

Contently

QUARTERLY

The Finance Issue



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From the Publisher



If you've spent as much time around content marketers as I have, you get the sense that early '90s rappers aren't high on their list of inspirations. But as someone who grew up on Raekwon and now spends his days worrying about ROI, I've been thinking a lot about this one line from Raekwon's 1995 album, *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx*:

**From staircase to stage,
minimum wage /
But soon to get an
article in *Rap Page*.**

What exactly does this have to do with content marketing? Well, as content continues to expand from the back stairwells of marketing departments, some of the most advanced practitioners have been turning up on the most unlikely stages.

For instance, it's no shock that brands in New York, the media capital of the world, should be quick to embrace storytelling. But over the past year, we've found that many of content marketing's most forward-thinking companies—from decades-old enterprise tech players to the new batch of venture-backed "unicorns"—actually have their roots in the West Coast.

And who'd have thought the finance industry—which carries a reputation for risk-averse marketing and a tradition of straight-lacedness—would be leading the charge for owned media. Yet just as rappers like Raekwon have embraced the trappings of high finance, so, too, have financial institutions embraced the storytelling inherent in hip-hop—often with stunning results.

In this issue you'll read about how content marketing is taking over regions and industries in ways that would have been inconceivable just a few years back. You'll hear how marketing guru Seth Godin imagines the future, how YouTube is using content to reimagine the Hollywood studio, and more. In between, we'll give you insights and research from Contently's own brand publishing efforts.

Raekwon would never have guessed it, but 20 years after *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx*, rap music is all over the pop charts. And while *Rap Pages* might not be as popular as it was in 1995, brand publishers are doing their best to pick up the slack.

Sam Slaughter (@samslaughter215) is the VP of Content at Contently.



OPINIONS

Content Marketing's Future Is in the Hands of Two Groups, and They're Not Talking

By Joe Coleman

Photograph by Kyle Dean Reinford

Over the last four years at Contently, we've seen content marketing go from something no one was talking about to something brands found interesting (but not worthy of much budget) to the number one digital priority for brands. To say money is now pouring into content marketing would be an understatement. It's happening now from all sides, from inside CMOs' offices and through their agencies alike.

Lasting content marketing success requires more than just writing a check, however, and the rapid growth of content marketing has left many initiatives living in silos, disconnected from a brand's broader content strategy.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the gulf between those responsible for formulating and enacting a brand's long-term content strategy (usually the CMO's office) and those responsible for getting that content in front of the right audience (the media agency).

Why is this a problem? Well, as the industry inevitably moves beyond "check the box" mode—where just doing some form of content marketing is enough to show progress—to more mature programs that require real business results to justify the expenses, it will be necessary to break down silos in order to build content marketing programs that really work.

Here are a few areas where we've seen our customers succeed in bridging this gap:

1. Multi-agency cooperation

Having a brand's agencies as the driving force behind content adoption helps generate a holistic strategy. When PR, media, and creative agencies collaborate on content strategy, it means all the bases (creation and distribution) can be covered from the outset.

2. Media agencies moving beyond campaign-based thinking

The true power of content marketing is building owned audiences—putting the brand in a position where it's connecting directly with its potential customers, instead of relying on the traditional media properties of old for access to consumers. The infrastructure now exists for media buyers to drive traffic to brand-owned properties at scale; it simply represents a change in thinking.

3. Brands fostering a culture of content

The content teams that sit within brands can do a better job of packaging their content and making it available to their agency partners. There are tools that can help them do this. But to truly close the CMO–agency chasm, it's essential to foster a culture of content and evangelize internally. Long-term success takes buy-in at the highest levels.

Content marketing is here to stay—but content without proper distribution can't be effective, nor can distribution work without a coherent content strategy. The best content marketers will find a way to bridge the gap. ■

Joe Coleman (@JoeDColeman) is the CEO of Contently.



**The infrastructure
now exists for media
buyers to drive traffic
to brand-owned
properties at scale.**

Content Marketers Need a Better Formula for Success

By Ray Cheng

Photograph by Kyle Dean Reinford

Content marketing has a problem that not enough people are talking about: How do I accurately measure the true value of the content I create?

Content performance metrics are still being measured in the form of opens, clicks, pageviews, and shares. Thus, content marketers are getting better at leveraging a common formula: clickable headlines + paid distribution = numbers that look like success. Unfortunately, that success is often an illusion.

The real value generated from such metrics for a given content program could actually be zero, because audience engagement and loyalty may be limited to just that one campaign. The harder it is for content marketers to prove that their content results directly tie into a company's overall financial success, the harder it is for them to ask for more money to produce better content and truly engage audiences over time. This is a huge mistake and a disservice to the marketing profession.

At companies that are attempting to link content more directly to shareholder KPIs, content marketers are quickly evolving into hybrid creatures: half editors, half data scientists. To succeed, these Chimeras need a formula that goes one step further than attention time. The formula needs to consider the lifetime value of each audience member and, more importantly, how to maximize that value from the best audience segments.

I've spent a lot of time in my career thinking about better ways to prove marketing attribution. That effort has evolved with the help of the latest marketing automation technologies. At Contently, we have the pleasure of looking at a treasure trove of content performance data in our own

technology platform, which has allowed me to develop a pretty exciting formula for the content marketing world. We have lovingly named it ROCI [rock-ee], short for Return on Content Investment:

The ROCI formula:

*(Revenue Attributed to All Content Marketing Assets
– Total Content Marketing Spend)*

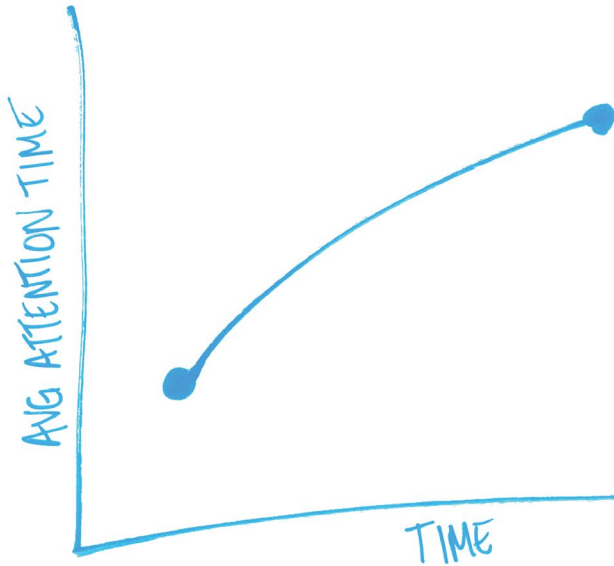
+

*(Share of Audience Attention × Fair Market \$ Value of
Target Audience)*

It's by no means a finished theorem, as solving the problem of true content value over time is incredibly hard and unique to each business model. But over the next few months, we will be working with the best minds in the marketing and data worlds to test and adapt this formula. If you have any thoughts, opinions, or insights, I hope you'll let us know. ■

Ray Cheng (@Ray_Jing) is the VP of Marketing at Contently.

CONTENTLY INSIGHTS



Content marketers are quickly evolving into hybrid creatures: half editors, half data scientists.



Effective Publishing Means Making an Impression

By Joe Lazauskas

Photograph by Kyle Dean Reinford

Engagement is one of those truly irritating words because no one can agree on what it means. Once upon a time, it meant two people were going to get hitched, which made it a perfectly pleasant word that—double bonus!—had absolutely nothing to do with marketing.

But then we needed a term for people interacting with advertising on the Internet, and marketers settled on “engagement” as a catch-all. At first, “engagement” meant clicks, visits, and unique visitors—because that’s all marketers could really measure. Then social media came along, and likes, retweets, views, favorites, and a slew of other buzzmetrics were added into the mix. Basically, if it was a number that could keep you from getting fired, it was ENGAGEMENT. And it was a mess. To a large extent, it still is.

A year ago, however, that mess started to clear. Smart content companies and brand publishers like GE, Coca-Cola, and IBM started focusing on a simple idea: Brands primarily care about building relationships with consumers over time, and the best way to measure those relationships is to track how much time consumers spend interacting with content—and the conversions that result from that content.

While the idea still hasn’t gone mainstream—yet—a new rallying cry has started echoing through the branded content landscape: **Depth, not breadth.**

Time is not a miracle metric. It’s a proxy for value, and many other metrics need to be considered if you want to measure true value. As BuzzFeed’s Jonah Peretti likes to say:

There is no God metric.

And that’s fine.

The secret is for brands to weigh content metrics (like readers, pageviews, shares, average finish, average engaged time, and total engaged time) to create that proxy measure for overall value delivered—while also tracking how data corresponds with conversions that are important to business goals. Because, as Medium’s Evan Williams likes to note, effective publishing is not just about getting people to spend time with you; it’s about making an impression on someone’s mind. Following a reader who takes an action is the only way to know you’ve accomplished your mission.

Getting there requires a sophisticated synchronization of marketing software and a company culture that prioritizes content. But the smartest brands will do it with “Depth, not breadth” as their rallying cry. And when they do, we can finally leave engagement where it belongs—with the romantics.

(Full disclosure: GE and Coca-Cola are Contently clients.) ■

Joe Lazauskas (@JoeLazauskas) is the Editor-in-Chief at Contently.



**There is no God metric.
And that's fine.**

Tagging Content: The Simple Thing That Most Brands Get Wrong

By Kunal Patel

Photograph by Kyle Dean Reinford

In meeting after meeting, I come across content marketers who worry that their work isn't being taken seriously by the rest of their company. I like to give them an analogy to explain why.

Imagine that you've just been named chief revenue officer of your company, and you're trying a lot of new tactics to grow the business—hiring new people, opening new offices, changing the price of your product. After a month or two, it would be reasonable for others to ask how each move affected the company's bottom line. Even if the overall business is growing, if you can't explain which things worked—with quantitative results—you're left to conjecture, which in our data-driven world is a fast track to getting fired.

Unfortunately, this is how a lot of marketers treat their content strategies: Throw a lot of content at the wall and look at the overall result. In a way, this is understandable. Content marketing is still new, and there's a lot of debate about the best way to measure its effectiveness. And marketers are rightfully wary of investing time in the wrong content measurement strategy. But I've found that many are shooting themselves in the foot before they even get started. If you can't explain which content tactics are working, you're less likely to be taken seriously upstairs, even if things appear to be going well over all.

Time and again, we see that there's a simple, overlooked tactic that produces huge results: tagging content. I believe it's the foundation for successful content marketing campaigns.

You may be thinking that you can put this off—perhaps content isn't a company priority, your operation is small-scale, you have no staff to backfill—but having a robust taxonomy

can solve all three of those problems. It helps you to demonstrate that content is supporting key business goals, compare content's value in cross-channel campaigns, and optimize what your staff works on. The simple act of using tags and tracking their performance is often enough to get content marketers a seat at the big table.

Creating an effective taxonomy isn't easy, but it's not rocket science either. It's important to know that at the start, you're going to be wrong, and that's okay! To cover the basics, considering the following categories: topic, type of content (by length, media type, etc.), audience (potential buyers, info seekers, advocates), marketing campaigns (if you have multiple messages in digital), and business themes or goals (leads, sign-ups, awareness).

It's that simple. At the end of the quarter or month or week, check the results. For those that have been riding their intuition, the results can be shocking: What you thought was a great recurring topic or format may turn out to be a dud, while another may be surprisingly effective. The important thing isn't what's performing, it's that you're accountable.

That's the only way content marketers are going to get the budgets to play with the big kids. ■

Kunal Patel (@kunalpatel) is a Product Manager at Contently.

WHAT HAPPENED
"LAST WEEK?"
If we're to find out,
how are we doing
relative to avg?
Maybe last week was
abandonment

STORY
ABANDONMENT
&
HIGHLIGHTING

READER AVG.
3:16 m
^ 4 seconds

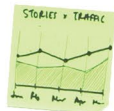
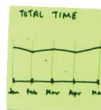
How long are
readers engaging
with my stories?

avg
↓
DIP

TOTAL STORIES
/ 7
new
^ 1



How long is the
avg. story
keeping readers'
attention? ***



my stories
start engage
new
being

How is my ***
publishing schedule
affecting my

**Tagging content
is the foundation for
successful content
marketing campaigns.**



ANSWERS

WHAT'S THE SECRET TO OPTIMIZING HEADLINES AND IMAGES?

Click Magnets

By Amanda Walgrove

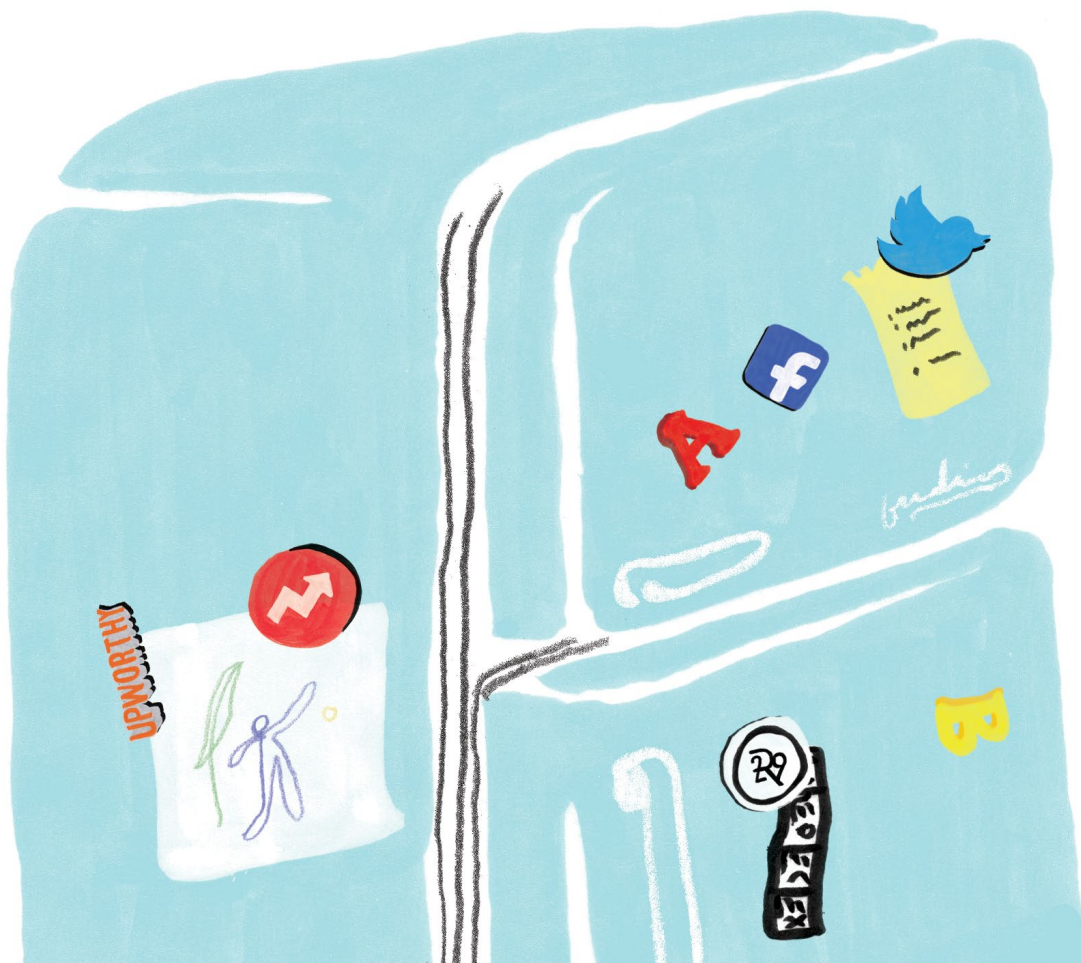
Illustration by Jimmy Mezei

As Drake rapped in his hit single “Headlines”: “They know that the real is on the rise / F*ck them other guys / I even gave ‘em a chance to decide / Now it’s something they know / They know, they know, they know.”

Wouldn’t it be great if all content marketers had the same confidence about their headlines and images as Drake does about his career? Well, through optimization and A/B testing your content, you can. Just give your audience a chance to decide on which variation they like best until it’s something you know, you know, you know. Okay, I’m done referencing Drake lyrics.

Upworthy curator Adam Mordecai said at tech conference Netroots Nation that you must test headlines because when it comes to producing potentially viral content, you’re dumb. We’re all dumb, and our intuition often means squat.

Yet according to Upworthy, a good headline can be the difference between 1,000 and 1,000,000 people reading your story. Optimizing images can also do wonders for your SEO. And after testing the best images and headlines for your website, you can use the information you’ve gleaned and apply it to strategies for email, social media, and future content.



Isn't a 20, 50, or even 500 percent difference in engagement worth testing for? I think we all know the answer to that one. For brands still getting started with optimization, here's what you need to know.

Why you should optimize headlines and images

According to Ky Harlin, the former director of data science at BuzzFeed, headlines and images are more often than not the two things that introduce readers to content.

"It's basically the only way we control the presentation of a given piece of content," he said about optimization. "In order for someone to peruse an article on BuzzFeed, they have to first click through a headline or thumbnail on our site or on social media or somewhere else. So that's our way to draw people in."

Neha Gandhi, VP of editorial strategy at Refinery29, also stresses how optimization is important for making a solid first impression on readers.

"Headline testing is really the first step when it comes to figuring out the right approach to how we want to position a story to our readers," she said.

It's not just the clicks that publishers are chasing. It's also, more importantly, the shares. In fact, social sharing is the main driver of BuzzFeed traffic, which was estimated in 2014 to be about 150 million unique visitors per month. In order to drive up that share count, BuzzFeed's editors have to make sure they're offering headlines that truly represent the content being teased to readers.

"You can usually get somebody to click on something just based on their own curiosity or something like that, but it doesn't mean that they're actu-

ally going to end up liking the content," Harlin said.

The headline is so important that you can't afford to leave its success to chance. An infographic made by Marketo, for example, shows how Upworthy managed to draw 17 million views to a YouTube video that originally only had 1 million views. The difference? The headline.

The Iowa House Democrats' YouTube channel titled its video "Zach Wahls Speaks About Family," while Upworthy chose the title "Two Lesbians Raised a Baby and This Is What They Got."

Those 16 million extra views are a big payoff for the simple exercise of testing, and then optimizing, your headlines.

How to optimize headlines and images

According to Upworthy's blog, Upworthy curators generate 25 headlines for every piece of content they want to post. The

content team then narrows this list down to a few final contenders to be tested against each other. Upworthy admits that

some of those headlines can be awful, but that's okay. Headline #24 could be a flop, but if #25 is a gift from the headline gods, then it's all worth it.

