



orange

Issue Sixteen

STRATEGY • CONTENT • CREATIVITY

orange

The Journey to Content

Content about thought leadership speaks to me. When a writer comes from a perspective of authority on a topic that matters to me—whether it's the power of print for under-30s or the best ways to manage creative talent—I click. And read the email, study the infographic, track LinkedIn, soak in the podcast and more. If it's good, I share, via social and with my team.

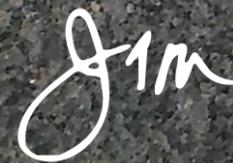
That's part of my own content journey. I have learned it's when I'm most open to new approaches and information. And just one more reason why we content marketers should pay close attention to user journeys in our planning and work.

Consider the journey of a chef or other foodservice pro, for example, and why it matters to a B2B company trying to reach them. Our chef might read multiple pieces of content before making any sort of transaction, so the marketer's must make each of those interactions count. Doing so requires a thorough understanding of the end user's behavior. For instance, long hours spent pacing a kitchen mean a webinar isn't always the best tool for communication. (Read more about content marketers taking foodservice journeys to bold new places on page 44.)

Understanding your audience's journey is one imperative; matching that to your own brand and business goals is another. This is why content gating (see page 20) comes up so frequently and why it's critical to realize that deciding whether to wall off content is not all or nothing. Smart gating is about give and take: You give readers value; they let you take information. But making that interaction worthwhile means understanding when users are at a point in their journey where they'll willingly offer personal details, and what they consider valuable.

The journey is more and more pervasive in content marketing conversations, whether we're talking about the value of Alexa and Google Home in content marketing (page 28), how a leading insurance brand reimagined its content strategy (page 36) or how to chart the ROI of your multi-element content hub (page 52).

Marketers with maps in their pockets will be best prepared to follow where those content journeys lead next.



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Ready to take your content marketing to the next level?

Contact **Erin Slater**, SVP, business development
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#AudienceFirst

Users first, brand second is the way to go. These industry insiders explain why.

Erik Witsoe

Welcome to a new era—where the focus is on people instead of products. It’s personalizing over stereotyping, engaging over chatting, and growing relationships over building traffic. We scoured LinkedIn, Twitter and Medium to capture top marketing thought leaders’ POVs on this industry shift. —*Courtney Fishman, Kristina Rodriguez and Christina Huynh*



“HUGELY LIBERATING TO TARGET THE RIGHT AUDIENCE, NOT NECESSARILY THE BIGGEST.”

Linda Boff, CMO of GE



“In the same way that sound isn’t music, traffic isn’t audience.”

Jason Fried, CEO of Basecamp



“NEVER FORGET THAT YOU ARE NOT THE AUDIENCE.”

John Zissimos, vice president of creative at Google and former chief creative officer at Salesforce



“Early results are clearly showing us the benefits of putting people, not stuff, first.”

Keith Weed, CMO of Unilever



“Marketing is shifting ... from talking at people ... to engaging with people—building meaningful, lifelong and personalized relationships.”

Chandar Pattabhiram, CMO of Coupa Software and Marketo

Erik Witsoe



“Rather than rely on the old-fashioned mindset of reaching mass audiences through influencers and intermediaries, we instead need to engage constituents as unique persons.”

Jon Iwata, senior vice president and former chief brand officer of IBM



“DON’T STEREOTYPE AN AUDIENCE—SERVE THEM.”

Philippe von Borries, founder of Refinery29



“There’s never been a better time to think ‘audience first.’”

Jonathan Becher, former CMO of SAP



“We are in the age of impact, and marketers must rethink the consumer landscape.”

Raja Rajamannar, CMO of Mastercard



“During my time at Netflix, and later at my next startup, Chegg, I learned to move from customer focus to customer obsession.”

Gibson Biddle, chief product officer at Chegg and former vice president of Netflix



“As marketers, we need to step back, think about people’s passions, problems and potential journeys. From there, we can determine a way of connecting in a way that feeds them, helps them and makes their lives easier.”

