

Contently

Marketing in the Post-Text World:

How Multimedia Storytelling is Changing Advertising



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Narrative transportation is
the state of being immersed in
the world of a story.

—Dr. Melanie Green

Editor's Note

Welcome. At Contently, we are all about arming brands with the tools and talent to tell stories people love, and what excites us most is how quickly those stories are evolving. As forward-thinking brands commit to becoming true publishers, they're channeling their inner Daft Punk and telling stories that bigger, better, faster, and stronger, casting a gravitational pull on consumers through narratives that just can't be ignored.

We're quickly waving goodbye to the age of the amateur brand blog post and welcoming the dawn of the content marketing arms race—a battle that's just now heating up between some of the most creative and innovative brands on earth.

In this ebook, we look at a sampling of brands that are telling great stories across a variety of different mediums, and then examine some of the keys to their success. We hope it inspires you to join the battle.

— Joe Lazauskas
Contently Editor in Chief

Table of Contents

I. Intro: Google’s Generation C	5
II. Pioneer Brands	6
Converse’s New New “Snow Fall”	
Chipotle takes on “Big Ag”	
Ledbury reimagines the lookbook	
III. Telling Great Multimedia Stories	11
Craft compelling narratives — even if they’re not true	
Quality is crucial	
Mind the medium	
IV. Conclusion: The Road Ahead	14

How Multimedia Storytelling is Changing Advertising

Change is coming. Look no further than Google's "[Generation C](#)."

The "C" stands for connection, community, creation, and curation, and the tech giant calls this demographic "a powerful new force in culture and commerce." Members of Generation C don't fall under a specific range of birthdays, but 65 percent of them are under

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35 years old. And according to [YouTube Insights](#), this Gen C audience is twice as likely to favor watching YouTube videos by brands versus TV commercials.

If you prefer to examine traditional generations, you'll find that one-third of Millennials now watch absolutely no broadcast TV, [according to a 2014 New York Times study](#). Whichever way you slice it, the message is clear: the effectiveness of traditional TV advertising is in decline, and brands need to find an alternative moving forward.

What's emerging is the beginning of a renaissance in brand storytelling through multimedia as brands break out of the confines of the 30-second spot to experiment with immersive, in-depth narratives.

Forward-thinking brands are also moving past the simple, text-only blog posts of the 1.0 era to embrace the power of visual storytelling.

Brands aren't just telling these new stories for cool points, either; opting for the same goal that always drove TV advertising: brand lift. A

[recent study on Forbes.com readers](#) shows people who consume a piece of branded content are 41 percent more likely to express an intent to buy from that brand, and [Buzzfeed's case studies](#) have found that repeated exposure to branded content delivers a brand lift upwards of 400 percent.

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We're still in the honeymoon period, but let's take a Three Little Bears approach and examine how three pioneer brands—one big, one medium, and one small—are embracing this trend. Then, we'll look at a few keys to successful brand storytelling through multimedia.

Pioneer Brands

Converse's New New "Snow Fall"

There are those who make moves instead of standing still. That's the first line of Converse's stunning interactive story, "[The New New](#)," published in Complex this past November. The line may refer to the artistic entrepreneurs and hustlers profiled in the article, but it also describes the innovation on display from Converse.

© Converse



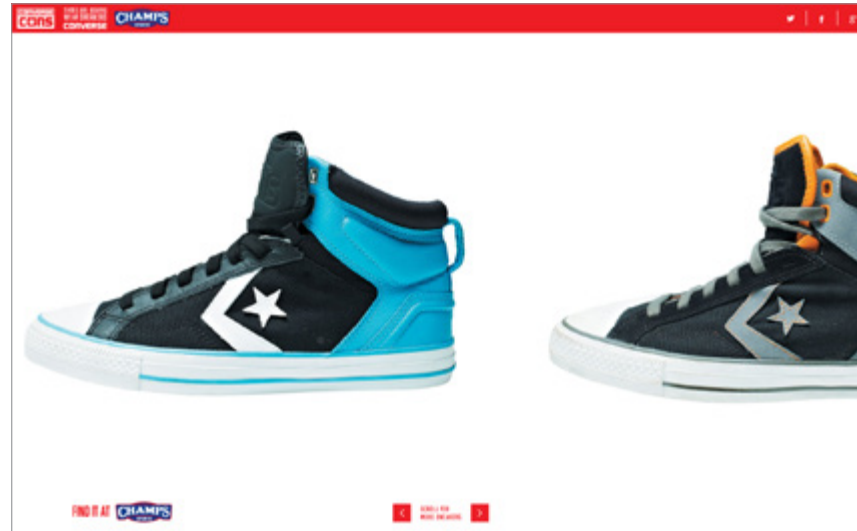
Produced in partnership with Complex's branded content team, "The New New" uses parallax design—also known as "Snow Fall," after the groundbreaking 2012 New York Times piece that catapulted the technique into the mainstream editorial world.

