crafting, republishing - everyone's a curator and we're passing the same piece of content along. (Hello, "23 Ways to {Insert Cat Video} Into Your Content.") And sure - listicles and celeb stories, controversial headlines and repurposed content all drive a certain kind of interest.

But it's that original, fresh piece of content that's getting the eyeballs, the clicks, and most importantly the brand boost and loyalty. It needs to be smart and it needs to be interesting and it needs to be useful. After all, if they can find a given piece of information anywhere, what's encouraging your readers to come back?

Problem is, quality and originality are hard - especially because they're often found only in the eye of the beholder. But hard doesn't mean impossible, and with the right roadmap, any brand can make content that's original, inventive and sticky - the kind that stands out from the crowd and makes users come back again and again.

So what's the secret? How are the smartest brands and publishers standing out in this noisy world of content? Well, the first thing to do is take a 360 degree view of your possibilities.

## **Consider these 5 approaches:**

- Look outside: Tap into the content that surrounds your niche.
- Go inside: Consider your brand's particular niche and unique offering.
- Give it muscle: Make it bigger, richer and brighter, through multimedia storytelling elements; taking things "live", or adjusting the frequency of content for a more powerful punch.
- Make connections: Could you benefit from creating a series of shorter elements or smart curation of existing content? What about enlisting the users who are already engaging in your site?
- Get weird: No really, we'll show you what we mean.

So how can you be more than just another publisher?

With the 27 million pieces of content that are shared daily, you're competing not just with other likeminded brands, but with the media, blogs, and anyone who publishes an article, a photo, a comment.

Based on the 5 overall principles above, here are several ways to take that 360 degree view.

# 1. LOOK OUTSIDE: START WITH THE BASICS & BRANCH OUT

Ok, this may seem like a no brainer, but its critical. Most of your special creativity sauce will come from truly walking your own talk.

First, what does your brand stand for? What is your particular niche in the marketplace? Are you a company that makes the best deadbolts in Phoenix? Are you a Swedish company that makes cheap, but aesthetically lovely furniture?

Consider your product, your raison d'etre and think about the content that directly relates to and *surrounds* your content.

For example: Let's say you're a company that connects teeth-whitening services and dentists to potential patients. Your ethos is about brighter, whiter teeth. You've done a keyword analysis via Google's Keyword Planner and see that the chief search topics related to teeth-whitening include dentists, implants, costs, treatments and, interestingly, smile.

You'll want to have some basic content around the topics that relate directly to your services, perhaps some expert-written Q&As, 101 articles etc... but to really stand out, you'll need to think outside the box.

What about content around the idea of a smile? Happiness. Inner Beauty. Humor. Consider topics that might broaden your appeal to a wider audience. That kind of content, when done right, can end up being shared and shared again.

General Electric has become legendary in content marketing case studies for creating beautiful, content geekery that floats effortlessly with and around their brand: instagram shots [inside a wind turbine](#); a Tumblr that aggregates those beautiful images; videos that take you behind the scenes "from the factory floor"; visualizations (infographics) on the [future of flight](#).

"We're competing for the attention of anyone who likes science and technology online," says Katrina Craigwell, manager of Digital Marketing at G.E.. "Brands aren't just competing with their traditional business and competitive set online, they're competing with any other publisher, most of which are media publishers who speak to the same passion points."

Start with an initial brainstorm and make a list of those topics and categories that your brand stands for, subjects your audience is interested in and the topics that relate to your core topics too (and if you're having flashbacks of word diagramming in high school, you aren't far off).

You're getting your brand and your team into the mindset of a publisher - by creating interesting content that a broad audience would want to read, you're helping to define your company as an interesting brand that a broad audience wants to have a relationship with.

## 2. GO INSIDE: SURFACE YOUR UNIQUE CONTENT, SANS SEO

Once you've decided your strategy for a good content mix and where that content should live, you'll want to identify the content that you can own. Original content. And it's probably hiding right under your nose.