It's also key to optimize images, for both site engagement and search traffic performance. Quick Sprout's blog offers tips for making your images search-engine-friendly, including using alt tags to describe your image, using straightforward and descriptive file names, adding various

types of metadata to your image file, and using rich snippets to tag an image to your website or business.

When it comes to headlines, Refinery29 uses content marketing platform Taboola (which raised \$117 million this February) to help test the performance of various options. There's often a visible distinction between the results.

"Sometimes you can see as much as a 5 or 6 percent CTR lift, which makes a pretty big difference," Gandhi said, "and it really tells us what our readers are responding to and what they want more of." Gandhi and her team then apply those lessons to how the content appears on their site and their social feeds.

Publishers can also take advantage of leading optimization platforms such as Optimizely and OpBandit to A/B test on-site. These services allow you to plug in different headlines and images for a piece of content, as well as

track engagements, clicks, and conversions in order to see which options your audience responds to best. Some companies, like BuzzFeed, have custom, built-in

systems in which editors can input several headlines and images and test them against each other.

"Usually, one or two of the different variations outperform everything else," Harlin said, "and then that's ultimately what's used going forward for the rest of time."

“ A good headline can be the difference between 1,000 and 1,000,000 people reading your story. ”

How to optimize for email and social marketing

Testing headlines and images isn't just good for your clicks. Optimization can also improve your email and social strategy.

For example, Refinery29 uses Sailthru to create different segments within its emails for stories. In order to make sure they're sending out the best version of their email, the team uses headline and image testing as a way to optimize every email.

"Today we used a story about warm-weather travel destinations. ... We picked two or three image options from inside the slideshow, and tried them out as the [featured image]," said Gandhi. "Upon testing, we saw that one of the images had a pretty big list [of clicks], so we swapped it in. We're going to test it as an email later this week."

According to Harlin, BuzzFeed's primary goal for email marketing is to make the experience a more personal one for the reader. He noted that the website strategy has been more global, whereas the strategy for email is user-centric. And the information that they can glean from those emails is vital.

"We can get quite a lot of data back from these users," Harlin said. "As we start sending emails and also as we see when they signed up, we can see which specific articles and which categories of articles they tended to like."

That same framework can be applied to social media.

"We often test stories that we think are going to be big on social if we feel like they can wait," Gandhi said. "We tend to test a few different ideas on how we want to position the headline or the call-out on social, and use that as the first testing ground."

Publishers can also test out different headlines on Twitter or TweetDeck, where it's easy to schedule tweets. Link-shortening platforms like Bitly are great for tracking how many clicks each variation receives.

For BuzzFeed, optimization on Twitter and Facebook has been focused on driving traffic back to BuzzFeed.com. But some emerging social platforms like Instagram, Vine, and Snapchat aren't conducive for sharing URLs and linking back to a homepage. Instead, their goals are to generate engagement native to the platform itself, with tags, likes, and comments.

How to optimize for future content

By testing different headlines and images, publishers can learn what readers respond to and, in turn, inform decisions about content that hasn't been created yet. For example, BuzzFeed found that color images almost always perform much better than black and white images, and that images in which you can see someone's entire body perform worse than the ones showing just a face or upper body. In headlines, Harlin's team found that shorter works better, because of how the story is displayed.

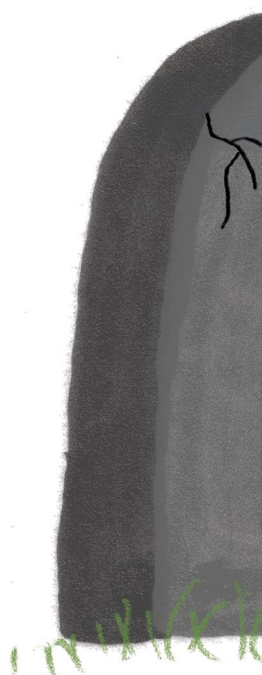
"On BuzzFeed, we have this thumb strip at the top of every single page with a bunch of other recommended stories," said Harlin. "You can hover over it and it shows you a headline, but it can only show a certain amount of the text. For some super-long headlines, you can't actually read the whole thing, so you don't know what the story's about."

BuzzFeed will have someone from the data science team talk to their editorial teams and sift through

various insights they've collected on a regular basis.

"We'll have a conversation with them, and oftentimes they want us to look deeper into the hunches that they have to confirm them," Harlin said. The cycle continues, with editors informing the data scientists, and the data scientists reporting back, all the while testing different pieces of content and acquiring more information about reader interests.

While intuition about what might perform well can help you start banging out that list of 25 headlines, the best way to know what your readers want more of is by gathering data through optimization strategies. Only then can you reach Drizzy's level of confidence. ■



WHAT MAKES FOR
GOOD SEO IN 2015?

SEO Isn't Dead. It's Just Different

By Jordan Teicher

Illustration by Jimmy Mezei

Over the last few years, search engine optimization has become one of the most misunderstood terms in the world of publishing. Ask marketers about SEO and some will probably tell you it's a chore, a nuisance meant to promote spam. Others might nod vigorously like the term is important, even if they don't really know why. For those who are still unsure or unconvinced, know this: SEO remains incredibly important. According to Shareaholic, search accounts for about one-third of all Internet traffic. So if you're serious about getting the most value out of your content, understanding how to use SEO the right way is something you should be paying close attention to in 2015.

Starting in the late '90s, publishers and marketers alike started to taint SEO with the ugly of practice of keyword stuffing. As Google worked on updating its algorithm, marketers sabotaged the quality of their work by force-feeding too many keywords into their writing to see if it would benefit a page's ranking.

To see how keyword stuffing might look on an article page, Google gives an example about humidors:

We sell custom cigar humidors. Our custom cigar humidors are handmade. If you're thinking of buying a custom cigar humidor, please contact our custom cigar humidor specialists at custom.cigar.humidors@example.com.

But Google stopped all this by changing its search algorithm to penalize content creators who tried to rely on cheap tricks like keyword stuffing by pushing them down search rankings. As you probably know already, Google's algorithm is fluid and esoteric, meaning content marketers and publishers will always be a few steps behind SEO best practices. By 2003, Google's Florida algorithm update had already begun to improve rankings, and over the next decade, dozens of updates from Panda to Penguin to Pigeon fine-tuned the process. Last September, for example, Google's Panda 4.1 release sought to penalize publishers who stuffed keywords into meta descriptions and title tags, not just body text.

But with search engine algorithms getting more sophisticated, experts say we need to get more sophisticated as well.

"Instead of focusing on keywords, focus on content," said Ambar Shrivastava, a veteran developer who is now VP of product management for Tutor.com and the Princeton Review.



“Really try to map out content to your target audience. You want to think about your audience and what’s important to them instead of creating pages built for keywords.”

Find what makes you unique

Focusing on content is an umbrella strategy that encompasses a number of different SEO tactics. But just about everyone can agree that content should be unique and useful. In other words, content creators need to find a niche that will help them stand out and try their best to avoid self-promotional pitches cluttering their prose. Moz, an inbound software company, suggests a good benchmark to measure the value of a piece of content is for pages to be described by 80 percent of visitors as useful, high quality, and unique.

As Rand Fishkin, the “Wizard of Moz”—seriously, that’s his title—told Contently in a recent interview, “I think there’s still a lot of [misguided] belief around quantity over quality. The vast, vast majority of links and shares and amplification signals of all kinds are going to only the top five or ten percent of content that gets put out. There’s not a whole lot of value in writing a decent blog post anymore. [There’s not a lot of value] unless you can be pretty extraordinary.”

Learn to love long-tail

If you have high-quality content, the next step is to make sure people can find it via search. All publishers want to show up on the first page of

a search query on Google, but to direct users to relevant content, marketers need to learn how to master long-tail keywords, or distinct multi-word phrases specific to your brand and its publishing efforts.

According to Neil Patel, 70 percent of search traffic now comes from long-tail keywords. If you’re an up-and-coming men’s fashion service with a blog, like Trunk Club, you probably won’t get on the first Google page if someone searches “men’s clothes.” However, if you optimize your site effectively, when someone searches “handpicked men’s clothing,” you’ll show up near the very top of the first page.

The key is to be consistent. One of the major consequences of Google’s recent algorithm changes is that publishers can no longer track what keywords people type to find a site. In

Google Analytics, search referral traffic shows up as “[not provided],” which makes it difficult to monitor popular keywords (although there are some external tools available for tracking them, such as HitTail, which Shrivastava helped build). However, this also has upsides, as it prevents content marketers from resorting to keyword stuffing. Content creators should pay more attention to the little things. For example, page titles should be under 75 characters, URLs under 90 characters, and meta descriptions under 160 characters, per Moz.

Essentially, all of these factors point toward a new strain of SEO that favors a holistic experience. “SEO is a process: the way things earn atten-

tion, how they’re amplified, who amplifies them, how they earn links, whether they’re targeted at things that people actually search for,” Fishkin said. “Whether they solve those search queries is the user experience you provide.”

Constantly collaborate

UX looks like it will emerge as the final piece of the SEO puzzle. Even though some people view SEO as an editorial issue, it’s become much more nuanced than that. Editorial teams need to work closely with design and development teams to ensure that content loads quickly on all platforms and that all visuals are formatted correctly.

“SEO and functionality are going to become much more intertwined,” Shrivastava said. “Google is looking more at usability and user metrics. Making sure your site is mobile-friendly is becoming a big factor.”

Of course, these takes on SEO are all relevant right now, but Google will continue to refine its search algorithm. When that happens, marketers will need to keep adjusting. SEO isn’t about gaming the system anymore; it’s about learning how to play by the rules. And the next time the rules change, publishers that focus on producing quality content will already be ahead of the game. ■

“There isn’t a whole lot of value in writing a decent blog post anymore.”

WHAT ROLE DOES
TECHNOLOGY PLAY IN
CONTENT MARKETING?

The Wizard and the Wand

By Joe Lazauskas

Illustration by Jimmy Mezei

As editor-in-chief of The Content Strategist, I often feel like I'm welcoming new readers to the content marketing party—pouring champagne glasses of optimistic trend pieces, passing out hors d'oeuvre articles full of impressive examples of brand storytelling. But today I want to address the elephant in the ballroom. **Most brands still haven't mastered the one skill that makes content marketing work: telling relevant stories, day after day.**

I call this capability "content velocity." It's the big test no one has aced yet, the issue everyone wants to ignore because it's so hard to address.

Simply put, it's time to tackle this challenge head-on and talk about why content velocity is such a big problem for brands, what needs to change, and how technology just might be able to provide a magical solution.

Let's ride.

The content velocity problem

What does a content velocity problem look like?

Well, according to the Content

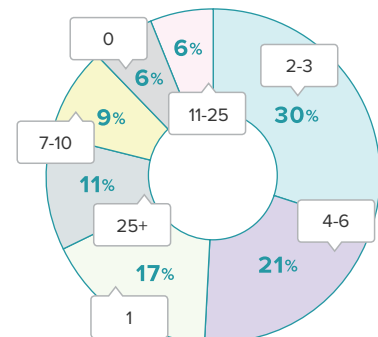


Marketing Institute, only 16 percent of B2B content marketers publish content daily; only 42 percent of B2B marketers publish more than once a week, a figure that's especially troubling when you consider that the CMI's stats include social media posts. The numbers aren't much better for B2C marketers: Just 17 percent publish daily, and only 48 percent publish more than once a week.

We wanted to dig deeper into this problem, so we surveyed our audience of 413 B2B and B2C marketers and posed them a similar question: How many pieces of content do you create each week (excluding social media posts)? While the results of our survey were more heartening, we still found that just 25 percent of respondents

were creating seven or more pieces of content each week, which you can see in the graph below:

HOW MANY PIECES OF CONTENT DO YOU CREATE EACH WEEK?



And that's a problem. Maybe a few brands can succeed while publishing only a handful of pieces per month, but those cases are becoming exceedingly rare. The most effective method is to create a steady stream of content so brands can appeal to primary and secondary audiences, keep those audiences interested long-term, and optimize quickly to double down on what's working.

Yes, quality is king, and nothing turns a reader off like a bad story. But it's hard to build a relationship if your content marketing is the equivalent of a one-night stand.

Why it's so hard

Let's get one thing out of the way: Really good content marketing isn't easy. In fact, it's incredibly difficult.

Save for the Super Bowl, there's no longer any environment in which brands have a captive audience to speak to. We're living in a truly unique time when consumers have what seems like a limitless choice of things to read, watch, or listen to at any moment. Save for Facebook, there are no media gatekeepers anymore. Hell, there's barely a gate.

On one hand, as marketing legend Seth Godin told me, this freedom to publish has given brands an incredible opportunity. "[F]or the first time in the history of humanity, any human being with a hundred bucks has the ability to reach any other one of the several billion people that are online," Godin said. "We can connect to people who are outside of our geographic region, and we have the chance to do great work and to do it in a way that makes an impact. I think that's astonishing, and I couldn't imagine a more positive and

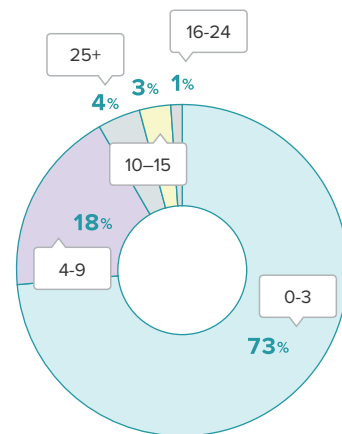
bigger change to our culture than the one we're in right now."

If you're still reading this piece, you're probably excited by that opportunity. You're also probably aware that without barriers to entry, there's an incredible amount of content marketing competition. The media world is a battle royale, and every day, brands are fighting with millions of publishers and content creators to win even a single minute of someone's precious time.

But most brand marketers are fighting this battle with one hand tied behind their back. There's no shortage of hurdles keeping brands from doing content well, and we write about those hurdles often. There are excessive legal roadblocks and convoluted approval processes, battles for a half-decent budget, and, of course, the need for a culture of content so brands have the infrastructure in place to build loyal audiences.

On top of all that, brands are also struggling to spend enough time in the ring. According to the CMI's 2015 report, less than half of marketers surveyed said their organization has a dedicated content marketing group (47 percent for B2B; 45 percent for B2C). Similarly, we found that 73 percent of content marketers have fewer than four people devoted to their content marketing.

HOW MANY INTERNAL EMPLOYEES DO YOU HAVE DEDICATED TO CONTENT MARKETING?

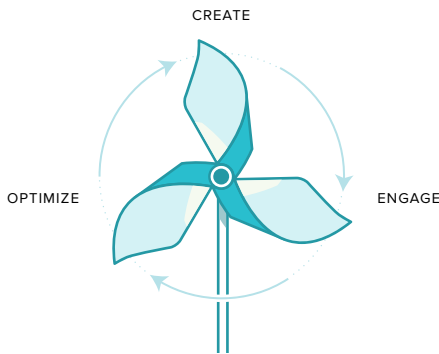


In many situations, the point person in charge of content marketing is also balancing other responsibilities. Or even if she can devote all her time to content marketing, she has a limited team and a slew of other challenges beyond creating awesome content—challenges like evangelizing a content program, working with legal, distributing content, measuring its success, and optimizing accordingly. If she wants to succeed, she has to maximize every second available to her.

And she has to figure out how to tackle all of these challenges fast. Competition is heating up. Every day, it becomes harder to attract and retain an audience.

Better wizards need better wands

At Contently, we constantly think about these issues—in brainstorming, at lunch, and even, obsessively enough, after work at the bar. They're hurdles we face as publishers ourselves and hurdles our brand and media clients face. However, over the past few years, we've come up with a proven way to take on this challenge and crush it. It boils down to the executive-friendly acronym of C.E.O.: create, engage, optimize. Contently co-founder Shane Snow likes to visualize it with the flywheel:

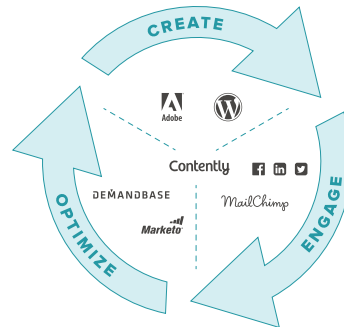


The illustration is pretty simple. To build and retain an audience, you need a process in place that allows you to quickly create content, engage your audience with that content through multiple distribution channels, measure the success of each piece and distribution channel, and then use those measurements to fuel your next round of publishing.

From experience, we know it works. Over the past year, we've grown our audience for The Content Strategist five-fold. This month, over 200,000 people will read or watch the four stories we publish every weekday here on TCS, and many of those people will sign up for our daily newsletter and

keep coming back. I'd love to be able to say that this is because I'm some kind of content marketing wizard as Contently's editor-in-chief, the personification of Jay Baer's rallying cry that "tools are great, but content marketing success is about the wizard, not the wand." But I can't.

In truth, the flywheel doesn't work without a pretty great wand, which we have thanks to the software we built in-house and a combination of external tools.



This combination allows us to:

- Rely on the Contently platform to create high-quality content, organize our editorial calendar, tap into a network of experienced freelance storytellers, collaborate with them quickly and efficiently, jet stories through our internal approval workflow, and publish to our CMS with a single click.
- Engage our audience through our own tools as well as a combination of email and social media optimization platforms.
- Measure and perfect the engagement process so we're better publishers tomorrow than we were yesterday. Contently Insights is so helpful for cutting through the noise and figuring out what's actually working.

To be honest, I used to think software wasn't all that important to content marketing. I thought the wizard was all that mattered. But after using this system the past year and reporting on how brands struggle to master content marketing, I firmly believe software is going to be one of the key elements for brands creating content that resonates with people on a regular basis.

Unfortunately, most marketers don't have the aforementioned tools at their disposal. We also asked that group of over 400 content marketers whether they have a tool or platform that helps them manage their content marketing program. The majority—56 percent—do not. Even more troubling, only 32 percent have a tool that helps them measure their content effectiveness. Even fewer, 21 percent, have a tool or platform that helps them create more content at scale when they are ready to amp up their efforts.

Without these tools in place, brands and marketers are at a huge disadvantage. They're destined to struggle when creating content, and they can't optimize because they have no way of measuring what's working in a meaningful way. The already limited amount of time they're devoting to content is wasted.

