

The anatomy of content marketing

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If you don't know what content means, don't bother looking it up in a dictionary, you may not find the answer you seek.

With marketing trends and catch phrases coming and going, it would not be wrong to consider "content" as the next big marketing buzzword. It's a word that almost everyone has heard and one that has grabbed the attention of most marketing practitioners. This is a whatwewant view on content.



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Perceptions of content

Let's start with a definition of content as defined by the Content Marketing Institute: *"Content is brands telling stories to attract and retain customers through creating on-going engagement."*

Marketing through content is not new. In 1895, farm implement producer, John Deere published content for farmers in its publication "The Furrow". In the 1930's Proctor & Gamble became one of the first companies to use content to associate with and to market brands. This also established the still popular Soap genre. At the time P&G used radio as a host medium for Soaps. Content is not new and not static in an evolving technological environment.

Embarking on a quest to assess perceptions of content, we asked a few people about their thoughts on content, what it means and what first springs to mind. Interestingly, most responses were fairly similar: Social media, YouTube, internet, digital, long-form web video. The large majority of people defined the medium in which content lives and not content itself. There is a strong digital association with content, which, in part, overshadows the creation and idea itself. This could be attributed to the fact that content is associated with the internet and "free" media.

Traditional media

The global demise of traditional broadcast television has also contributed to the rise of content's popularity. Traditional TV viewing patterns have changed, making it harder for marketers to engage audiences, hence their quest to find "new" avenues of engaging with their customers.

As was the case with broadcast, the Internet is a host and a gateway to stories, it is not content. The Net today is what broadcast was in the 50s and the 60s. Broadcast is the transmission (carrying) of signals in which, content is embedded.

In an ideal world, content is designed by creative marketing experts who understand brands and people, and who, with good ideas, are able to produce projects, which grow brand love and sell products. Those are the stories we create, it's what inspires us to come back time and time again. Content can live anywhere and it is dynamic in so many ways.

Creating content for the internet

Many interesting opportunities are lost when we create content where the medium is top of mind. Great ideas can live anywhere and as shapeshifters can manifest itself in many forms. It can live in digital and analogue, in print, as a game, on stage, on TV in a DVD and on mobile etc. The essence and message does not change.

"Great ideas can live in anything" *The One Show*

Focus on telling good stories, ensuring successful and lasting engagements. The internet still struggles to command top dollar for production. This is especially apparent in countries like South Africa. Unfortunately brands are not prepared to pay top dollar for something that still remains, according to some, unproven or underperforming. Regardless of perceptions, we should not be creating content for the internet; we should create great long lasting ideas, with the view of hosting it on multiple platforms.

Lets say for instance a client wants to teach consumers the nutritional value of eggs and in the same process wants to debunk a few myths, of course the logical step would be to create a cooking show. What can we do with a cooking show?

1. Screen it on TV.
2. Host it on the internet.
3. Do an interactive proposition on Facebook and social media.
4. Feature it in/on Taxi TV.
5. Run a print series in newspapers featuring the content.
6. Have radio discussions.
7. Give it away as DVD hand-outs etc.

Content marketing does not always call for the creation of new content as a departure point. Curating content, for instance, is growing in popularity; brands either curate or partner with prominent people to assist. Clothing retailer and brand Forever 21's Instagram account has 2.8 million (and growing) followers and does not only dish up product related images. They include trend related content and user-generated content. Sure, it directly connects the trends and clothing featured in their stores, but it does not feel like it's a "hard sell". It is content.

Think of it - what if consumers looked forward to receiving your marketing, receiving your content!

How will brands benefit:

- Brands are able to establish an on-going conversation with their customers. One where the customer willingly engages in a conversation with the brand.
- Digital has made the conversation interactive and real time.
- Brands can own direct channels of communication to their customers.
- Engagement results are immediate, real and can be tracked.
- Product can be integrated into the stories. It's not only a brand building exercise. Product and related benefits should underscore the essence of the story/content.
- Content is an asset it does not belong on a shelf or the trash can. Use it. Cut 14 seconds for Instagram, distribute parts of a conversation on Facebook. Offer regular webinars on a topic of interest, print a book...

What can content be and how does it manifest?

Here are a few examples:

SAPA Eggs are magic

The South African Poultry Association created content educating customers on the nutritional value of eggs, as well as its diversity. At the same time, they were also able to debunk a few myths about health and eggs.

The 'Eggs are Magic' show was created as a fun 6x7 minute series which, accompanied by a booklet, made its way onto a DVD, distributed at taxi ranks and densely populated areas.

The Conflict Kitchen

The Conflict Kitchen is a take-out restaurant in Pittsburgh that only serves cuisine from countries that the United States is in conflict with. The Restaurant also endeavours to teach its patrons about conflict areas involving the USA.

Historic continent and conflict details are printed on the food packaging, which serves as a magazine, and the medium for delivering the content and feeding people's souls and bodies. Other than the food itself, which is interesting, The Conflict Kitchen has created a good reason for customers to go back and engage.

Lego Club Magazine

The magazine allows kids of any age to receive targeted content that's relevant to them in a fun, portable format. Lego has a broad and well considered content strategy, ranging from feature films, online content, and printed handouts games etc. It's Lego, need we say more? Pester power.

Red Bull's "Red Bulletin" digital magazine

What do you think about when you hear the word "Red Bull"? Energy? Extremism? Excitement? Red Bull has done an excellent job building its brand on a few consistent themes that permeate every aspect of the company, from goofy cartoon ads to rockin' live events.

Its content marketing activities reflect these themes as well. Aside from a strong online video presence, Red Bull also publishes the Red Bulletin magazine, which defines itself as a "modern lifestyle mag focusing on sport, people, art and culture designed to break new ground." The publication lives in print as well as digital forms.

"You have caught your butterfly and now what!?"

ABOUT ERIK DE JAGER

A graduate of Pretoria Film School, Erik has amassed a wealth of television and related production experience, receiving several local and international nominations and awards along the way, including from Vuka's, NNTV and Avantis to nominations at the London International Awards as well as the coveted Cannes Lion's.

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