This term can sound scary to brands: "I make espadrilles not essays!" But you know something about

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your brand, you've done due diligence to understand what makes your consumer tick, where they shop, what they do in their spare time. In fact (little secret here) you might have gathered more information about your potential readers than most publishers do when they send a magazine to press.

Creating "something new" is a sure-fire way to give consumers a piece of information that they could not have gotten elsewhere.

"It's incredibly hard to get anyone to pay attention to a one-way commercial message that's focused on your brand," says Jonah Bloom, Former Editor of Ad Age, now Chief Strategy Officer at kbs+ (Kirshenbaum Bond Senecal + Partners). "Success today is almost always predicated on providing something the consumer actually wants and therefore may respond to, interact with and even advocate for."

But choosing where you spend your resources creating that original content is an important question. You're probably not in the business of creating another New York Times, and even the New York Times is judicious about what is "fit" to print. You're creating a lasting connection between you and your audience, so you want to make sure the content is editorially smart and doesn't bankrupt your workflow.

So first, ask yourself a few key questions:

### **How can you provide value?**

You should look at content like a gift. Aim to give your audience something of value that they'll read/watch and feel as if they've come away with: new knowledge, had a laugh, or a good cry, or felt compelled to share it or just remember it. It's a tall order, but it's critical: With the 27 million pieces of content shared every day, the only way to stand out is to be meaningful.

### **What does your audience want?**

Are they interested in simple solutions to a super-hectic life? Are they interested in in-depth, educational white papers and case studies? Are they looking for the next, hilarious "Oh My Dayum" fast-food YouTube review they can share with their friends? Chances are it's some combination of all of those.

### **Where will the content live?**

While the term "microsite" has become a bit of a dirty word, you'll still need to think of the various repositories and platforms for your goodies. Will the

content be part and parcel of your current website? Will it be a singular Tumblr that hones in on one special topic like cereal? (See General Mills' [HelloCerealLovers](#) Tumblr) Is it a series of articles syndicated on the Huffington Post like Citi's WomenandCo.com content which has a second life on the [pageview-nabbing women's site](#)?

"Make sure that you're tailoring each piece of content for the platform you're on," says Craigwell, "We do a few big digital content stories every year that live across GE.com, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram. We know which content plays the best where. So it's not about shoving a ton of video on Tumblr. We know that animated Gifs are the things that really delight people, but it's not about building more animated gifs, it's about making sure that we are having as much fun and being as entertaining as possible without losing the informative side."

#### **How can you tell a great and compelling story?**

Pepsi enlisted Basketball pro Kyrie Irving for this

series of [hilarious movies about "Uncle Drew."](#) Is it about Pepsi? Well, no, not really, but the Pepsi "culture" is all over this and helps to define and entice their audience. Part of telling a great story is making sure the people creating it are pros: enlist great writers, videographers, journalists, designers, multimedia and experience artists, depending, and you'll be glad you did.

#### **Could you find great content in the archives?**

Brands like P&G and Johnson & Johnson have amazing [museum-like archives](#) of their products and promotions. A tour of the P&G archives reveals groovy old Ivory soap advertisements, elegant lipstick tubes and even the kissing machine that was featured on the Red Hot Chili Peppers album cover. Talk about great, unique content. Imagine a series of Past & Present slideshows, infographics, videos or just about anything.

Nostalgia is always a good bet -- and it because it's intrinsically yours, it's content you can own.

## 3. GIVE IT MUSCLE

### Make It Longer, Better, Slower, Stronger

Sure, your audience has limited time, but if everything is brief, “snackable” and relentless, you may end up getting more unsubscribes than you’d like. Consider changing the length and frequency of your content to make an impact.