On its own, the wand doesn't solve anything. You still need a great wizard to make magic happen. And even then, it can take years of practice before you see truly great results. But I believe most brands and marketers would rather end up like Harry Potter, wielding that wand to defeat the dark arts (of display ads), than the Wizard of Oz, wand-less and pompous, bellowing about fake successes that never happened and never will. ■



WHAT ARE SOME COMMON
CONTENT STRATEGY
MISTAKES I NEED TO AVOID?

Rookie Mistakes

By Ryan Galloway

Illustration by Jimmy Mezei

I'm not a marketer. I never took a marketing class in college. Sometimes I don't even understand the charts we look at during the weekly revenue meeting. But if I really put my mind to it, I could totally drive a big-budget marketing initiative. I'd spend some money, I'd look at some spreadsheets, and everything would work out just fine.

See how crazy that sounds?

And yet, marketers doing content for the first time often take the "How hard can it be?" attitude toward content strategy. 2015 is going to be the make-or-break year for brand publishing, but brands that rush into publishing without developing smart, robust content strategies will be doomed from the start. As an editor who's worked in branded content for some time, I've seen it happen more often than I care to admit.

These are some of the most common content strategy mistakes that plague first-time brand publishers. Avoid them at all costs.

1. They try to run before they walk.

At Contently, nothing excites us more than an ambitious brand. You want to tell great stories and lots of 'em? Wonderful. But creating great

content takes time and effort, and if you don't have a robust team in place to handle the demands of content creation and production, you're going to get overwhelmed pretty damn quickly.

My colleague Richard Sharp calls it the "crawl-walk-run" methodology: Start slow, examine what you've learned, re-evaluate your strategy and goals, and tweak your approach. Produce a handful of stories a month for six months, then do a content audit. Take what you learned about your own content and the competition, and use it to produce a higher volume of stories for another six months. Lather, rinse, repeat.

Creating great content isn't a sprint—it's a marathon.

2. They don't have a concrete workflow.

"What does your internal review process look like?"

If I had a nickel for every time this question was answered with a confused or panicked stare, I'd have a really inconvenient amount of nickels. Too many first-time publishers think that the work is



done once their agency or their freelancers deliver the content. Sure, the hard part might be over, but there's plenty left to do—and if you don't know who's going to do what, you're going to have a serious mess on your hands.

So who owns what? Who's responsible for making sure the stories are on point when it comes to voice and tone? Who's responsible for shepherding the content through legal review? Who should your agency contact about budget changes?

Who's responsible for production? What about social promotion?

Before you invest in content, create an established workflow with clearly delineated ownership at every stage—and be sure that any agencies or contractors you're working with know exactly how things work. It'll save everyone time and energy and prevent a lot of unnecessary frustration.

“ No one's going to trust a brand that's giving them advice about deck maintenance and trying to sell them a belt sander in the same breath. ”

3. They underestimate the work involved.

Great content takes work. A lot of work. After all, that's why people like me have jobs. But first-time publishers often don't understand just how many hours go into creating a single story. Research, writing, securing an interview source, photo selection, editing, fact-checking, web production, and promotion can all add up to hours and hours of work for each piece. That's why bandwidth almost always becomes

a problem for brands that try the DIY approach.

Trying to squeeze all of those hours into an already packed schedule isn't just frustrating—it's

expensive. If you're a director of marketing, you've already got plenty to do, and something critical is bound to get deprioritized or downright ignored if you're spending hours on content creation. That can lead to costly failures

elsewhere within your purview, not to mention a dragged-out publication schedule. It's often cheaper to hire outside experts who can create better content faster and in greater quantities. Plus, they're, y'know, experts.

4. They underestimate the competition.

The world of media is flatter than ever before. Any brand can emerge as a preeminent media publisher by creating outstanding content. By the same token, a brand's content efforts can fail if they're only focused on beating the other guy without first considering the competition from established media brands.

Think about it like this: Suppose you're a big-box retailer of hardware and home improvement goods, and you want to get into the content game. Once you do, you're no longer just competing with other hardware retailers—you're competing with established media brands like *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Dwell*, and even PBS. Be ambitious, or be forgotten.

5. They don't have specific goals.

I've worked with far too many first-time brand publishers who had no real idea what they wanted their content marketing to achieve. They seemed to think that publishing content on a blog tucked in some obscure corner of their site would magically boost their marketing mojo. Like *South Park's* underpants gnomes, their approach was essentially:

PUBLISH
CONTENT ...► ? ...► PROFIT!

Helping them become successful meant asking questions like: Do you want to be seen as a thought leader in your industry? Do you want to drive conversions? Do you want to change how your brand is perceived by consumers? Once they identified their goals, the next step was helping them put some measurable KPIs in place. And yes, "Is it working?" is another question too few brand publishers ask themselves—but don't get me started on that.

6. Distribution gets forgotten.

Many brands seem to think that promoting their content via social is all they need to do in order to get eyeballs on their stories. The reality, however, is that publishers are playing in a very crowded field, and investing in distribution is a must. As Forbes recently noted in their piece "The Top 7 Content Marketing Trends That Will Dominate 2015," "only 26% of marketers are investing in content distribution, even though more than half believe they need to."

If you're new to brand publishing, earmark a few thousand dollars a month from your budget for a great distribution service. What good is content if no one sees it?

7. Brand mentions.

Brand mentions everywhere.

This is every brand editor's pet peeve. I've touched on this a couple of times before, so I'm not going to belabor it again. In short: If you want people to see your brand as a trusted source for home improvement advice, give them content that's genuinely helpful and engaging. Leave your brand out of it. No one's going to trust a brand that's giving them advice about deck maintenance and trying to sell them a belt sander in the same breath.

Look, I get it. Everyone's publishing, and you want to publish too. Your boss is probably riding you about it as we speak. But investing a little time on content strategy up front will save you countless hours down the road. And think very seriously about hiring a professional to help you sort it all out. ■



HOW DO SUCCESSFUL BRAND PUBLISHERS STRUCTURE THEIR NEWSROOMS?

Build vs. Buy

By Alyssa Hertig
Illustration by Jimmy Mezei

As we speak, marketing directors around the country are being tasked with an exciting but unenviable challenge: “Do content marketing.” But how? It’s difficult to know where to begin. Do you spend months building the perfect in-house team? Hire a bunch of freelancers? Or embrace some combination of the two?

Each brand will necessarily reach different answers to fit its specific needs. There’s no definitive best way to build a brand newsroom, but top brand publishers all seem to have settled on a similar formula of in-house teams and freelance talent that lets them create content that matters—and at scale.

The freelance factor

When you examine the most successful brand publishers, you’ll find a common theme: All of them embrace outside contributors to varying—but significant—degrees.

“I think that brands are using freelancers a lot more simply because it’s a lot easier for them to scale based on what their content needs and requirements are,” explained Michele Linn, the Content Marketing Institute’s director of content.

And brands are finding other benefits for outsourcing some content, too.

Brands might want to maintain a “vice grip” over their message, “but something magical can happen when

companies look outside their own walls for ideas,” Natalie Burg wrote in “Letting Go: Why Brands Should Embrace Freelance Storytellers,” an article for The Content Strategist about how brands using freelancers often means tapping a well of creativity. Freelancers with deep expertise brought a bunch of unexpectedly rad ideas to the table.

Jay Moyer, editor of Coca-Cola Journey, recalled how freelance writer Laura Randall came to him with a story about Coke-themed weddings. “It’s a thing,” Moyer said. “Believe it or not, it’s pretty popular.”

After having her pitch approved, Randall wrote about the phenomenon. Her story features a few happy couples and their Coke-red weddings—and one couple that touched up the Coca-Cola ambiance with vintage attire. “That was not an idea that we can take credit for. That was Laura’s idea,” Moyer said. “And there are many more where that came from.” Coca-Cola Journey invites pitches, including from writers in the Contently network.

General Assembly, which uses freelancers for some of its blog content, experienced similar benefits. “Freelancers are great for flexibility, but we can also tap more subject matter experts for content that way as well,” Erin May, head of content marketing at General Assembly, said in an email.

She added that freelancers get General Assembly more bang for its buck: “For instance, if we applied the same content budget to just one or two full-time writers, we could work with 10 or 20 writers (depending on how much content they write, of course) who are experts in 10 or 20 different topics, versus having more generalist writers within, say, the tech

or startup verticals.”

(Full disclosure: Coca-Cola is a Contently client.)

The glue that holds it all together

While freelancers are an important part of the equation, leaning on freelancers isn’t enough for top brand publishers. They need a whole architecture that consists of the following three components:

Editors: Editors juggle many tasks. There’s the typical headline writing and grammar cleanups, of course, but in the brand world, an editor ties content to a brand’s voice and business objectives. The right editor works to build trust, which is important in an age when brands are still reeling from native advertising missteps.

Editors also oversee freelancers and can mold the disparate voices of numerous writers into a cohesive brand voice. Successful content is contingent on choosing the right editor who can strike the right tone for the publication.

“I think that unless you have a very strong editorial group, and a managing editor specifically, it can be very difficult to train freelancers, to make sure that they’re all speaking on-message, using a very similar tone, and so forth,” Linn said. “Obviously, every business model is a little bit different. But I think there are a lot of pros of having a person on staff who understands exactly what it is that you’re trying to do.”

Technology: Just as finding the right editor is necessary, so is finding the right freelancers. It’s not a cakewalk. While General Assembly has freelancers apply to write for its blog, many brands are looking to technology services to pool freelancers for them.

Coca-Cola is among the latter. “We’ve really tried to carve out a beat system with our Contently writers,” Moyer said. “It’s nice to know who we can go to for certain stories.” Journey found a sports writer, a food writer, and business writers through the Contently network.

Moyer calls Coca-Cola Journey a “virtual newsroom” since most of the employees, including Moyer, work remotely. They communicate at a couple of weekly meetings, and a lot of the collaboration, especially with freelancers in the mix, occurs online.

Brands must also lean on other tools to coordinate digitally. BarkPost

Editor-in-Chief Stacie Grissom calls their newsroom an “Evernote-style” setup, referencing the multi-device note-taking and productivity tool. “We have this gigantic Google Doc with the schedule where everyone can look at what everyone else is doing,” she said.

General Assembly uses “mad Google Docs,” May said, plus Slack for real-time chat. Others noted the supremacy of ever-overflowing email. Tomas Kellner, managing editor of GE Reports, said he uses Percolate’s cross-channel calendar for long-term planning.

“When you examine the most successful brand publishers, you’ll find a common theme: All of them embrace outside contributors.”

A small group of in-house writers:

Brands appear to be taking a hybrid approach to newsrooms: They have a few folks in-house, then staff up with freelancers for flexibility.

Kellner writes the bulk of the content of GE's award-winning publication, but other writers contribute too. When they do, he prefers to tap in-house writers. "I think they really do need people inside the company who really understand what's going on," he said.

Still, he pairs a half-dozen in-house writers with some work outsourced from the publishing company Group SJR. "I prefer the combination of inside writers—writers who live inside GE—with outside resources that can help with reporting some of the stories, or shaping or editing these stories," Kellner said.

BarkPost, the mega-successful pub for dog lovers, also relies on the hybrid approach. The team consists of four full-time writers and 30 freelancers. Grissom manages roughly 20 herself, each at a different level of activity. While BarkPost relies on "typical writers," Grissom often taps people who just really, really love dogs.

For each brand, it's a balancing act. While the stereotypical newsroom may resemble a heavily cubicled factory, there are a zillion types of brand newsrooms of all shapes and sizes. The flexibility of a hybrid newsroom can make content creation easier, as long as the self-sustaining editorial architecture is in place.

So which way do you go? Freelance or in-house? May summed up the general sentiment: "Both are great. Ideally I like a combination of both." ■

Contently

**"The
best platform
for high-end
brand publishing."**

—CONTENT MARKETING INSTITUTE



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sodastream

Google



Walmart 



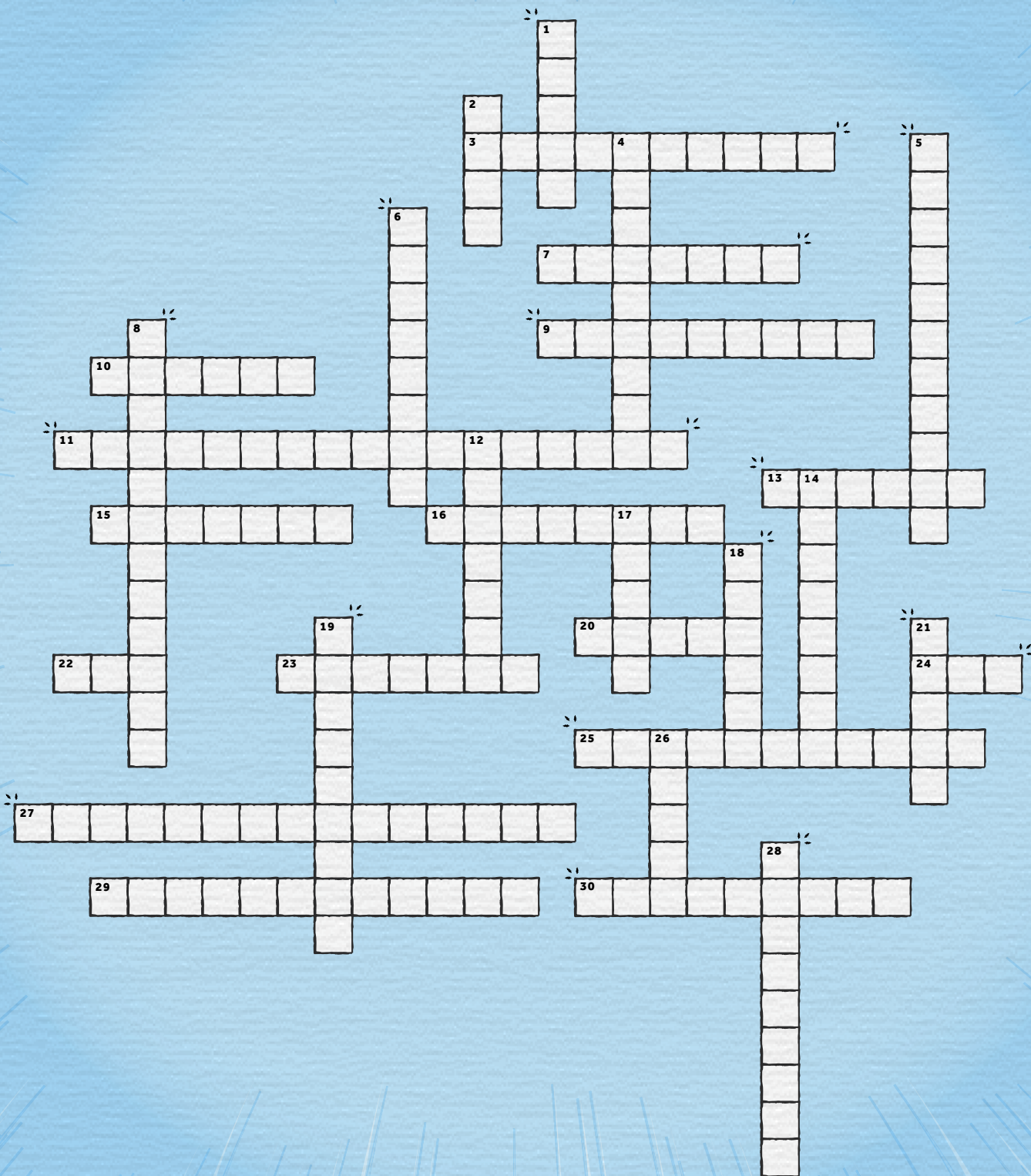
THE ULTIMATE CONTENT MARKETING BUZZWORD CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 3. Tim Cook's wrist wear
- 7. Mr. Vaynerchuk, for short
- 9. Twitter-owned submarine streaming app
- 10. Social, local, mobile buzzword/acronym
- 11. Ads that don't interrupt
- 13. *Mad Men's* Don
- 15. Energy drink turned media brand
- 16. Home to Ezra Klein and Lockhart Steele
- 20. Startup job title; also martial artist
- 22. Key performance indicator
- 23. Small data's big brother
- 24. Return on investment acronym
- 25. NHL team; also Disney movie
- 27. The Grey Lady
- 29. *The New York Times'* native ad shop
- 30. This magazine's publisher

DOWN

- 1. These selfies disappear
- 2. Software as a service shortened
- 4. Content that stays relevant forever; also a type of tree
- 5. *House of Cards* actor, content marketing spokesman, Keyser Soze
- 6. Buzzy new Peretti media co.
- 8. CPC
- 12. _____ Leader
- 14. Former SecDef, "known unknowns"
- 17. "Father of Advertising" Ogilvy
- 18. *Citizen Kane's* real-life publishing house
- 19. Preferred social network of brides-to-be
- 21. Canada's Aubrey Graham
- 26. Squidoo's Seth
- 28. Content that's a few sandwiches short of a meal



Study: How Effective Is Your Content Marketing?

By Jordan Teicher

Content marketing is having a moment. U.S. companies will spend in the neighborhood of \$50 billion on content marketing this year, and that number is growing fast. As marketers dedicate more and more of their budgets to content, we wanted to understand more about where their goals—and concerns—lie. In November 2014, we surveyed more than 600 marketers about their fears, ambitions, and plans heading into 2015. We teamed with *Adweek* to add 144 more people—and paint a more statistically significant portrait of the content marketing industry.

Instead of just letting the numbers talk, we're also interested in how those numbers relate to the more in-depth thoughts of those who participated in our study. As you'll see below, we've included some of these open-ended answers throughout from the respondents who gave us permission to identify them by their names and companies. We hope their perspectives give you a more complete understanding of how your colleagues feel about their content marketing successes and failures from the past year, and what they expect to accomplish in the next 12 months.

Introduction

There's a good chance we will look back at 2014 as the year brands first seriously plunged into the content marketing waters. Terms like native content, brand publishing, and owned media are set to evolve from buzzwords into crucial staples of marketing success. Marketers are looking to invest

in longform storytelling, both in print and online. And instead of relying on disruptive banner ads, brands are starting to get smart about targeting customers with original content.

But content marketing is still in its infancy, and marketers have a number of challenges to overcome. As we discovered earlier this year, measurement remains a hurdle. Our content measurement survey from last summer found over 90 percent of marketers were not confident that their key content metrics were effective in measuring business results. For 2015, we wanted to broaden our scope and ask our audience of content marketers some important questions related to their triumphs, failures, and future goals: What types of content lead to the most ROI? What resources are in short supply? What are some of the biggest challenges marketers face on a daily basis?

What follows is a crucial snapshot of the content marketing landscape as we move further into 2015.