Converse's work weaves GIFs, photography and tracks, and music videos cohesively into the narrative of Brooklyn soul band Phony PPL and rap group Ratking. There are interactive ads for Converse shoes, too, and the most deserving criticism of the piece might just be the way those ads break up the narrative—though Converse argues they make the ad "the hero," according to [Digiday](#).

The branding comes through in every part of the piece—font, text color, black and white images—and even the GIF transitions find a clever way to include the Converse logo as an arrow. Every creative decision has a purpose, and the different visual components give the entire work an amped-up pace that moves the reader along.



© Converse



One of the benefits of parallax scrolling is the open space available to the brand. Converse wouldn't have been able to design sprawling multimedia content during a TV spot or in the confines of a magazine. And Converse is showing that interactive, experimental storytelling isn't just meant for *The New York Times*. Brands have the power to spread their messages creatively, particularly with startups like [Ceros](#), [Scrollkit](#) and [Exposure](#) providing the tools that build interactive stories without programming.

For brands looking to tell unique stories related to their products, "The New New" is a prime example of how layered media can make text and ads pop out of the page for a remarkable visual experience.

Chipotle takes on “Big Ag”

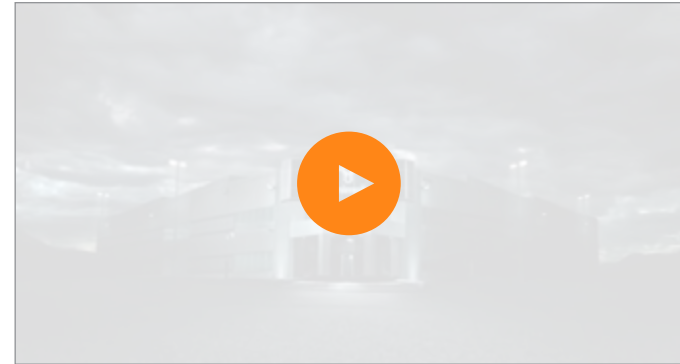
Dark clouds and thunder loom above a large gray building. A villain approaches a scientist to learn how a more efficient animal feed, PetroPellet, will change the agriculture industry. The scientist mentions these pellets have an unusual side effect.

Then, the cow explodes.

“I realized ... it wasn’t simply an advertisement from Chipotle, or just promoting Chipotle, and that it was really just a TV show that would exist on its own merits,” said Wise.

While this scene resembles a promo for a primetime TV show, it’s actually part of “Farmed and Dangerous,” a new satirical web series from Chipotle that comments on the unsavory practices of the “Big Ag” industry. The four 20-minute episodes are being distributed on Hulu, and the series features professional actors with extensive TV experience, headlined by Ray Wise—of 24 and Twin Peaks fame—as the show’s villain.

“I realized it was a satire all about food production here in the United States,” Wise told the [Nerdist](#). “[A]nd although it was sponsored by Chipotle, it wasn’t simply an advertisement for Chipotle, or just promoting Chipotle, and that it was really just a TV show that would exist on its own merits.”



© Chipotle

More importantly, even though the series is still a marketing effort, Chipotle’s branding messages aren’t intrusive. It mostly concerns itself with the food sustainability issues the chain uses to differentiate itself from competitors. Chipotle was the first food chain to [label all genetically-modified food](#) and plans to serve 15 million pounds of locally grown food this year.

“We’ve been thinking of ‘Farmed and Dangerous’ as more of a values-integration than traditional product-integration,” said Chipotle Chief Marketing Officer Mark Crumpacker. “The show is rooted in some of the problems we are working to solve or improve upon [the first season hits on the reliance of fossil fuels in large-scale farming], but it isn’t about us.”

While Chipotle is a public company, it’s relatively small by fast food standards. The series cost the company approximately \$1 million to produce—not exactly cheap, but much less than [\\$4 million](#) price tag for a 30-second spot during the Super Bowl.



This isn't the first time Chipotle has smartly invested in video, either. In 2013, they released "[The Scarecrow](#)," a beautifully animated short film about a scarecrow opening an organic food stand in a dystopia known for unethical factory farming practices.

The video went viral, receiving more than 5.5 million views in under a week, even though Chipotle didn't spend any money on traditional advertising. The end of the Scarecrow video also links to [a companion mobile game](#), which ended up reaching the top 15 free apps in the iTunes store.

Will "Farmed and Dangerous" exceed Chipotle's previous success? Only time will tell, but given the energetic discussion the series has already elicited, Chipotle's foray into multimedia storytelling is off to a strong start.



© Ledbury



Ledbury reimagines the lookbook

Anyone who's seen a menswear catalog knows to expect perfect models posing in high-fashion glamor shots. But this isn't the case with [Ledbury](#).

Their lookbooks are stylish without being glamorous or superficial. For example, their ["Color Four Ways"](#) lookbook features four local painters from Richmond, Virginia. The lookbook is filled with action shots of them painting, carrying canvas, and getting messy, and creates a kind of cohesive narrative through

"We've always believed that people will feel more connected to Ledbury if we share ideas and tell stories about things and people we're actually interested in."

the lookbook's artistically minimalist web design.