Yes, there will always be the scores of OMG political gaffes, animals jumping on trampolines and Ryan Gosling memes. But we’re starting to see a trend away from thinly-reported, quick-hit posts toward long-form, magazine-style, well-reported narratives and rich multimedia, experiences (think the Webby/Pulitzer-winning New York Times [Snowfall](#), [The Jockey](#) or this Pitchfork feature on the band [Bat For Lashes](#)). When experiences are immersive and compelling,

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users become more invested. And you [might not even need to hire a slew of developers](#) or [go quite so big](#).

Patagonia does a great job with slower, more thoughtful, yet simple content: elegant photo essays, gorgeous, immersive big wave surfing videos, and in-depth profiles of their Ambassadors. You want to spend time on and explore the site, because simply, it’s a great publication. So when you decide to buy active gear, you’re probably going to feel better about purchasing something from Patagonia.

### Adjust the Volume

Try slowing down the cadence, too. Make an impact with a weekly schedule instead of daily (radical!) and make sure to stick to a powerful set of related, thematic features. Take your readers on a longer ride.

Speaking of longer, as we’re all more comfortable reading vertically, there are more and more sites employing scrolling, usually Parallax techniques to tell

a visual, interactive story. The company [VonDutch](#) spins a yarn about their namesake Kenneth Howard through super cool iconography and visual wizardry. [Every Last Drop UK](#) is just educational storytelling at its most charming. The wide screen, immersive approach lends itself well to narrative storytelling, biography and infographic or educational concepts come to life (see [Dangers of Fracking](#)).

### Do It Live!

What’s better than cooking from a recipe on your iPad? Cooking, live, with a chef that you can tweet and interact with, of course. Companies like [The Chopping Block](#) use Google+ for monthly cooking classes where they teach viewers to sauté spinach or trim a tenderloin.

Event-based content using Google Hangouts, Scribble, Ustream or Livestream make it possible to connect with your readers/ consumers in an immediate, humanizing way. But brands are still hesitant to embrace the technology for fear of “Hello? Hello? I can’t hear you...OK now I can’t see you” (and their fears aren’t unwarranted – the technology requires a solid connection from all participants).

Still, this kind of content has legs: with Google Hangouts the content is live streamed and recorded to YouTube – so you can archive it, share it, repurpose it. How-tos, multiple blogger discussions, one-on-one access to experts are all great ways to take your content into real time goodness.

[ASOS](#), a UK-based clothing retailer offered a series of fashion advice hangouts featuring celebrities and stylists giving two-minute tips to individual users who signed up.

For a different kind of event-based Hangout, consider Scribble, a paid service that allows you to tap into its partner networks through “Scribble Market”(including ABC News and Reuters). If those networks like the content you’re creating, you can find yourself a whole set of new eyeballs. Scribble can also live curate any related topic and the stream can be embedded right into your own site. The NY Daily News used the service for its [coverage of Fashion Week](#).

## 4. MAKE CONNECTIONS

### Package Up Shorter Features

OK, so we just suggested going long. But the reverse can be equally as compelling – especially when done as a series. You probably know about Vine and Instagram video, but a few companies have started to create thematic or how-to collections. When you merge your several 6 or 15-second videos together, you create a reason for your users to return.

Lowes, for example, has created a Tumblr of their Vine videos called [“Fix in Six”](#) — home improvement hacks using Lowes products, of course. Entertaining and compulsively watchable.

Brands might also take a cue from actors like David Koechner (Anchorman 2) who’ve created Instamovies. Koechner’s [series of eight 15-second films](#) add up to one fun buddy-cop flick.

### Use Your Users

Your current customers, consumers, fans can be an amazing, rabidly passionate source of fresh, honest-to-a-fault content.

Warby Parker uses Vine to encourage its customers to test drive on their six try-at-home glasses, and share their 6 seconds with their social sphere.

Last year G.E. held a contest to find a great Instagram photographer within their community, they found Adam Senatori (@adamssensori) who already had a big following on Instagram and a passion for aviation, landscapes and infrastructure.