Methodology

Between November 5 and November 17, we surveyed 601 marketers with an 18-question online survey. A few weeks later, *Adweek* sent the questionnaire to 144 additional marketers. As the survey was answered by nearly our entire population target, the calculated margin of error was approximately 1 percent.

KEY FINDINGS



68%
of marketers back original
content over licensed



56%
of all companies have two
or more people dedicated to
content marketing



24%
are devoting more
than half of their marketing
budget to content



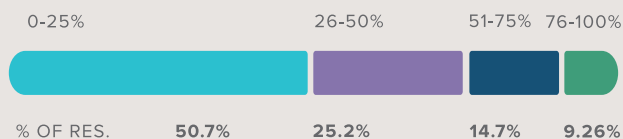
50%
of marketers are looking
at ROI and LTV as the most
valuable goals to measure



60%
believe they could drive
2–5x more ROI or brand
lift if they had an expert
content team

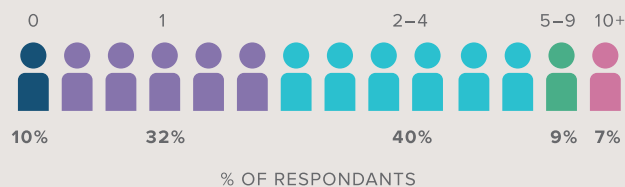
RESULTS & ANALYSIS

Percentage of marketing budget devoted to content



Publishing quality content over time requires a healthy investment when you account for the talent and tools required. Here, we see there's a huge range in the resources that companies are devoting to content marketing. While 51 percent of marketers are devoting 25 percent or less of their marketing budget to content, a significant group—24 percent—has shifted over half of their marketing budget to content.

Number of employees devoted to content



Over the past few years, it's been common to see content marketing treated as an experimental marketing practice, often put in the hands of a single employee juggling other responsibilities. While that's still the case for 43 percent of respondents, it's promising that more than half of all brands have at least two employees dedicated full-time to content marketing. Companies like Coca-Cola have succeeded with a balanced model that teams a few full-time employees with dozens of freelancers working remotely.

Given the small teams that are dedicated to content marketing, it's not a big surprise that approximately two-thirds of respondents are creating fewer than five pieces of content per week. Finding the right balance of quality and quantity is one of the biggest challenges marketers face today, but it's one that needs to be surmounted if brands want to compete with traditional media companies for audience attention.

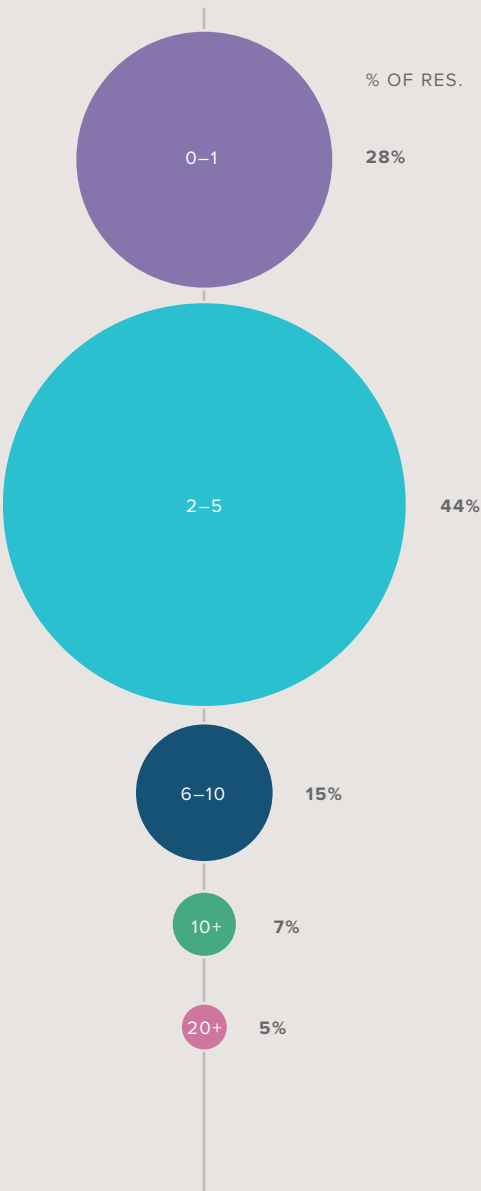
However, before settling on a certain number, marketers need to have a clear strategy in place that outlines big-picture goals and guides the total output. Just churning out articles for the sake of publishing more content often leads to diminishing returns.

For example, Thea Oliver, communications manager at Thrive, said her biggest content failure last year was pushing "guest blogs on non-audience-relevant sites in the hope of getting more content out there and the vain hope of helping our SEO." Guest posts can certainly benefit some brands in the short term, but only if the external publications are relevant to your business.

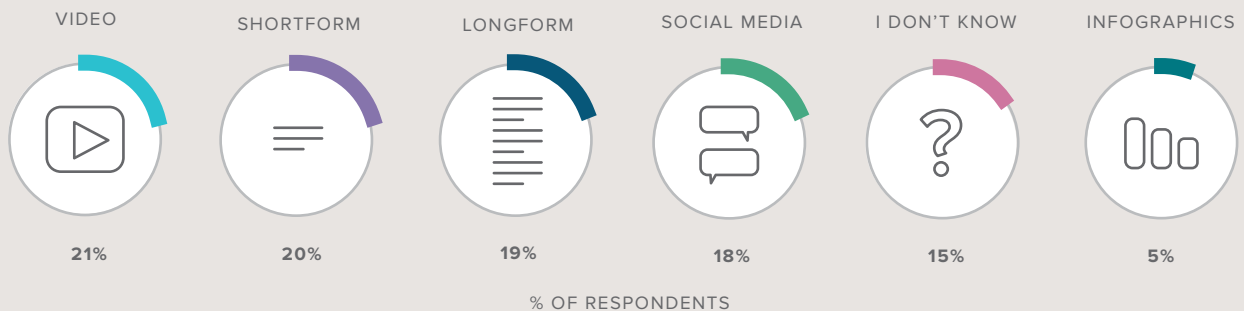
In 2015, we expect to see brands and agencies really step back and look at their thought processes for making content marketing decisions. As we try to figure out fluid, complex topics like SEO, it may be better to publish fewer pieces of content that are right for a particular audience based on data-driven insights instead of putting more pieces on other publishers' sites based on intuition.

Pieces of content created each week

(excluding social media)



Type of content most effective in terms of ROI



Considering most marketers only publish a few times per week, filling those slots with the right content becomes even more important. Interestingly, respondents didn't overwhelmingly prefer or dismiss one medium over another—save for infographics.

This question was the only part of the study that had a statistically significant difference between the responses from our original study and the total responses including *Adweek's* results. The discrepancy can almost be attributed entirely to the impact of video. While written content topped our first batch of results, video content got a slight nod in this iteration.

That outcome isn't a shock: Video content has become increasingly popular in the last year and will continue to grow—an Invodo report from earlier this year predicted video content will account for an incredible 74 percent of all Internet traffic by 2017. A year from now we expect video and multimedia to be a clear winner ahead of any text-based content.

Also of note: Almost 16 percent of those surveyed picked “I don't know.” Perhaps the popularity of that answer choice echoes the idea that marketers are still searching for the best way to link their content to business results.

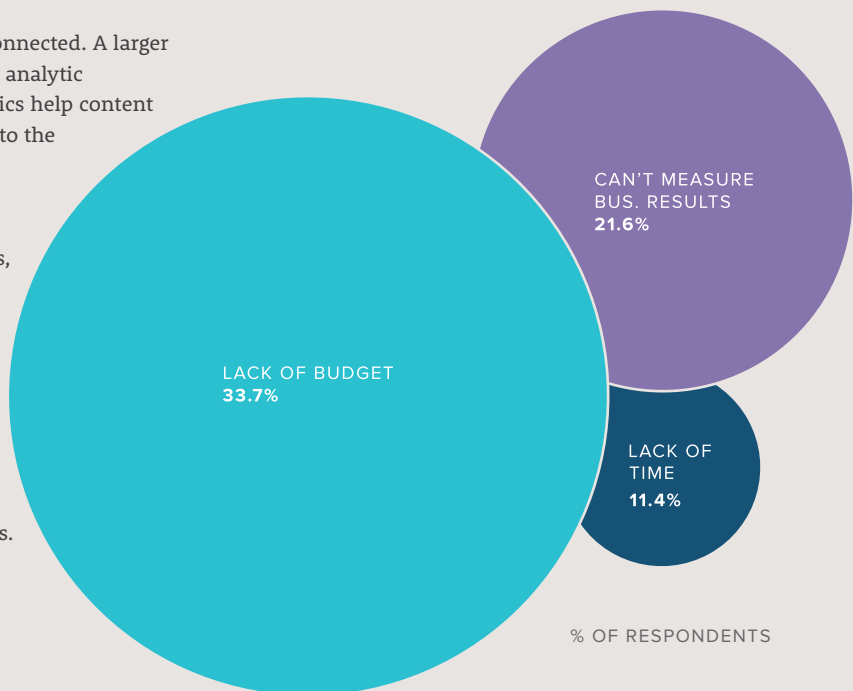
A marketer is only as good as his or her tools, and those tools include time, money, and analytics. Fittingly, our respondents identified budget (34 percent), the inability to measure business results (22 percent), and lack of time (11 percent) as their biggest challenges.

Ostensibly, these challenges are all connected. A larger budget can open access to the necessary analytic tools and resources, and the right analytics help content marketers devote their time and money to the most effective tactics.

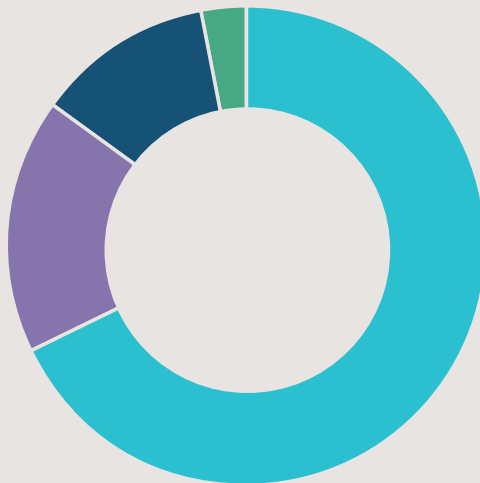
Ricardo De Lucia Leite, owner and marketing director of Brazilian firm Hytrade Marketing and Communications, said: “We only produced blog posts this year due to lack of budget and time, and for 2015 our goal is to make content for the whole sales funnel, including white papers, e-books, webinars, case studies, and testimonials.”

Leite's words are a good example of why marketers need time to explore what works for their particular audiences. Marketers get a good grasp of which content ties to ROI only after they have enough firsthand experience with different mediums.

Biggest challenges to creating effective content



Content effectiveness: original vs. licensed



% OF RESPONDENTS

ORIGINAL 68% IDK 17%
EQUAL 12% LICENSED 3%

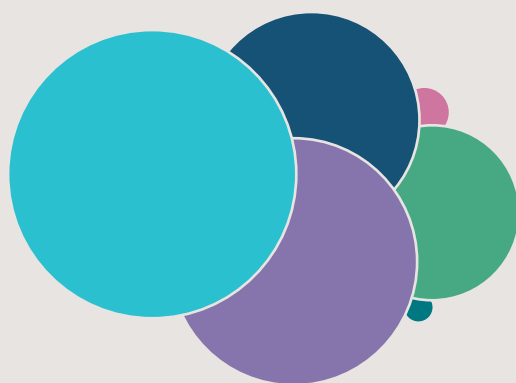
When it comes to publishing original content versus licensing content from other publishers—also known as syndication—the results are clear: More than two-thirds of those surveyed favor original content. That answer shouldn't come as too much of a surprise. If readers can get your content elsewhere, what would make them come to you specifically?

As Cyrus Shepard, director of content and SEO at Moz, told Contently co-founder Shane Snow: “Syndicated content is like giving popcorn to children. It will keep them busy for a while, but that’s it.”

Moz, a robust content creator in its own right and a leader in SEO, doesn't syndicate any content in either direction. “I think all the value is having something original,” Shepard said.

Licensed content from other publishers rose in popularity in the early days of content marketing as a one-click solution to populating corporate blogs and as a hack for boosting search rankings. But it's clear from these findings that marketers see limited value in it.

Most important marketing goals



% OF RESPONDENTS

- ROI **29%**
- TRAFFIC GROWTH **29%**
- LTV **21%**
- THOUGHT LEADERSHIP **17%**
- SOCIAL GROWTH **5%**
- VOICE **3%**

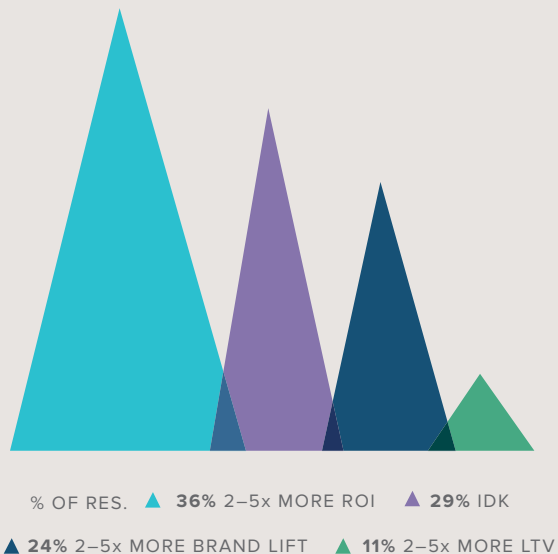
Interestingly, even though a plurality of marketers selected ROI as their most important marketing goal, lifetime customer value and audience growth were very close behind. When it comes to content, measuring success can be a complex endeavor, with ROI, LTV, and audience growth all intersecting at various points.

However, the results suggest marketers are embracing a nuanced approach when figuring out how content can impact their bottom lines. Cultivating a loyal audience takes time, but the benefits are long-lasting. Once you have a relationship with your consumers, the ROI should follow.

Keesia Wirt, a content strategist at Two Rivers Marketing, offered interesting insight into how her goals fared in 2014. When asked about her biggest content marketing success in the last year, she didn't directly mention ROI. Instead, she said, "My biggest success was getting clients to focus on their audience needs and interests instead of just telling them about the company's products."

I'd imagine that sentiment rings true for many marketers in all industries. In 2014, many brands learned that a sales pitch doesn't necessarily work with content. These companies need to talk with their audiences, not at them. That's a powerful distinction, and those who have already started to change their approach to suit the needs of their target consumers are way ahead of the game.

Potential results with a high-quality content team



What if marketers could create content under ideal conditions? The responses here show how optimistic marketers are about the maximum benefits of their content marketing operations. Notably, a majority of respondents seem to think they could increase ROI or brand lift by 2-5x with the right team producing high-quality content.

CONCLUSION

Content marketing may still be the shiny new toy of the advertising industry, but brands that want to create content are beginning to learn how to best spend their sacred budgets.

Clearly, there's plenty of room for growth. According to a recent study by the Content Marketing Institute, only 23 percent of B2C marketers are successful at tracking ROI. Everyone points to Red Bull, GE, and American Express as the all-stars of content marketing, but aspiring content marketers likely need some of the resources afforded to those best-in-class brands—a stable supply of time, money, and analytics that takes the guesswork out of their jobs.

Ultimately, the fate of content marketing isn't in the hands of the marketers pushing for creativity on a daily basis; the future depends on a dedicated investment from the executive level. American Express President Ed Gilgigan, for example, fully supported OPEN Forum's initiative to publish small-business content. Marriott International's chairman, Bill Marriott, who doesn't use computers, still saw the value of telling his company's story directly to consumers and has invested heavily in content.

Thanks to an early commitment from the executive level, Red Bull now employs approximately 135 people just for their media house. Marriott's content studio has grown to 65 employees, and Nestlé's digital editorial team consists of almost 20 community managers and designers producing content every day. And according to the *Columbia Journalism Review*, Coca-Cola "now reportedly spends more money creating its own content than it does on television advertising."

In 2014, many brands tested the waters, and a few dove in headfirst. In 2015, we'll see how many follow.

(Full disclosure: Coca-Cola, GE, and American Express are Contently clients.) ■

The New Hollywood

Can YouTube reinvent the studio system?

By Jordan Teicher

Photograph by Adam Voorhes

Prop Styling by Robin Finlay



Through the crowded corridors of Chelsea Market and past a gauntlet of coffee shops, you'll find steel elevator doors stamped with YouTube branding—the gateway to a Willy Wonka factory for the digital age.

In YouTube Space New York, everything is shootable. The kitchen area, the conference rooms, the screening room—nearly every inch of the 20,000-square-foot space is meant to be filmed. That means you'll see a talk show going on in one corner while a bro comedy in a '50s diner booth rollicks on in another. In an overcrowded city where just getting a permit to film on a subway platform can take weeks, that kind of freedom is incredibly valuable.

If you've ever been curious what a film school opened by a tech company would look like, well, this is for you. And unlike a degree from a traditional film school, YouTube Space New York costs nothing—if you're popular enough.

YouTube has made it easy for anyone with a smartphone to record a video and go viral, effectively reducing the benchmark for fame from 15 minutes to 15 seconds. But even though it's probably easier to get noticed today than a decade ago, maintaining that fame is harder than ever.

Why? Production quality. Anyone with a smartphone can get lucky with a one-off idea. But most people don't have access to expensive camera equipment, editing gear, or professional teaching.

That's where YouTube comes in. In an effort to change the way content creators think about digital video, Google, which owns YouTube, opened five production "spaces" in major cities around the world that offer free equipment, sets, and expertise. The goal: Give amateur content creators the resources they need to make powerful videos online.



The studios are located in Los Angeles, London, Tokyo, New York, and Sao Paulo. The flagship L.A. studio, which is 41,000 square feet, was the first to open in 2012. Last November, YouTube Space New York became the fourth studio, filling up 20,000 square feet a few floors above Chelsea Market—right across the street from Google's Manhattan office.

◀◀ **You can almost see the roots of Hollywood's old studio system as a precedent—a powerful media conglomerate trying to nurture talent.** ▶▶

even some special rotating sets, like a bar set that includes the original walls, phone booth, and cash register from famed East Village music club CBGB. Aside from the rotating sets, every room has a modern feel, full of sleek furniture and equipment.

At this point, you're probably wondering, *What's the catch?* While classes and workshops are open to anyone with a YouTube channel, those who want to use the sets, post-production facilities, and equipment—which includes a few RED cameras—need at least 5,000 subscribers on their channels. (To use YouTube Space Los Angeles, creators need at least 10,000 subscribers.)