Each lookbook has its own unique narrative, from the [story of a Quail Hunt](#) to the [history of the Olympics](#) told through the quirky lens of the Ledbury brand. They also use short documentaries to [tell the story](#) behind their products and the concepts that drive their designs.

Why did Ledbury go in this direction, telling a personal story about their brand, rather than relying on the standard lookbook approach that has existed for decades? "It comes back to authenticity," Melissa Calabro, Ledbury's Social Media Manager, said. "We've always believed that people will feel more connected to Ledbury if we share ideas and tell stories about things and people we're actually interested in."

The response to their approach has been overwhelmingly positive. "We get awesome feedback from customers all of the time when people see something they can relate to," she added.

Perhaps this relatable style has helped this upstart brand land a spot on the [Forbes list of America's Most Promising Companies](#). Ledbury has grown their customer base so quickly that their shirts have become ubiquitous in men's magazines all over America. Ultimately, they sell shirts. But to get there, they had to learn to tell the right stories.

Telling Great Multimedia Stories

Given these brands succeed by focusing more on spreading stories than buying paid advertising, how do we know which experimental strategies will work for others?

While there's no secret formula, there are tactics proven to succeed.

Craft compelling narratives—even if they're not true

There's one element that every story needs to be persuasive: narrative transportation.

This means that a truly compelling and transporting story can help the audience understand—and even agree with—the beliefs encouraged by the storyteller.

“Narrative transportation is the state of being immersed in the world of a story. People feel like they've left the real world behind and are cognitively and emotionally engaged in the story world,” says [Dr. Melanie Green](#), a social psychologist.

According to Green, people who are transported lose track of time and are immersed in mental images from the story. “This experience of being transported helps create the persuasive impact of a story—transported readers [and] viewers are more

likely to shift their real-world beliefs to match the implications or conclusions of the story.”

This means that a truly compelling and transporting story can help the audience understand—and even agree with—the beliefs encouraged by the storyteller. Transportation works so well that it doesn't even matter if the story is true. In fact, fiction is often as persuasive as fact.

“Even though people think that they won't be persuaded by fiction, the evidence shows otherwise,” Green explains. “People can be just as affected by stories that could happen as those that actually happened. It seems that people don't really care about whether a story is about real people and events as long as the story is plausible.”

The research suggests adding factual talking points might not help a story's persuasiveness. It's all about the connection with the audience.

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© Distilled

Quality is crucial

It's not just the story itself that matters; you also need to execute.

Will Critchlow's "The Future of TV" report argues, "Whichever platform dominates, we believe that the creative will be crucial." It's no longer enough to have your audience's permission via an email subscription or social media engagement. The quality of the content must stand out, otherwise it will get lost in the noise.

"Permission is no longer enough," says Critchlow. "Brands need to create such great content that it gets curated and shared by their audiences."

For brands to achieve this, they need to act more like publishers. According to Critchlow, "Those brands that view their content as sales material will inevitably under-invest, whereas those that seek to build a real audience of their own will thrive."

Mind the medium

Brands must also be able to distribute stories in a way that fits the audience and the message.

Ledbury, for example, distributes effectively by testing and paying attention to how they are packaging content. “Each medium serves a different primary purpose,” Calabro said. “It’s a new playing field for a lot of us here, whether the new element is retail,

TV commercials interrupt shows, and the audience expects this interruption. But when the audience is on YouTube, where they typically self-serve content, ads are just skipped.

menswear, e-commerce, etc... so it’s been interesting to see the results and shape our strategy accordingly.”

Critchlow advises against falling into the trap of treating new storytelling and branding media like traditional media. According to him, TV commercials interrupt shows, and the audience expects this interruption. But when the audience is on YouTube, where they typically self-serve content, ads are just skipped.

“This has always happened,” he said. “The early radio ads were newspaper ads read aloud. The early TV ads were radio ads with images. And it’s no wonder that online video ads currently look too often like TV ads on the internet.”

In other words, don’t use TV conventions in documentary sales videos and don’t treat immersive longform stories like sales copy. It’s best to find how your audience behaves when interacting with a specific medium and use that information to benefit your story.

Finally, it’s also important to have a clear separation between content meant for sales and content meant for branding. “Content designed to seal the deal has its place, but it can’t be the same content that builds your brand,” explained Critchlow.



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The road ahead

In the book *The Innovator's Dilemma*, author Clayton Christensen wrote about how large organizations tend to focus too much on meeting current customer and market needs. These companies, no matter how large, will then fall behind as more disruptive and innovative challengers displace them.

Eventually, we reach a tipping point: the newer ways of innovation become standard. Critchlow believes this tipping point for advertising will be reached in the next five years.

"I think the giant brands will do fine. It's the advertising industry that has a dilemma on its hands," he said. "The brands will adjust when it's in their interest to do so. Those reliant for their revenues on TV ad spend may not find it as easy to move rapidly."

Wherever these changes are taking us, it's clear that at the end of the road lies a compelling, immersive story.

Want more insights into the state of content marketing?

Be sure to check out [“Consumer Packaged Content”](#), Contently’s ebook on how storytelling is transforming CPG marketing.

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