“He came to us with new ideas we’d never considered,” says Craigwell. “There are great content creators across these segments, how can we learn from them? How can we support what they do, leverage what they do? That’s where it gets really cool from us.”

Keep in mind that when you activate user-generated content, there’s moderation involved; you’ll need to appoint someone to sift through the best of the bunch, do some light editing; maintain the brand’s

voice.

In addition to creating user-generated content, your users can help you focus any and all content you create. Pinpoint the kinds of content they’re already creating and where they’re spending their time.

Are they creating boards for favorite hairdos on Pinterest, offering parenting advice on Quora, sharing photos of the new Harley on Facebook or joining regular Twitter chats? Are they primarily accessing content on their mobile device, on their tablet or on their desktop during the workday? (Shhh, we won’t tell.)

What content are they not getting that they would like?

“We rely on everything here from to media planning data to listening to the brands’ consumers and how/when/where they say they want to interact with the content,” says Bloom.

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### Curate It

If you don’t have the ability to develop original content, there’s no shame in developing a curation model. Or mixing your original content with some curated content. It can be a great way to quickly ramp up to publisher status.

The idea is selecting choice pieces of content from around the web which fit into your topic group, and packaging them up. You might choose some category experts to hand-select the copy and write a few sentences of context (“original content”!) that can make the content feel fresh and relevant to your brand.

Sites like Upworthy and BuzzFeed have made entire businesses on a curation or part-curation model where they tease, recast or package-up already existing content from the web.



## 5. GET WEIRD: BE QUIRKY & SURPRISING

When in doubt, be weird. The Hairpin partnered with Samsung for this [wacky, user-generated series](#) of food art images, inspired by news stories. A little less weird, just as evocative: Hairpin partner site The Awl debuted the next Cronut through a series of step-by-step [“how it’s made” animated GIFs](#) using the Samsung Galaxy S4.

You might think that the strange and offbeat idea has the potential to be brand-damaging or at the very least off-brand (Samsung and [“The Lonely Broccoli Mammoth”](#)?), but that’s just what makes it cool and captivating. It makes Samsung look awfully ahead-of-the-curve and since they campaign as “The Next Big Thing is Here” it’s kind of perfect.

Another fun example: comedian and author Baratunde Thurston’s site TheCultivatedWit.com asks users to scroll to its “Section 4” and then take a hilarious, absurdist quiz with questions like How Many Miles in a Marathon and “Please pick any contentious issue of the day, take a side, and state in 100 words or less why you are a fool for taking such a hardline stance in an ever-changing universe.”

As Thurston told Contently, CreativeWit, “creatively employs humor and technology to make the world better through marketing and original content.” So in this way Thurston demonstrates that he gets it — his medium is the message.

## 6. BONUS! FINALLY, TRY ENO

This is borrowing a method from the founder of Roxy Music, Brian Eno, whose [“Oblique Strategies”](#) box has been turned into a lovely iphone app. Like the Eno box, the app is filled with virtual cards that make simple, but potent creative suggestions. Eno used these in his songwriting, but they’re great for any aesthetic roadblock. Have a content quandary? Pick a card:

“Are there sections? Consider transitions.”

“Go to an extreme, move back to a more comfortable place.”

“Work at a different speed.”

# AND HEAVEN FORBID, DON'T TRY ALL OF THESE IDEAS AT ONCE.

Don't try to be everything to everyone. Focus your content on topics your brand knows best, techniques and resources you know you can pull off, and ideas that will resonate with your audience, and yours alone. That's the best way to be different.

## **So what did we learn?**

Well, to quote [Mama Cass](#) "Different is heartache, different is pain. But I'd rather be different than be the same."

By looking at your special you-and-only-you offerings, reaching out to your core audience, adjusting your frequency, amping up your quality, and getting a little weird, you'll stand a good chance of cutting through the clutter.

It may not be easy to be unique, to try something new, but in the end, you'll make something more meaningful.



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