"The reason for that is we have a finite number of resources," said Adam Relis, head of YouTube Space New York. "It obviously takes a certain amount of experience and expertise to know how to use things, so we want to make sure there's a level of commitment to the YouTube channel before we start opening up the facilities. That said, our goal is to help people get to that point and bring them in, and it really is designed to help set people up."

You can almost see the roots of Hollywood's old studio system as a precedent—a powerful media conglomerate trying to nurture talent. What makes YouTube different is the absolute freedom it's giving content creators to produce videos about anything.

The economic relationship between YouTube and its creators is where things get a little complicated. YouTube doesn't charge a cent for use of the space, the equipment, or the expertise since they're raking in revenue from ad sales. But some have claimed that the site takes an unfairly large chunk of ad revenue—45 percent—from the people who post

The New York studio features three sound stages, five editing stations, four private editing suites, a few permanent sets, numerous conference rooms, and

videos as part of the YouTube Partner Program. Estimates suggest creators earn about \$5 per 1,000 views before factoring in taxes and YouTube's cut.

Essentially, YouTube has democratized celebrity. People use it to become stars, and YouTube now wants to help them along the process. And if the content creators can produce videos of a higher quality, then advertisers may be willing to pay more for pre-roll ad placements.

Interestingly, Google also chose to put their first BrandLab in the middle of YouTube Space New York. It's a glass-walled conference room where companies hold workshops about content creation and how they can benefit from digital video. Major players like General Mills, Anheuser-Busch, and State Farm have already used it. When Relis gave me a tour of the BrandLab, he emphasized the glass walls, mentioning how anyone could drop in on a workshop to see what's going on. It's part of the YouTube Space mantra: Learn. Connect. Create.

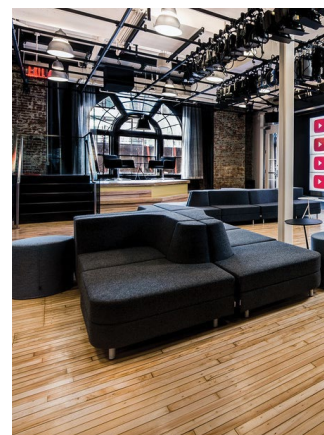
If the entire space is like an unconventional film school, then the BrandLab is like an unconventional digital media school for marketers who want to adapt to a new media ecosystem.

According to Relis, YouTube doesn't actively try to connect brands with creators, but if they happen to cross paths in the space, partnerships can always develop organically. It's a smart play from YouTube, especially considering ad revenue margins are tight for most creators.

"The reason these two pieces came together is because there's a natural curiosity between creators and advertisers, and it's only growing," he said. "You might have certain ideas or misconceptions or just not know how creators or advertisers work, and this gives everyone a chance to see that exactly in action."

Part of bridging this gap is also about control. Digiday notes that YouTube has penalized some creators and brands who work together on sponsored posts "unless the sponsor pays Google to advertise on that channel."

Digital and mobile video has fundamentally changed how people consume content, and as a result, video advertising continues to evolve. While expensive TV commercials may not reach the right audience, web video has become a boon for brands.



A 2014 *Variety* survey found that the five most popular celebrities among American teenagers weren't actors or musicians—they were YouTube stars.

Ideally, sponsors can offer these creators financial stability in exchange for exposure to a loyal, targeted audience of subscribers. When makeup star Michelle Phan was just starting out on YouTube as an amateur, French cosmetics company Lancôme signed her as a spokeswoman to help the brand become relevant online. Fast forward seven years later, and Phan's own company now brings in annual sales of \$84 million.

Phan is an outlier, one of the rare few who found a smart way to monetize her videos and build her own brand, but there are others like her. Popular personalities like Jenna Marbles, Smosh, and PewDiePie rack up enough views on their videos to earn millions of dollars from ad revenue. But the YouTube spaces aren't really designed to serve the platform's A-listers. Instead, the studios are best suited for the emerging video star making the jump from amateur to professional.

One such emerging creator is Paul Gale, a filmmaker with 75,000 subscribers who shoots comedic videos such as “Why Starbucks Spells Your Name Wrong.” If you look on Gale's channel, you'll notice some videos have millions of views—his Starbucks clip has over 9 million—while others have fewer than 40,000. He got involved with YouTube Space

New York last year to see if its resources and expertise could help him find that level of high-quality consistency for all of his videos. Polishing his filmmaking skills is part of the equation, but another part that's easy to overlook is learning best practices specifically for YouTube.

“YouTube does a great job of keeping you on the site, but the nature of the Internet is very frenetic,” Gale said. “It's so difficult to keep people's attention. I'll see a great video and there won't be any call

to action. Allowing people to enjoy more of your stuff is key.” He also credits YouTube's “Creator Playbook” as one of the tools that's helped him increase his subscribers.

Gale has worked in YouTube Space New York three times since it opened and was one of the first people to use Lionsgate's temporary Halloween set for his video “Millennial Horror Story.” Based on the success of his channel, he recently teamed with Zipz Wine for a series of four promotional videos. “Now, I'm just trying to refine my voice and my craft and allow people to know more and more if they would subscribe to my channel,” he said.

Each month, YouTube receives more than 1 billion unique visitors who watch approximately 6 billion hours of video. For creators and brands alike looking to build audiences and make money off of their content, that means one thing: There's plenty of space to grow. ■

◀◀ **A 2014 *Variety* survey found that the five most popular celebrities among American teenagers weren't actors or musicians—they were YouTube stars.** ▶▶



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF YOUTUBE

STATE OF CONTENT MARKETING

★ ★ 2015 ★ ★

BY SHANE SNOW

This morning I woke up, stretched, and said to myself, “You know what I could really use today? A relationship with a brand.”

That’s not true. (Not even the stretching.) But someone in nearly every company in America woke up today wanting to build a relationship with me.

More precisely, today’s savvy brands are trying to win me over by creating stories and games and movies and educational materials they think I’ll like instead of interrupting me with ads I don’t care about or trying to butt into my social life. In other words, trying to be “friends” with me the way real friendships are formed.

That give-first mentality is the essence of a good relationship. It’s also increasingly true of content marketing, which as of 2015 is officially the fastest-growing marketing channel for most businesses.

If the 21st century is the era of democratized publishing, the 2010s are the decade of brand publishing. And 2015 is a year of convergence, where the content business further shifts from a media-corporation model (make content, sell ads) to a corporate-media model (make content, get customers). This is happening to both traditional and new publishers.

Before the Internet, content marketing was the domain of a small number of companies that had pub-

lishing in their DNA—really, media companies with something to sell. Cookbook makers that sold kitchen supplies. Business newswires that sold computer terminals. Today, between 80 and 90 percent of U.S. businesses use content for marketing in a strategic fashion. Half of those businesses spend 25 percent of their marketing budgets on content.

In 2014, brands did more content marketing than ever. Everyone and their pet ferret started a content marketing agency. Agencies (creative, media, and PR) skated onto the content marketing rink en masse. And in the process, three main content marketing strategies emerged:

“SYNDICATED CONTENT IS LIKE
GIVING POPCORN TO CHILDREN,”
MOZ’S CYRUS SHEPARD RECENTLY TOLD ME.
“IT WILL KEEP THEM BUSY FOR A WHILE,
BUT THAT’S IT.”



OWNED CONTENT:

Publishing to one's own publication.
E.g., GE Reports and Amex OPEN Forum. This is an "always-on" content marketing strategy, often promoted by PR and creative agencies, or run internally by brands willing to make long-term investments in content marketing.



RENTED CONTENT:

Paying a publisher to publish an advertiser's content (whether written by the advertiser or by the publisher). E.g., the beautiful work *The New York Times'* T Brand Studio has done, or the crazy sponsored listicles you'll find on BuzzFeed. Typically, these are labeled "sponsored content," and are promoted by media buying agencies (which aim to make profit by selling content like they do advertising inventory) and traditional media (which aim to further monetize their publications through brand content).



SOCIAL CONTENT:

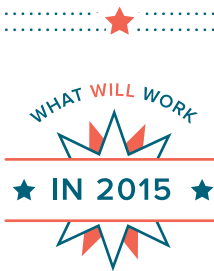
Using "micro content" to spark conversations and build communication channels on social networks. Essentially, this is social media marketing, but people call it content marketing or social content. E.g., the many, many pancake GIFs that Deny's posts to Tumblr. PR and social media agencies typically push this strategy.

These strategies are being powered by a new world of technology platforms, sponsored content studios, and content distribution services.

At Contently, we've experienced all sides of this world. Our technology platform helps power brands like American Express and Coca-Cola that have built publications that

millions of people visit each month, and we grew as a brand publisher ourselves in 2014—dramatically so. The Content Strategist quadrupled in audience, garnering a million minutes of attention time in Q4.

As a result, we're fortunate to see a lot of industry trends before they unfold. Here's what we see happening:



Before the Internet, publishers needed three things: talent to find and produce stories, a press to print stories, and trucks to deliver stories to newsstands and doorsteps. Back then, publishers learned about their stories' effect on their audience via newsstand sales figures and letters to the editor. Humans and analog technology did each of these jobs for centuries.

That was the model that worked: Produce stories, deliver them to the audience, and use audience clues to divine what worked and what didn't.

In the Internet age, smart digital publishers—folks like BuzzFeed and Mashable—have essentially used the same process with new tools. They employ tech-savvy talent to find and produce stories and print them to the web using a content management system (digital "printing press"), send the stories out to audiences via social media and native advertising (digital "trucks"), and measure the results using analytics (digital "newsstand figures"). Smart publishers use those analytics to inform their next round of publishing.

At Contently, we boil that process of being an effective publisher to "C.E.O.": create, engage, optimize.

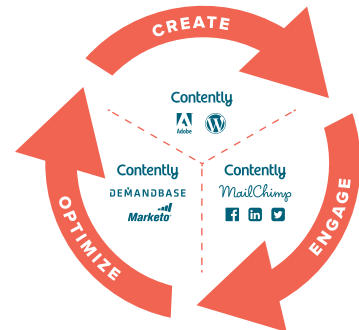
At many brands, what used to be an audience-reaching effort is increasingly shifting to an audience-building

effort. Instead of treating content as ads with a shelf life, they're seeing content as a way to build an asset. This has increased in priority as social networks tweak their algorithms, making it clearer that brands don't truly own their audiences.

In 2015, we're going to see more companies converge their disparate content strategies into one strategy that points toward owned-content-first: brands building their own publications and using rented and social content as mechanisms for drawing audiences to their own turf. There, the brands have an opportunity to build direct relationships with their readers and viewers. As such, we'll see a lot more emphasis on racking up email subscribers and less emphasis on building social media followings. Social will be properly viewed as a channel for distributing your content and attracting readers who will become direct email subscribers.

To make the flywheel work, content marketers can no longer ignore software. And as I mentioned before, technology companies are racing to provide solutions across each piece of it. Here, for example, is how we use some of the primary players on

that tech field (including our own products) to make Contently's own flywheel work:



This owned-first, rent- and social-second strategy is going to be the most effective plan for brand publishers moving forward. In fact, the brands that have gotten the most bang for their content buck—and which get the most sustained industry cred—are the ones that have jumped all-in on owned content: Red Bull (with its separate business unit for media, Red Bull Media House), American Express (disclosure: a Contently client), and Marriott (also a Contently client), which just built a 65-person content studio.

AT MANY BRANDS, WHAT USED TO BE

★ AN AUDIENCE-REACHING EFFORT ★
IS INCREASINGLY SHIFTING TO

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In the last few years, our neighbors have learned a few brand content lessons for us the hard way. Here's what won't work for brands in 2015 and beyond:

Non-independent news

In 2014, we witnessed the boisterous rise and messy explosion of Verizon's brand publication, SugarString. The cause of the crash? Verizon tried to do "the news" as a brand with a stake in shaping said news, banning coverage of sensitive topics like the NSA. As I wrote in my recent essay about business models of journalism, brands can thrive as publishers of education and infotainment, but they'll have a hard time acting like news organizations. To be honest, they shouldn't even try.

Inauthentic content—like the "health" stories by Chick-fil-A that came under fire this year—won't =work for brands in the long run either. The common element of both of these is the refrain we repeat every day here and cite in our "Content Marketing Code of Ethics": Don't betray the reader.

Content licensing

I talked about this in last year's "State of Content Marketing," but I'm mentioning it again because we

have another year of data to confirm:

For brands, licensed content doesn't work. Zero brands got organic traction, gained reader attention, or built an audience using licensed content in 2014. Many tried, and 100 percent flopped.

If you're trying to build a relationship with someone in real life, re-gifting them something they could easily get on their own is a bad strategy. Telling them a story they already heard is a bad strategy.

"Syndicated content is like giving popcorn to children," Moz's Cyrus Shepard recently told me. "It will keep them busy for a while, but that's it. I think all the value is having something original." Furthermore, he said, the SEO implication of a content strategy based on publishing other people's content is "dangerous."

Google rankings aside, if you're trying to build an audience as a brand, a blog that's populated with stories already published elsewhere is not going to get people very interested in visiting your website.

Because of social media, the era of the aggregator portal is over. Today's big remnant portals—Yahoo, MSN, etc.—increasingly create original content in addition to the content they syndicate. The biggest portals today for aggregated/curated content are Reddit, Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and the like. A brand like Nike or Ford is not going to compete with those websites on that battlefield. But the reverse strategy is effective: Nike or Ford can leverage portals and aggregators to spread their original content.

As a wise man once said, "It is better to be syndicated than to syndicate."

Licensed content has been an attractive proposition because it's cheap and easy. It's terrific proposition for ad-supported media companies that already have an audience and need more page refreshes to sell more ads against. But it doesn't build audience. And for brands, it simply doesn't work.

Headline trickery

"The thing at the end of this story is gonna be crazy!!" ← Headline you're going to be seeing much less of this year.

Facebook is getting sick of deceptive headlines that pull you in with a tease and then let you down. Algorithms are changing, and readers are getting more savvy. So click-throughs on stories that begin "You won't believe what..." are going to plummet. But more importantly, good headlines with bad content behind them don't result in people spending much time with you, and therefore don't help brands build audiences. If you want to build a relationship with someone in real life, you need to spend time with them. That's why brands looking to build relationships with customers ought to think of engaged time—or how much time people are actually paying attention to content—as their most important metric.

Data shows that engaging with content longer makes people more likely to come back to a brand later. See that three-minute engaged time mark? That's a magical point to hit. It corresponds with a 50 percent-plus probability that the reader

will return to your site within the next week.

But tricking people into showing up? That does little good. We'll see brands get better at writing engaging headlines, yes, but we'll also see content that matches the expectations those headlines set. At the end of the day, great stories are still what will drive success.

Twitterjacking

We probably will continue to see more "Oreo tweet" behavior as brands perpetuate the fad that is Twitterjacking—latching onto a cultural event by posting a clever photo on Twitter and trying to incorporate your brand into said event. We'll see more of it because agencies can charge an arm and a leg to build "war rooms" that sit around and make these. But most brands haven't caught on to how useless it is for audience-building (in most cases).

Leaner social content efforts will be a part of a good content strategy, under the Engage section of the flywheel, but employing a dozen agency folks to produce a photo of a pizza with a bow tie that gets 1,000 retweets is a monumental waste of money.

Blatantly promotional sponsored content

This one almost goes without saying because it's obvious, but apparently it's not obvious enough for it to stop happening: Sponsored stories that read like an infomercial are a worse Internet experience than being flashed by a furry on Chatroulette. Blatant ads masquerading as content do nothing for a brand, and they

hurt publishers' relationships with existing readers.

This stuff won't work. No matter how many times you try it.

Where we're heading

The marketing industry has been saying for years that "brands are publishers." And brands are definitely publishing. But so far, most of them make pretty crappy media companies. With the shift to an owned-first content strategy, brands are going to have to address that fact.

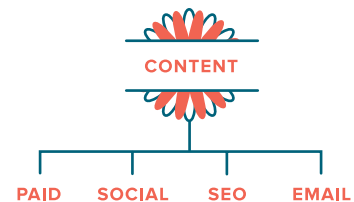
What's needed? Deep understanding of audiences that you're speaking to. The ability to capture audience. The ability to run a publishing operation like a real magazine, with software and process and an appropriate amount of oversight (that means empowered editors and managers, but not fleets of corporate approvers). Essentially, the infrastructure and process to run a real publishing Flywheel.

Since the launch of Blogger and WordPress, and subsequently Facebook and Tumblr and Twitter, content has been a marketing thing, but it's sat on marketing's back burner. At the rate that content marketing (and digital content consumption itself) is accelerating, however, I believe that 2015 is the year that content starts to subsume marketing.

In other words, in order to create a real publishing flywheel, marketing organizations that used to look like this:



Will increasingly look like this:



Other things to watch for in 2015: an increase in emphasis on divisible content, using traditional banner ads to advertise content instead of landing pages, using chat apps to engage audiences in riskier ways, and a lot more email content.

And I think I'm going to pick up stretching. It's going to be a fun year. ■

2015 IS THE YEAR
CONTENT STARTS TO SUBSUME
MARKETING.

the Contently Interview:

SETH GODIN

 JOE LAZAUSKAS

THE MASTER
of **MODERN MARKETING**
dishes on **TRUST, ART, &**
WHY EDITORS WILL SOON *rule*
THE MARKETING *world*



PHOTOGRAPH BY
BRIAN BLOOM

SETH GODIN is the godfather of modern marketing—or, at least, the type of modern marketing we all want to be doing.

In 1999, Godin published *Permission Marketing*, and, in every way, it was a revelation. At a time when Bill Clinton was still in office, TLC's "No Scrubs" was a #1 hit, and eToys.com was about to IPO, Godin released a practical guide to how brands could leverage the incredible connectivity of the web to engage consumers by seeking permission to do so. His creation of the concept of permission marketing—which posits that marketing should be anticipated, personal, and relevant, rather than interruptive—continues to echo in darn near every marketing brainstorm today.

Permission Marketing was Godin's third book. Since then, he's published 19 more while posting daily to his blog—one of the industry's must-read sites—and launching successful entrepreneurial ventures like Yodydyne and Squidoo.

I caught up with Godin to get his take on the present and future of content marketing.

Everyone who interviews you describes it as this amazing, life-changing experience. What do you think makes you such a good interviewer?

I don't think I change anybody's life. I think sometimes people decide to change their own life, and if I can be present for that, that's a nice thing to do.

Why do you think you have that influence on people, then?

Well, I think that showing up every day for 10 years or more in a row gives people a hint as to what it is you're actually trying to accomplish. There's a mindset by some people who do content marketing that you give a couple of times, and then it's all about the getting. And I'm not interested in the getting—I'm just trying to make a change in the universe that we can all be pleased with.

You give a lot: You're a prolific writer with your books, and also on your blog. Do you see your blog as a form of content marketing for everything else you do?

Not if you define marketing the way old-school market-

ers do, which is a chance to make noise in the world to sell more stuff. I define marketing differently. Most of the people who read my blog have never bought anything from me, and that's fine.

But then there's the whole obsession now with tying content to revenue—in other words, tracking whether people who are consuming your content will eventually buy something from you, and putting a hard number on each piece of content you create. Do you think that's misguided?

Oh, I think there's no question it's misguided. It's been shown over and over again to be misguided—that

in a world of zero marginal cost, being trusted is the single most urgent way to build a business. You don't get trusted if you're constantly measuring and tweaking and manipulating so that someone will buy from you.

I don't have any problem with measurements, per se. I'm just saying that most of the time when organizations start to measure stuff, they then seek to industrialize it, to poke it into a piece of software, to hire ever cheaper people to do it.

The challenge that we have when we industrialize content is we are asking people who don't care to work their way through a bunch of checklists to make a number go up, as opposed to being human beings connecting with other human beings.

How does a brand care? How do you build an infrastructure where you have people who care create content?

Well, a brand can't care. All that can care is people. So if someone in your organization—and it doesn't have to be the CEO—decides they'd rather work in a place where you care, they can start caring. They can hire people who care, they can reward people who care, and they can do work that demonstrates that they care. What we find is that the more people care, ironically, the better they do compared to the industrialized systems of folks who don't care and are just doing it for the money.

**"MOST of the PEOPLE
WHO READ my blog
have NEVER BOUGHT
anything from me,
& THAT'S FINE."**

It seems also that that risk/reward system for caring at most brands is a little messed up. It's a lot safer to just create one blog post a week, or one blog post a month, than it is to create 10 or 15. Because so many brands are risk-averse—if you make a mistake, your job is on the line.

I think the fear is, without a doubt, present. It turns out that in most organizations, it's warrantless fear, but we're humans and we can't help it. The number of people who have actually lost their job because they've created content that showed they care is very, very small. But we play into the whole industrialist mindset and act as if our job is on the line.

There's the famous content marketing success story of Oreo's tweet at the Super Bowl. People tell that story as if it's the greatest thing that ever happened. They leave out that it took dozens of people to work on it, when it should have been one person who loved Oreo cookies. And it didn't actually sell that many more Oreo cookies.

There are constantly trends and fads on the Internet, and people make a good living amplifying them. But I think that industrialized content marketing is one of those fads, and it will end up where they all do: petered out because human beings are too smart to fall for its appeal.

What do you think content that builds trust looks like?

I think that it's human, it's personal, it's relevant, it isn't greedy, and it doesn't trick people. If the recipient knew what the sender knows, would she still be happy? If the answer to that question is yes, then it's likely it's going to build trust.

A few years ago you said that content marketing is the only marketing left. Does that still hold?

Marketing in 1965 was the same thing as advertising. We called it marketing, but it was advertising. As advertising has faded away, marketers have tried to turn the Internet into advertising. My argument is: Real content marketing isn't repurposed advertising, it is making something worth talking about.

It always struck me that the beauty of the Internet is that you can pretty easily create something amazing that's worth talking about, and then distribute it to thousands or millions of people. But brands have, for the most part, done a pretty poor job of building owned digital media properties.

See, you are absolutely right here. When I think about how much money someone like Gillette spends, the question is: Why doesn't Gillette just build the most important online magazine for men, one that's more important and more read than *GQ* or *Esquire*? Because in a zero-margin-al-cost world, it's cheaper than ever for them to do that.

Or why didn't Random House and Simon & Schuster start a search engine? Because after all, that's what they wanted to do: Organize the world's information. They could have been Google—they were there, they knew how, and they chose not to.

I think part of the challenge is that we have to redefine what business we're in. I think that most big companies come from the business of either knowing how to use TV advertising to build a mass-market product, or knowing how to build factories to build average stuff for average people. I think we have to shift to a different way of thinking.

“Real **CONTENT MARKETING**
ISN'T repurposed advertising,
it is **MAKING SOMETHING**
WORTH TALKING ABOUT.”

If you were trying to build a brand media property—if you were Gillette—how would you build it? Would you just give some really smart people the resources and creative freedom to go out and make great content?

I think the most important thing is to have an office that's not in your building. I think what kills brands who try to be interesting is to have meetings where they're not saying to senior management, “How can we be more interesting?” Instead, they're saying, “How can we play this more safely?” That's not what happens when you want to make a hit TV show or a website that people care about. You need editors, not brand managers, who will push the envelope to make the thing go forward.

So one easy way to do that is to set people up in an office down the street, only visit them once a month, and give them really significant metrics—not about page-views, but about mattering. And give them the resources—not too much, just enough—to go do work that matters.

What metrics do you think best measure the fact that you're doing work that matters?

I think the only one that I care about is: Will people miss you if you are gone?

That's a pretty good one. Is there any particular way to measure that?

We've got lots of people who are good at statistics and surveys. It's pretty easy to figure out how to do an intent analysis, how to read what people say about you, and how to ask them. Once you've created something that people would miss, like, say, Harley-Davidson, it's pretty easy to figure it out.

Let's go back a little bit to the ideal brand newsroom—where you set people up in an office and give them creative freedom. That's impossible at a lot of brands right now, simply because there isn't that attitude towards content within the organization. How can marketers convince people to make that kind of commitment?

I think that if you want to keep whining about the decline of advertising and the stress that retailers are being exposed to, by all means, feel free. If you want to find a way out of where you are stuck, you may have to do something that's uncomfortable, that's organizationally difficult, and, worst of all, that's frightening. And I don't know how to tell you how to do it, other than to point out that it might be frightening.

You talk a lot about making art. Do you think brands can make art?

I think that humans in almost any job can make art. What I mean by art is the human act of doing something that connects us to someone else. We see great brands,

which are nothing but human beings doing things under the same name, do something that feels like art all the time. It doesn't have to be a luxury good. It doesn't have to be a physical good. If it's something that makes us sit up and notice it because we care, it probably qualifies as some form of art.

That's really interesting, the idea that the sponsorship of a brand doesn't tarnish the work you do. That's often how it's presented in the media.

The word “brand” is problematic. Is Bob Dylan a brand? Bob Dylan has been a multibillion-dollar company over the course of the last 40 or 50 years. Is Apple under Tim Cook a brand, or is it the work of half a dozen leaders who are pushing themselves to do something that they're proud of?

Where do you draw the line? If you're talking about big, impersonal, insensitive, historically large packaged goods companies, yeah, it's going to be really hard for them to dig their way out of their reputation. But I don't think it's impossible.

There's sort of a parallel there with the debate over the ethics and merits of native advertising. How do you feel about sponsored content?

There are two kinds of native content: There's content I want to read and content I don't. If you're putting content I don't [want to read] in front of me, it doesn't really matter how much you got paid for it—I'm probably not happy.

What's the big thing right now?

Well, for the first time in the history of humanity, any human being with a hundred bucks has the ability to reach any other one of the several billion people that are online. We can connect to people who are outside of our geographic region and we have the chance to do great work, and to do it in a way that makes an impact. I think that's astonishing, and I couldn't imagine a more positive and bigger change to our culture than the one we're in right now. ■

“You **NEED EDITORS,**
NOT BRAND MANAGERS,
who will **PUSH** *the envelope*
TO MAKE *the thing*
GO FORWARD.”

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ON THE MONEY

**How the finance industry
is changing its image
through content**

By Natalie Burg
Photographs by Adam Voorhes
Prop Styling by Robin Finlay





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If brands were people, which ones would you most want to hang out with? The chic apparel company that made those killer stilettos? That fun-loving soda brand? How about your credit card company? Or your bank? For most people, it's safe to assume a date with a financial services business wouldn't be their idea of a wild night out.

That's the challenge financial services brands face today as they try to build loyal, engaged audiences. In a crowded and competitive content space, how do brands in arguably the stodgiest of industries hold consumer attention?

Some savvy financial services brands—from credit card issuers to investment firms—are beginning to solve that riddle not by pretending to be hip, hilarious, or viral, but by leveraging content to clearly outline how they can provide value to their consumers.

Why is this straightforward strategy starting to work?

Because specializing in moolah provides a unique opportunity to connect with audiences. Just about everybody wants to know how to make more money. Positioning themselves as the gatekeepers of such knowledge gives financial services brands the potential to create very powerful content that leads to long-term relationships with customers.

So while you might not go out for Saturday night drinks with your bank, if it's got the goods on how to better manage your money, you'll probably be open to Wednesday morning coffee, metaphorically speaking. And if the content is both useful and engaging, that coffee meeting could become a standing appointment.





Having a unique focus is certainly a prerequisite for great content. But in addition to that, there are certain trends the financial brands with the best content have been bullish on:

Editorial, not marketing: Transparency, education, and creativity are supposed to be the hallmarks of good content marketing, but for sales-driven brands interested in publishing, committing to those ideals is easier said than done.

Building a resource: While consumers may not want to hear a sales pitch, they still want help. And the brands that resist the overt sales pitch reach more consumers by becoming trusted resources.

Audience targeting: Since other people's finances generally aren't interesting, money-based content has to match up fairly well with a specific audience. To be successful, brands need a specialty that sets them apart from competitors, and good content marketing comes down to targeting the right audience at the right time.

Mint: MintLife blog



Established financial institutions and capstone banks have it a little easier when building an audience—customers

are already familiar with their brands. But Mint, a digital personal finance service founded in 2006, had to start from scratch. So it started with content.

"They decided in the early days to invest heavily in building out MintLife ... independent of the eventual Mint.com product," serial entrepreneur Sachin Rekhi writes on his blog. "This created a welcome audience when their product eventually launched, and MintLife went on to become the number one personal finance blog on the web."

When Mint eventually revealed its product—a tool that helped users budget their finances by gathering different account information and balances all in one place—the viral nature of the blog was key to the company's rapid growth. Mint was sold to Intuit for \$170 million after three years in business and reached 10 million users by 2013, largely thanks to the blog's smart, helpful content.

Since Mint was in the unique position of relying on its website for both sales and content marketing, the company needed to make sure the content hit exactly the right audience. To publish on a tight budget, the editorial team invited finance bloggers to write for free and sponsored other finance blogs, and also fine-tuned its content by seeding it on places like Digg and Reddit to track engagement after an article went live.

Mint's former lead designer, Jason Putorti, told KISSmetrics, "Our app didn't have a high viral coefficient, but we had content that [did]."

Once the groundwork was laid out, Mint started to see incredible results. Seven months after the blog launched, Bloomberg reported the site was adding 10,000 new users each week. And that momentum continues today. TrafficEstimate shows that Mint's site received 15 million visits in February 2015, up more than 10 million year over year.

Brands from all industries dream of building an audience that big.

By committing to content from the very beginning, Mint's owned media property not only became a hub for resourceful articles, but also a place for users to open up their wallets and buy a financial product.

Sun Life Financial: Brighter Life

Canada-based Sun Life Financial had some hype to live up to as soon as it launched its lifestyle

and money management platform, Brighter Life, in 2011. At the time, the *Financial Post* immediately called Brighter Life "worth taking note of—particularly if you're an executive developing corporate blogs, web sites and trying to develop a social media strategy."

As Brenda Spiering, manager of content strategy at Sun Life Financial and editor of BrighterLife.ca, put it: "Brighter Life was launched as a way to reach consumers where they are, searching for information online before they may have even considered Sun Life or are aware that their needs may be met by a financial product."

The site, which includes useful tips and tools about money, health, family, working life, and retirement, began with an equal emphasis on quality and on content that served the company's audience instead of its own bottom line.

Since then, the strategy has really resonated with Canadian consumers. According to the Content Marketing Institute, more than 620,000 pages of content were consumed on the blog, which helped the platform convert approximately







4 percent of traffic to leads and garner more than 8,700 click-throughs to SunLife.ca—exactly the impact the brand was aiming for.

“Brighter Life put an emphasis on content that served the company’s audience instead of its own bottom line.”

Once Sun Life realized its editorial strategy was driving results, the company continued to invest in content. It rolled out a French-language edition for Quebec in 2011, called *Simplement Brillant*, before launching custom platforms in Indonesia in 2012 and the Philippines in 2013. Each platform has its own editorial team tasked with developing content for a particular region.

In addition to connecting with consumers who haven’t started thinking about their banking needs, Sun Life now leverages its financial advisors as promoters of the platform, using content to educate and engage its existing clients.

Banking on content takes support from executives, and any company actively working to get more employees involved in the marketing strategy, regardless of editorial experience, knows what it’s doing. For Sun Life Financial, it’s clear the company has known what to do every step of the way.

Bank of America Merrill Lynch



**Bank of America
Merrill Lynch:
A Transforming World**
Sun Life Financial isn’t

the only brand that turned its focus inward to grow an audience. Bank of America Merrill Lynch built a publication, *A Transforming World*, which contains insightful content on five investment themes—people, innovation, markets, government, and Earth—with that very concept in mind.

“[*A Transforming World*] is really about providing content to our clients that describes how what’s happening in the world around them might be impacting their investment strategy,” said Bob Mirales, director of content development and delivery for Merrill Lynch. “Rather than read a dry research report on something to get some insight, you might need someone with more expertise to help unravel it.”

Merrill Lynch not only uses its financial advisors to quickly connect a ready-and-waiting audience of existing

clients to exclusive content, but also gives these employees access to an “advisor side” that’s only available internally, which includes additional information on topics and helps them provide more insight.

When *A Transforming World* went live in 2013, it was built as a place that could complement the company’s existing content platforms, such as Merrill Lynch Edge.

“The Global Fight Against Obesity,” for example, appears as just a video in a webcast library on Edge. But on *A Transforming World*, the video is accompanied by a transcript and text. This system allows the many divisions of Merrill Lynch to tweak the content for their specific needs. Editors also prepare potentially timely content in advance, so they’re able to publish at the speed of news despite working in a huge company with compliance checkpoints.

“The strategy is to have really deep curriculum so we can align with the conversation that is going on,” Mirales said.

The lesson here: Try to schedule compelling content ahead of time. With a lot of foresight and a little luck, brands can stay relevant regardless of the situation.

Northwestern Mutual: Learning Center and Inspire 360

About two years ago, Wisconsin-based financial services firm Northwestern Mutual started posting articles about retirement, financial planning, and entrepreneurship to *Forbes BrandVoice*. Then, in May 2014, the brand launched Inspire360, a digital publication focused on female leadership. Seven months later, Northwestern Mutual’s corporate site was revamped to include a new content hub with much of the work the company posted on the other outlets, including its digital monthly newsletter.

How’s that multi-channel approach working? With a small team, Northwestern Mutual generated more than 2 million pageviews on its BrandVoice channel in 2014 and built an email list with approximately 700,000 subscribers.



Northwestern Mutual

“Our philosophy is build once, use many,” said Julie Salchert, Northwestern Mutual’s director of marketing integration. “It’s about taking a piece of content and chunking it up for multiple audiences and driving traffic.”

With such a large readership after only two years, one might assume Northwestern Mutual came charging out of the gate with its BrandVoice content. In reality, the company didn’t even announce internally that the channel had launched for the first six months, wanting to ensure it could walk before trying to run.

“Our philosophy is build once, use many. It’s about taking a piece of content and chunking it up for multiple audiences and driving traffic.”

But once Northwestern Mutual had the infrastructure in place to publish consistently, the running began, thanks to *Forbes* homepage promotions and distribution traffic powered by Outbrain. Internal resources were also crucial to the company’s distribution strategy. The brand’s 7,000 field reps had access to a diverse catalog of content that could help them connect with every kind of client. Transitioning from crawling to an all-out sprint didn’t take very long.

Original, high-quality content doesn’t hurt either. Stories like “How Drew Brees Is Helping Teen Entrepreneurs Score Success” from the brand’s *Forbes* channel and “Women Score Higher on Leadership Metrics, so Why Do We Prefer Male Bosses?” on Inspire360 bring fresh takes to a finance industry that’s often inundated with dense reports and dry writing. And Northwestern Mutual has learned that it’s distribution strategies and internal tools are only beneficial if supported by meaningful stories.

ANZ: BlueNotes



Australia may be known more for surfing and sunshine than savings bonds, but that didn’t deter Australia

and New Zealand Banking Group Limited, also known as ANZ, from riding the content marketing wave last year.

Instead of publishing a lot of quick-hitting lifestyle content, ANZ went in a different direction, emphasizing big-picture topics such as national rate cuts and trend pieces about nearby countries like Indonesia and Myanmar. And although this type of content isn’t designed to generate a

lot of social shares, it's perfect for ANZ's very specific target audience: policymakers, academics, and shareholders.

“One thing we did well was hire a very respected senior journalist to run BlueNotes, which immediately gave us enormous credibility,” Edwards said.

Since ANZ's blog, BlueNotes, launched in April 2014, it has attracted more than 110,000 unique views. The company can expect to see between 5,000 and 6,000 views on their most popular articles, which is respectable in its own right, but even more impressive when you realize they're only focusing on a niche subset of readers. Successfully honing in on that target is one of the main reasons Australia's 2014 BEfest Awards named BlueNotes “Brand Site of the Year” before it had even been live for a full 12 months.

With such an educated audience comes high expectations for quality content. From the very beginning, ANZ knew BlueNotes needed seasoned professionals and editorial transparency to succeed.

“One thing we did well was hire a very respected senior journalist to run BlueNotes, which immediately gave us enormous credibility,” Edwards said, “and then not publishing stuff that seemed to be too self-serving. We try to put everything through that filter so we aren't publishing stuff that is just corporate PR.”

Developing content for a niche audience on BlueNotes has proven to be so successful for ANZ that the brand is now developing more publications to reach new audiences. For the financial firm from Down Under, these new media properties could potentially target female executives, small businesses, and corporate clients.

Yet even as they explore launching trade pubs, ANZ is still very committed to growing its core audience on BlueNotes. ANZ already has locations in more than 20 countries, and BlueNotes has channels for content focused on North Asia, South and Southeast Asia, and Greater China, some of which is translated into simplified or traditional Chinese.

These are big plans for an emerging bank, but by committing to building an owned audience, ANZ positioned itself nicely for long-term growth regardless of where it tries to expand.

These five companies have gotten behind what once seemed like an unlikely idea: People are willing to hang out with their financial services brands, but only as long as they're able to position themselves as unique, engaging, trustworthy, and helpful. Companies like Mint, Sun Life Financial, Bank of America Merrill Lynch, and Northwestern Mutual have built high-value audiences by giving their readers content aimed directly at the needs of their target content consumers. Who wouldn't grab a coffee with someone like that?

(Full disclosure: Forbes BrandVoice and ANZ are Contently clients.) ■





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GOES LONG

BY CELINE ROQUE

How a credit card company raised the bar for longform storytelling

During the fall of 2013, Asheville, North Carolina, wasn't home to any calamity, revolution, or major world event—yet American Express assigned a reporting team there to cover a single story for three months. Why? Because the credit card company made a serious commitment to longform storytelling. More than a year later, this investment led to “The Journey,” a rich nonfiction multimedia project that chronicles the daily triumphs and trials of Buchi Kombucha, a brewing company specializing in kombucha, a type of fermented tea.

“The Journey” is a prime example of what happens when a company executes its content marketing with an ambitious editorial mindset. Each of the story's seven chapters contains high-quality photos of the founders, their staff, and the 180-acre property that holds their farm and brewery; there are three short video documen-

taries that intimately profile the Buchi team; and over 10,000 words of rich detail. To complement these components, there's also a section devoted to journal entries from the founders, including daily ratings on a scale of one (very challenging) to 10 (perfect), written for each day during the three months they were being profiled. And to cap it all off, there are infographics illustrating the business's highs and lows over that time period.

American Express is one of those rare companies that was already a brand publisher generations before “brand publishing” became a buzzword. Ever since the company started offering travel services in 1915, Amex has been publishing guides, booklets, magazines, and sponsored content for its audience.

One hundred years later, it's producing arguably its most refined content.





SARAH SCHOMBER
OF BUCHI KOMBUCHA

FINDING THE RIGHT STORY

When American Express launched OPEN Forum in 2007, small-business owners finally had a site dedicated to their needs. The site publishes blog posts, videos, and longform guides that help entrepreneurs make better business decisions, and it hosts a thriving community where readers can network, ask for advice, and share their own stories.

American Express hasn't been the only brand in the last few years to seek out and share the stories of small-business owners in the U.S. In 2014, Ford Trucks underwrote *This Built America*, a 50-week documentary series profiling small businesses that are rebuilding communities across the country. Basecamp, a Chicago-based software company, puts out an independent online magazine called *The Distance* that publishes one long-form feature a month about a business that has been around for more than 25 years.

"The Journey" separates itself from these other storytelling endeavors with an unmatched level of in-depth reporting. Rather than covering several businesses, the

project offers a glimpse into the daily life of a single business—an approach that requires an unusual amount of time and resources.

"What we wanted to do differently with 'The Journey' was to capture the story as it unfolded to get an unfiltered view of running a business," said Courtney Colwell, director of OPEN Forum and content marketing at American Express.

The first step of that process was finding the right startup to profile. OPEN Forum wanted to search outside of hubs like New York or Silicon Valley since these places already receive enough press coverage.

As Colwell put it: "We wanted to show that there are a lot of amazing, fast-growing businesses across the country, operating in a variety of industries."

That's how Amex landed on Asheville, North Carolina, an emerging entrepreneurial hub powered by local initiatives such as Venture Asheville, an entrepreneurship program from the Economic Development Coalition and the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce.

The lead journalist of "The Journey," Darren Dahl, lives in Asheville and covers the small-business beat for publications like *Fast Company* and *The New York Times*. Dahl helped OPEN Forum find local companies they could consider for the project, and eventually they settled on Buchi.

Amex realized that Buchi's story of two female founders and mothers living and working in close proximity to each other would offer a unique look at how entrepreneurs balance personal and professional lives that are deeply intertwined.

"We were fortunate to find a company like Buchi that was gracious and, frankly, brave enough to open their doors and themselves to a reporting team and have them on site for so much time," Colwell said. "Through this account, we get an objective inside view of a business at what turns out to be a fairly pivotal moment for their growth."

Documenting this in real time meant one thing: American Express had no idea where the story would end up.

GOING INSIDE THE MACHINE

Given the scope of the story, Amex could've approached "The Journey" from a number of angles: covering it chronologically, organizing ideas by topic (such as hiring or sales), or focusing on a single interview subject. One idea the team initially committed to was publishing field reports to take snapshots of the narrative in real time. But the OPEN Forum team soon realized field reports were not enough. The story behind Buchi needed to be a focal point.

There was just one problem. The existing article templates on the OPEN Forum site were mostly static pages that wouldn't have suited such an expansive story.

"We put design and development into building more immersive content templates and connected chapters to lead you through the story," Colwell said. As a result, the design of "The Journey" received a major upgrade full of smooth scrolling and multimedia treatments.

For example, the fifth chapter, "The Daily Grind," opens with a full-width photo of two Buchi employees packing kombucha bottles.

This photo fades out as the reader scrolls down to read the text. The rest of the page itself is simple and clean, only including the text, an infographic, and crucial pull quotes. The design is responsive, making the story look stunning across different displays. OPEN Forum members have access to another layer of interaction since they can follow the Buchi founders within the OPEN Forum community as they would on Twitter or Facebook.

This enhanced layout provided readers with a richer experience beyond what's typically available from the OPEN Forum blog, but because of the additional time needed for developing the custom experience for "The Journey," the publishing schedule was delayed by almost a year.

"As time passed, there were questions of whether it was now stale," Colwell said. "We then realized there were a number of benefits to be had with additional time—a key one being that we could now end the story on what happened since and share the results of those decisions made a year ago."

As the story grew, Amex learned how to adapt. The extra content collected eventually became the final chapter, titled "Buchi Now," which gives readers some closure to Buchi's story. The audience learns about Buchi's new products, an 86 percent increase in sales, and even how a new investment in an expensive head brewer didn't work out. The last chapter succeeds because it leaves readers wanting more—connected and invested in how the business fares long-term.

"You don't need to run a business, though, to appreciate "The Journey,"" Colwell said. "At its most basic, it's a story about these authentic, entertaining characters working together to achieve a dream. Like we say in the introduction, running a business is a series of ups and downs—financial, emotional, even physical. We hope it makes readers think of the journeys behind small businesses they encounter every day." ■

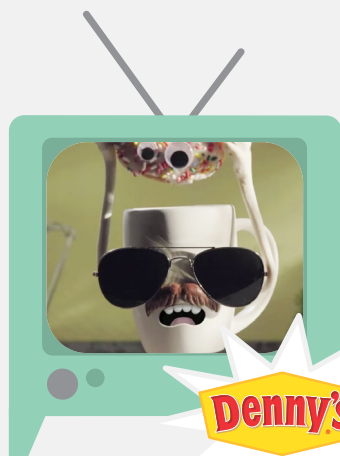


THE BEST BRANDED



OF 2015 (SO FAR)

BY:
JOE LAZAUSKAS



DENNY'S: "THE GRAND SLAMS"

This winter and spring, Denny's rolled out the latter half of its first season of "The Grand Slams," their Adult Swim-esque mini-web series that's quickly developing a cult following. The series follows four characters—Pancake, Sausage, Bacon, and Egg—on 30- to 40-second adventures inside a Denny's restaurant. It'll take you about five minutes to watch the entire series, and it's well worth it. Even if you're not in the late-night-diner millennial demographic Denny's is trying to reach, it'll inspire you as you figure out how to reach the young'uns. Plus, things get pretty wild once everyone starts hittin' the syrup, and the seventh episode turns into a bit of a sausage fest.



HIPCHAT: "LUMBERGH RETURNS"

Few characters garner as much nostalgia as Bill Lumbergh, the buzzword-babbling, cubicle-farm overlord from *Office Space*, a movie that's largely responsible for the fact that you're crammed at a single table with nine other people right now. In 1999, Lumbergh was obsessed with laminated TPS reports, but today, he's all about more meetings and *electronic* mail. "So I'm gonna go ahead and ask to see more bulk on your threads," he instructs his team. "Because remember, m'kay, volume equals competence."

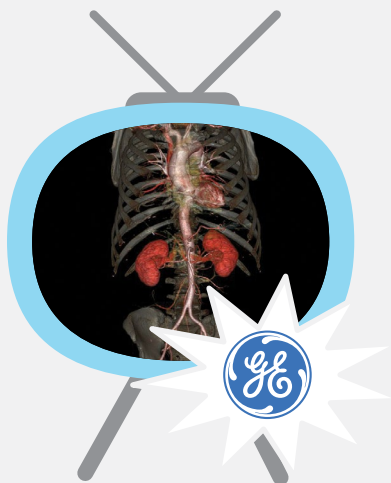
This video series will resonate with anyone who finds their workday consistently strangled by meetings and email... or, you know, just really wishes Mike Judge would make another *Office Space*. And it ties back quite perfectly to Atlasian's HipChat, which is seemingly intended for workplace collaboration and not just for sharing Beyoncé GIFs all day.



AMERICAN EXPRESS: "THE JOURNEY"

Brands inherently can't do journalism, but that doesn't mean that they can't report. In an incredibly impressive storytelling initiative, American Express OPEN Forum embedded a reporting team in a fast-growing startup for three months to create a multimedia documentary, "The Journey." The seven-chapter series of essays, videos, and photographs follows the "Buchi Mamas," Sarah Schomber and Jeannine Buscher, who founded the company and built it into "a 160-acre farm that not only houses their brewery and production facility, but also many of the people who work there as well. They even have a school of their own."

It's an engrossing story, and the most ambitious project yet from American Express, which has been going all-in on stories that document the journey of entrepreneurs. Let's hope that this piece lights a fire under the butts of other brands and makes them realize that yes, you can do real reporting, and yes, you can tell stories that matter.



GE REPORTS: "BODY OF KNOWLEDGE"

Brands usually have a hard time making headway on Reddit. Not GE. It's quickly becoming the darling of the front page of the Internet. GE Reports, the brand's excellent online tech magazine, is getting a particularly large amount of love, largely thanks to a story about an innovative CT scan machine that creates stunningly detailed 3D pictures of a patient's organs and bones while exposing them to very little radiation.

GE's story had legs and spread far past Reddit. It was picked up by many other media outlets and quickly became a gateway for journalists to discover other amazing stories on GE Reports.

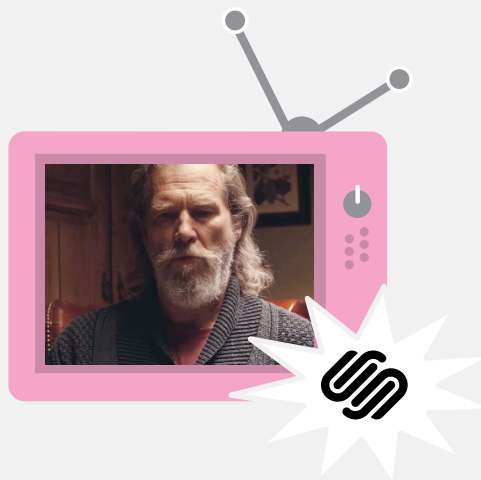
To Tomas Kellner, managing editor of GE Reports, that kind of continued reader discovery is the big advantage of creating a publication like GE Reports instead of buying native ad space. "When you publish a piece of native content, you can't really do that," he said.

SQUARESPACE: “JEFF BRIDGES SLEEPING TAPES”

In January, Squarespace decided to bring a wild idea to life: an album of sleeping tapes filled with “intriguing noises” and the soothing voice of Jeff Bridges. Why not? The microsite, DreamingWithJeff.com, is beautiful, and the tapes are weirdly comforting as Bridges coos things like:

“Sleeping tapes...I love that idea, and all that it implies, you know? Sleeping tapes. Sleep, of course, implies waking up. Tapes implies recording. Sharing things. Sort of implies the past, the future, that’s recorded in the past and shared at some future time...I think that everything implies everything else here. Sleeping tapes.”

Best of all, 100 percent of the proceeds go to No Kid Hungry. Ultimately, I’m thinking that the hot new trend should just be letting Jeff Bridges do whatever he wants. For extra measure, Squarespace also turned these sleeping tapes into one of the weirder Super Bowl commercials we’ve seen in a while.



JOSE CUERVO: “MARGARITAS IN SPACE”

Move over, Red Bull. To celebrate National Margarita Day, Jose Cuervo launched a rocket carrying a shaker of tequila and margarita mix and sent it to space to be shaken and frozen—a noble mission that any reasonable person can get totally on board with.

“Other brands have sent stuff into space, but we had a much better reason to do it—to literally freeze a margarita,” Tom Murphy, chief creative officer at McCann New York, told Digiday, seemingly while also instructing an intern to troll Red Bull on Twitter.

The brand live-blogged and documented the launch on its Facebook page and Tumblr before releasing a video of the stunt, which features some great copywriting and the requisite dubstep space soundtrack.

CHARITY: WATER: “FOUR DAYS IN ETHIOPIA”

No nonprofit does content better than charity: water, the organization devoted to establishing clean water sites around the world. Its program is largely fueled by the fundraising efforts of thousands of volunteers. It uses content in brilliant ways to get people involved, not only by highlighting the work it does, but also by profiling individual volunteers and the people whose lives are transformed by clean water. It's incredibly hard to encounter charity: water's stories and not want to help out in some way.

A year ago, the company started taking all 70-plus charity: water employees on trips to see the work they do first-hand. In February, charity: water released a chronicle of one of those trips: “Four Days in Ethiopia.” It's no “Snow Fall,” but it showcases the human voice and intimacy that characterizes charity: water's content. It's a piece that makes you think, “These are people that I can believe in.”



GAP: #SPRINGISWEIRD INSTAGRAM SERIES

At first, I didn't know how I felt about Gap's 15-second looping branded Instagram soap opera series starring Paul Dano and Jenny Slate. On one hand, it's an original idea; on the other hand, it kind of feels like something you'd watch while strapped to a mind-control machine in Jason Schwartzman's basement.

But as the series has progressed, the looping vignettes have become sort of mesmerizing. Dano and Slate make good use of quirky physical humor, and you have to give Gap credit for telling a story in a new way. It certainly breaks up nicely all those pictures of people wearing khakis. ■

LICENSE TO SPY

There are thousands of cameras following you, anyone can watch, and it's all legal

By Chris Francescani
Photographs by Jenny McCabe

"License to Spy" was paid for and originally published by the Contently Foundation, Contently's award-winning nonprofit arm. Launched in 2014, the Foundation is responsible for investigative reporting in the public interest and training the next generation of journalists. To learn more, go to Contently.org.

Accountant Arthur Ureche was heading to work in Hollywood Hills on January 30 last year when he turned his Enterprise rental onto Laurel Canyon Boulevard and noticed four LAPD squad cars following him.

So Ureche, 40, pulled his white Chevy compact over and waited for them to pass. When he checked the rearview mirror, he saw that they'd spread out across the road a good distance behind and were blocking traffic. He couldn't imagine they'd have any interest in him, a union dues administrator in a button-down shirt whose last traffic ticket, at age 19, was for driving too slowly.

But something was definitely wrong. Five cops crouched behind car doors, their weapons aimed in his direction.

"I started looking around for the maniac with the gun," Ureche said. "And I realized it was me."

A cop with a bullhorn ordered him to reach through the window and unlatch his door from the outside. But the lock was stuck. How could he get it open without drawing suspicion—and possibly gunfire? Ureche took a deep breath. His pulse raced. A police chopper buzzed overhead.

"I'm trying to not look crazy, not to do anything sudden," he said. "It's hard as hell to hear them because you've got the helicopter hovering above, and they are screaming from 25 feet back, so I have to shout back through the open window, 'I've got to use the inside handle! I'm not reaching for anything!'"

The standoff resulted from a potentially fatal mistake: An LAPD license plate reader (LPR) had confused Ureche's Colorado plates with identical tags of a wanted drug felon from California. Same numbers; different states. And though Ureche escaped without being shot, his terrifying encounter underscored the looming threat posed by LPRs, technology that is largely unregulated and, in cases such as Ureche's, disturbingly unreliable.

Plate readers have become the most pervasive new crime-fighting tool in law enforcement, capable of providing instantaneous information on fugitives, suspects, and missing persons. The technology helps investigators quickly pinpoint the whereabouts of a murderer, pick up the trail of a fleeing fugitive, or locate your stolen Honda.

But the use of LPRs is nearly as invasive as the National Security Agency's surveillance programs and the information far more vulnerable to abuse, according to privacy advocates and experts in LPR technology. While NSA data is highly restricted, scans of license plates, collected at police departments across the country, are highly susceptible to unauthorized access and official misuse. Equally troubling



is that ordinary Americans are tapping into private LPR databases, including huge troves of plate hits housed by debt-collection firms, which are commonly shared with law enforcement agencies. The average person can now track virtually anyone's movements, sometimes with the immediacy depicted on cutting-edge dramas such as *Ray Donovan* and *Homeland*.

Critics envision nightmare scenarios: An abusive boyfriend trying to hunt down his ex could learn where she parks her car each night. A celebrity stalker could trace her victim from film shoot to grocery store to home. A criminal defendant could learn where the key witness is hiding. An employer could discover that his worker wasn't really sick that day—LPR cameras show his green hatchback parked at the movie theater—or didn't visit all the clients he said he did.

Got a neighbor with a grudge? For about \$100 and the trouble of hiring a private investigator, he can download your daily itinerary: when and where you pick up your kids, the gym where you work out, the friends and family you visit, the doctors you see.

What would kidnappers, blackmailers, or assassins do with such personal information?





Cops across the country have embraced the new technology. A five-year, \$50 million grant by the Department of Homeland Security has fueled an acquisition frenzy. LPR cameras went from being used by 20 percent of all police departments nationwide in 2007 to 71 percent in 2012. Yet no significant studies have been conducted to evaluate their effectiveness, despite calls to do so by major police organizations and the American Civil Liberties Union, and there's been scant examination of unintended results from the unregulated collecting of tracking data.

The Obama administration is attempting to get a better understanding of LPR use. In May, the Department of Justice created a task force to study guidelines for law enforcement, and in September, the Department of Transportation sent out a request for proposals to examine the pros, cons and legal challenges of these devices automatically capturing massive amounts of vehicle data.

The first major study, released by the Rand Corporation on July 2, focused on how police employ plate-reading systems. It found that "while there is general concern about privacy, there is great uncertainty about privacy expectations and the acceptable limits of LPR use. Consequently, departments noted that they had little information or guidance about how to incorporate privacy protections and were essentially improvising on their own." The report provides insights into the industry, which once operated in almost total secrecy.

Every day, tens of thousands of high-speed optical recognition cameras silently snap digital photos of plates, capturing in milliseconds an image of each tag and sometimes the driver as well. They are difficult to see if you're not looking for them, but the sleek devices can be found clamped to patrol cars and the vehicles of debt chasers as well as mounted along streets and highways and in parking garages and shopping centers. A single reader, once activated, works furiously without assistance, capturing thousands of plate scans per shift.

Official and private databases are packed with hits, including 3.7 million alone in western New York's Monroe County and 7.9 million amassed in Vermont over 18 months in 2011 and 2012. The nationwide total is in the billions. And the information is not just collected and discarded. It gets put to immediate use.

After a police reader gathers a plate number, a computer marks it with a time, date, and location stamp, then fires off the hit to federal and local "hot lists," which contain tags from vehicles owned by people who are wanted or missing. Any match triggers an alert.

But there are bugs. The Rand study highlighted the mix-up that Ureche encountered, namely that LPRs do not distinguish between plates from different states. "The cameras also can false-read structures as license plates," researchers noted, explaining that one department's cameras "kept reading wrought-iron fences around homes as '111-1111'... plates." Despite such errors, LPRs play a leading role among new spying technologies, which include surveillance drones,

biometric scanners, and stingray trackers (which trick your phone into connecting with them by acting like wireless cell towers).

Investigators say they are indispensable to police work. Cops have been barred by the courts from placing GPS trackers on vehicles without a subpoena, but LPR systems are filling that need. They help crack cold case killings, take down drug traffickers, locate kidnapped kids, and nail scofflaw drivers. Federal statistics from 2011 show that law enforcement agencies had used scanners to locate 818 wanted criminals, arrest an additional 2,611 suspects, find 19 missing people, and recover 1,102 stolen vehicles since the technology's inception.

Police in every state have claimed successes. Officers in Hollywood, Florida, told this reporter that they busted Matthew and Gina Stevens, husband-and-wife grifters, after the two allegedly defrauded an 89-year-old man out of nearly \$300,000 in 2012 and vanished. Detective Daniel Justus ran Gina Stevens' license plate through an LPR database and found the couple in Las Vegas.

In Cobb County, Georgia, detectives searching for a missing elderly resident got a hit on his plate near a store where video surveillance showed two suspects getting out of the man's car. The missing person, whom they declined to name, had been killed. One suspect was later convicted in the slaying and the other is on trial, police said.

It's not surprising that so many police departments have invested in LPR technology. The cameras, which cost about \$500 apiece, are paired with systems that can be expensive to buy and maintain. But for departments like the one in Nassau County, Long Island, an LPR network is well worth the money.

Detectives there were stumped by a series of burglaries in northern New Hyde Park in 2010, when 22 homes were hit in three months, NCPD Detective Sergeant Patrick Ryder told this reporter.

"We put more and more bodies in that area and we just couldn't pick the [burglars] off. So we decided to surround the neighborhood with license plate readers. In 30 days, we scanned 20,000 plates." All the burglaries were taking place in the early evening on Friday and Saturday nights, Ryder said, so he limited the search to those times and eliminated drivers who lived in the neighborhood, bringing the plate pool down to 2,000. Soon cops were down to four plates — "a kid who was visiting his friend, a plumber [working in the

neighborhood], and two Queens cabs."

They placed both cabs on a hot list. Two days later, one of the vehicles was pulled over in nearby Floral Park. Four men were inside, along with proceeds from the burglaries, cash, and a receipt for jewelry they'd stolen from one home.

"The investigator from the tech side never left his desk," said Ryder.

But most police departments bought and built their LPR systems without first researching — let alone addressing — potential legal and privacy implications of the new technology, including the specter of cops misusing the data. This issue was addressed in the Rand study. "Since the technology spread so quickly and so many agencies lack policies and laws governing its use...an atmosphere has been created where abuse is possible," it said.

The impact of minimal regulation is being felt in Minnesota, where the plight of officer Anne Marie Rasmusson sparked a statewide uproar over unauthorized access to official motor vehicle records and set off alarms about the safety of LPR information.

Rasmusson was a striking blonde, and a former cop whose career came to an end in 2007 due to a spinal injury she suffered on the job. She retired, got divorced, and moved to



Lakeville, Minnesota, where she worked out regularly at a gym popular with police officers. In 2009 she began competing in body sculpting contests.

That's when she suddenly found herself the object of unwanted male attention, mostly from cops.

Some knew details about her personal life, including her failed marriage and names of past boyfriends. One former colleague revealed that he and his partner had looked her up on their patrol car computer.

Feeling hounded, Rasmusson moved away and in 2011 requested a state audit to find out what had occurred. She was driving when an official called with the results of the inquiry: Her private data had been accessed repeatedly by cops all across the state, going back to 2007.

"Can you tell me how many agencies there were?" Rasmusson asked. The finally tally was 18. She pulled over, opened the car door, and got sick to her stomach.

Over years, it turned out, 104 cops had gained access to her data, conducting more than 400 unauthorized searches, including 30 from one female officer in St. Paul. Many simply wanted to look at her driver's license photo, which shows Rasmusson's beaming smile and platinum blond hair.

The breach prompted a state auditor's probe, which discovered that dozens of Minnesotans were similarly compromised, many of them prominent women such as Hilary DeVary, a high-profile private investigator (PI) known for busting cheating spouses. DeVary learned that her driving records were illegally accessed 166 times since 2003 by officers in 11 different law enforcement agencies, two state departments, and a U.S. postal inspector's office.

"They want to know where you live, and that is what scares me," DeVary told the *America Tonight* show. "You know, I've got kids now. It's frightening."

The state audit concluded that half of all law enforcement personnel in Minnesota had misused driving records. Often the breaches involved men targeting women.

John Hunt, an administrator for the state's Department of Natural Resources, had illegally accessed files on more than 5,000 people, virtually all of them women, including cops, prosecutors, and local celebrities. Hunt had tapped into the records of the female prosecutor assigned to his case and the wife of the judge. Both recused themselves.

While the revelations in Minnesota make clear that your plate information is hardly secure in law enforcement hands, another worrying situation exists in the private sector, where an unlocked back door allows just about anyone to find out where you've been.

When you default on a car loan, stop making credit card payments, or duck alimony or other civil judgments, you become the target of private debt collectors such as auto repossession agents — repo men. They spend their days looking for deadbeats. And their search commonly begins with your car. If they can find it, they can seize it. A typical day for them involves driving around areas near your home or office. While they look for your vehicle, their LPR scanners capture the plate numbers of everyone else's.

The auto repossession industry is the single largest source of private LPR cameras and the owners of the biggest storehouse of data. Their devices, clicking away on the hoods of agents' cars and tow trucks as they troll the nation's streets, have captured billions of vehicle tags. Repo men rely on equipment made by security firms such as Vigilant and Digital Recognition Network—and a vast database that's openly shared among police and private investigators.

Vigilant, for example, offers its law enforcement customers access to its National Vehicle Location Service (NVLS) private database, which contains 2.2 billion scans. Conversely, if a PI wants plate information from a police department, a written request is often all it takes. That arrangement is what unlocks the data to the public. For a private citizen to tap in, he simply hires a licensed investigator to make the request. The cost? About \$100.

This means that anyone with enough cash can track your car's movements without you knowing about it—or being able to stop it. The technology is becoming more sophisticated, making data access much easier.

In June, data broker TLO offered free trials of its new "vehicle sighting" feature to customers, which include banks, insurance firms, private investigators, and major news organizations. Vigilant recently began bundling LPR with facial-recognition technology into a handheld device called a Mobile Companion, and the response from cops who've tried it has been "overwhelmingly positive," said Brian Shockley, the company spokesman. "They've been asking for these things for years and years," he said. "They say it's just a game changer for law enforcement, that it just really makes their jobs easier."



That worries critics who protest the use of LPR data on privacy grounds. “One of the strongest arguments for the constitutionality of LPR is that it is similar to manual license plate checks, but this argument becomes more and more difficult to sustain as additional technologies and capabilities are used synergistically,” said Linda Merola, an assistant professor of criminology, law, and society at George Mason University.

Absent federal legislation or any semblance of national guidelines, many law enforcement agencies keep LPR data for years, or indefinitely, with often lax or limited guidelines. Some states and municipalities have stepped in, passing measures aimed at protecting the public from unwarranted access to private information, but regulation in most places is limited, if it exists at all.

And while legal and privacy matters are being hashed out, the effectiveness of LPRs as a crime-fighting tool is being called into question.

In September, Vermont Public Radio broadcast a story about statewide plate reading. The report said that for 18 months ending on January 1, 2013, the 7.9 million scans collected by local, state, and federal agencies directly helped solve just three crimes. And a 2013 study by the American Civil Liberties Union, “You Are Being Tracked,” claims that law enforcement LPR cameras locate suspect vehicles at hit rates as low as 0.01 percent.

“We need to look and see how many times do [police conduct a] search, for what reasons, how many matches are they actually getting?” said David Roberts, a police technology expert. “When police get a match, are they able to make an arrest, close a case, locate someone? The last issue is most crucial: How old is that data? There hasn’t been any detailed [study] on that. We don’t want to retain data beyond when it’s going to be useful.”

In some cases, though, plate data benefits defendants.

“If you’re charged with a heinous crime, you can prove that you were spotted a hundred miles away,” said Massachusetts private eye Jay Groob. “LPR data — tied in with a credit card purchase near the vehicle sighting — proves beyond the shadow of a doubt where [a client] was.”

Among the victims of LPR error, Ureche’s case stands out. He knows he could have been killed.

“The time that I was really worried was in between exiting the vehicle and getting on the street. I’ve got four, maybe six guns pointed at me and a helicopter hovering above,” he recalled.

After he was cuffed, Ureche overheard the officers. They were convinced there was a passenger hiding in his vehicle. One cop approached and asked, “Is your name Raul Sandoval?”

“Do I look like I’m Raul Sandoval?” Ureche replied. “Whoever you think I am, I can pretty much guarantee you are wrong.”

Twenty minutes later, he was released with an apology, though no one bothered to explain that they’d apparently mistaken him for Raul Sandoval Jr., one of three men allegedly involved in a 2011 robbery of a Taco Bell in Monterey, California, in which an employee’s throat was slit. (Sandoval was arrested a month later at the Arizona border.)

“They admitted they had the wrong car, vaguely mentioning that there was a violent felony criminal warrant associated with the plate, but not much more,” he said. “As soon as they figured out their mistake, they were all in real hurry to get out of there.”

Ureche stopped them.

“So...we’re cool now?” he asked a supervisor. “I’m okay to drive this car?”

“Well, actually,” he said, “if a [patrol] car with a plate reader gets behind you, the same thing is going to happen again.”

Despite the mistake, Ureche said he does not plan to sue the LAPD.

“I was glad I didn’t get shot,” he said. “I’m all for better policing and using technology, but we have to have some sort of checks and balances.” ■



The 10 Unhealthiest Buzzwords of 2015

Written by Joe Lazauskas

Illustrations by Kyle Fewell

Storytelling

We're to blame for this one. Specifically, Contently co-founder Shane Snow is to blame. Shane started writing about the importance of brands becoming storytellers in 2012, and then he just kept writing about it—Google “Shane Snow storytelling” and you get 330,000 results. Hell, he even used a story about Ryan Gosling and Justin Timberlake to argue why brands should become storytellers, and since he has 7 trillion LinkedIn followers, everyone read his posts and turned a perfectly nice word into an abominable buzzword.

Now every person, brand, and agency identifies as a “storyteller.” That generic toilet paper brand? It's a storyteller. Jim the lead-gen guy? He's a freaking storyteller. He'll tell you a 90-minute story about his leaf blower, but damn it, he's in marketing and he showed up to work today, so he gets to be a storyteller, too. “Storyteller” is the youth soccer participation trophy of the marketing world, and you're only going to hear it more this year.



Conversation Marketing

“I just want to have a conversation with a brand,” said no one ever” is an old social media marketing joke, but it might finally be proven wrong this year. I've been bullish on chat apps as the next great content distribution and marketing platform, and I feel more strongly about that after speaking with Paul Gray, the director of product at Kik. Teen-centric brands have seen some insane success over the past few months using Kik's new Promoted

Chats. SkullCandy, for instance, has amassed 400,000 conversations in two months while seeing click-through rates 15–20x higher than on Facebook. The vast majority of these conversations are handled by robots, but kids seem to be really into that today. Get ready to hear the term “conversation marketing” from the 19-year-old who's going to take over your social media department in Q2.

Multichannel

At this point, is there anything that doesn't exist on multiple media channels? I guess the front door to my apartment only exists in reality, but considering all of the Jewish Museum tours that go by, it's probably been snapped, 'grammed, and Meerkat-ed by now. Your content is multichannel—congratulations. So are my six-year-old niece's drawings. (Plus, your content probably isn't creative enough to involve a princess riding an elephant.)

Social Reach

The greatest scam in content marketing is “social reach”—a fantasy metric that you pull out of your ass to justify a social media campaign that was way too expensive and didn't deliver tangible ROI. (Trust me, I used it when I was a 23-year-old social media consultant and had no idea what I was doing).

It goes like this: You launch a Twitter campaign or some sort, but only Steve (3,500 followers), Jane (1,000 followers), and Brett (500 followers) shared your content. Instead of admitting that maybe 100 people even saw their shares, you assume every single one of their followers saw their tweet, because in your fantasy world, Brett, Steve, and Jane have the most devoted followers on Earth. So you claim a social reach of 5,000. And if Brett's follower Ray (2,000 followers) retweets his tweet? Oh yeah baby, that's a social reach of 7,000. Repeat this trick until the aging CMOs of the world decide to devote an hour to actually understanding how Twitter works.

Relationship Building

Today's content strategists and consultants basically sound like my 85-year-old Jewish nana, who's obsessed with saving me from dying alone. Hundreds of professional yentas will be running through 6th Street this weekend trying to convince you that if you stop talking about yourself for a second, you'll find that special someone and settle down to build an audience. Honestly, they're right, but the moment their spiel starts to get annoying, wrap a scarf around their head and start singing show tunes from *Fiddler on the Roof*.



Bespoke Content

"Bespoke" is the shiny varnish and rear spoiler that 20,000 content marketing startups will slap on their 1989 Honda Civic of an offering this weekend. Listen, if all you can really offer is the same generic brand-safe listicle, it's not bespoke. And, honestly, I can't imagine anyone doing truly original work calling it "bespoke" — the word just reeks of bullshit. If you hear anyone say the words "bespoke storytelling," sound the alarm. There's a sociopath on the loose.



360-Degree

This buzzword is used a lot by agencies, but I have absolutely no idea why they're so obsessed with sounding like a protractor. From my understanding, 360-degree means your agency does everything a brand needs, to which I call B.S. That's like me telling my girlfriend I can do the entire *Kama Sutra*. We can do some things, and we can Google the answers to others, but that's about it.



Growth Hacking

Once a buzzword reserved for startups, growth hacking is now a full-blown marketing term. Personally, I feel bad for the verb “hack,” which is just being butchered at this point. Tweeting your content at relevant influencers, for instance, is not a growth hack. That’s a growth caress (which I hope to god never becomes a buzzword). Let’s reserve this buzzword for real growth hacks, like breaking into *The Economist*’s Salthru account and stealing their mailing list.

But we won’t. We’ll call every mildly competent thing we do as content marketers a “growth hack.” Because we are monsters. Buzzword-spewing monsters.



Brand Evangelist

Don’t tell my nana, but I’ve given up Judaism for Tide.



Snackable Content

Gary Vaynerchuk attempted to explain shortform social media content by talking about punching people in the face. For whatever reason, that didn’t really catch on. So, instead, some social media agency came up with a more delicious-sounding way to talk about half-assed social media posts—snackable content! It’s a term I love to use simply because it fills Contently VP of Content Sam Slaughter with so much rage.

But what is snackable content exactly? A snack, inherently, is relative; it’s simply defined as something less than a meal. If your usual meal is three steaks, can a steak be a snack? If your usual content meal is a buzzword post that runs 20,000 words, is this 1,500-word buzzword post a snack? Is a Mila Kunis meme snackable if you print it out and cover it with Cheez Whiz? Discuss among yourselves. ■



1. Your favorite social network is...

- A.** LinkedIn—gotta love those influencer posts.
- B.** Whatever drives the most traffic to my site.
- C.** Meerkat, and Layout, and Kik, and...

2. When you get to work in the morning, your first move is to...

- A.** Go to a meeting.
- B.** Stress out over your edit calendar analytics.
- C.** See what's trending.

3. Your favorite work jam is...

- A.** Steely Dan.
- B.** Jay Z.
- C.** This really obscure band. You probably haven't heard of them.

4. Your go-to business casual attire is...

- A.** A gingham pocket square.
- B.** The company tee and Timbs.
- C.** Your #blessed v-neck.

5. The next industry book on your reading list is...

- A.** "The Icarus Deception" by Seth Godin.
- B.** "The Night of the Gun" by David Carr.
- C.** What's a book?

6. To you, podcasts are...

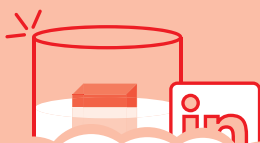
- A. A fundamental return to our oral storytelling past.
- B. Something we need to make, pronto.
- C. Like Meerkat, but without video, right?

7. The best part about SXSW is...

- A. BBQ.
- B. Open bars.
- C. Molly.

NOW TALLY YOUR SCORES

Now, tally your scores, assigning 3 points for every A answer, 2 points for every B answer, and 1 point for every C answer.



THOUGHT LEADER CMO

16–21 POINTS

Your soulmate is the Thought Leader CMO. The only thing you like more than a good LinkedIn Influencer post is an exclusive salon starring Malcolm Gladwell and 1920s prohibition cocktails.



THE BRAND EDITOR

10–15 POINTS

Your soulmate is the Brand Editor. To you, there's nothing more romantic than an evening spent obsessing over Google Analytics, nothing more thrilling than a 15 percent click rate on your newsletter.



SOCIAL MEDIA INTERN

1–9 POINTS

Your soulmate is the Social Media Intern. You two are destined to meet when you're the first two users on Twitter's yet-to-be-announced new app, Fad.

THE ULTIMATE CONTENT MARKETING

BUZZWORD CROSSWORD ANSWERS