David Edelman, CMO of Aetna



“Celebrating not only the uniqueness of your products and/or services but also the individuality of your consumers is a great way to stand out.”

Charisse Ford, CMO of PANDORA Americas

UGC: The Next Level

User-generated content (UGC) is nothing new: It's Wikipedia. It's Reddit. Back in the day, it was *America's Funniest Home Videos*. (Note: "Dad Getting Clobbered in the Crotch" will beat "Disgruntled Bulldog" 4 times out of 5.) But for marketers, UGC is more than an opportunity to bulk up content offerings—it's a way to build credibility and engage audiences. And it's in demand more than ever: According to Stackla's *2017 Consumer Content Report*, 60 percent of consumers said UGC is the most authentic form of content; *three times more* authentic than content created by brands.

For many social-savvy companies in 2018, UGC plans are well-oiled machines. They determine objectives, identify the most effective distribution vehicles, consider both the would-be users and the target audiences and iron out the logistics. Check, check, check. But there are other prospects that many marketers may be missing.

The most effective campaigns aren't done in a vacuum; they're agile and responsive. "Just like any other content strategy, your [UGC] plan has to have specific goals and guidelines to work its best," Growthetics founder Adi Suja told Ecommerce Platforms in 2018. "If you want [it] to work, you have to measure it. No matter what you choose for goals or how you plan your attack, you need to benchmark."

By simply tapping into social listening tools and the analytics provided on most key channels, content marketers can accomplish a number of goals:

- Flag inappropriate content, trolling or fake accounts.
- Follow what is and isn't engaging users via "likes" and up/down votes—and incorporate these trends into new and brand-sponsored content.
- Promote hashtags and vanity URLs for a low-cost tracking tool.

UGC is already cheap and fast. To also achieve the "good" element of this paradigm, it needs to be measured, monitored and expanded upon.

iStock/kreimick

Saving Us From Ourselves



Instagrammers: Big brother is watching your online stalking. Every click, share and like is getting number-crunched to better understand your scrolling habits. Your activity feed is in your hands, though. Look closely: Right in your profile, the new "Your Activity" feature visually breaks down how much time you've spent perusing the feed, on the device you're logged into, that day.

"We have a responsibility to help people understand how much time they spend on our platforms so they can better manage their experience," Instagram stated in an August 2018 press release. The new tool is also accessible on Facebook.

The social platform isn't the only one monitoring your screen activity. Earlier this year, Apple introduced a time-management tool in iOS 12 for users to better understand how often they're picking up their devices and interacting on apps and social networks.

Similar to how Apple products' Do Not Disturb feature works, 'grammers can also mute push notifications and set daily reminders when reaching their daily social allotment.

Sources: Instagram, Apple, Elle

Just Browsing

To reach shoppers, start on YouTube, which is rapidly shaping up to be the new window-shopping. These retail stats may catch your eye:

- **90%+**: Shoppers inspired by video who discover products and brands via YouTube
- **80%**: YouTube shoppers who watch during the early stages of their buying journey
- From 2015 to 2017, YouTube watch time increased:
 - **10x**: "Shop With Me" videos (on mobile)
 - **12x**: "Does It Work" videos
 - **2x**: "Everything You Need to Know" videos ... and **50,000+ years' worth** of product-review videos were consumed on mobile.



Source: Think with Google 2017, 2018

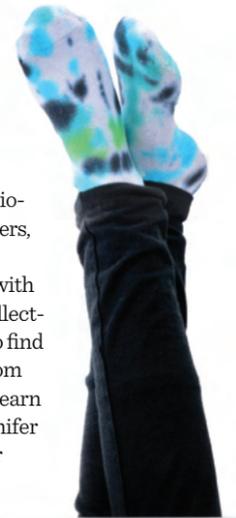
(Risky) Behavioral Biometrics

Typing, swiping and scrolling—the ways you tangibly interact with your phone or computer—say a lot about you. So much so that banks and retailers are tracking users' physical behavior on websites and apps to fight fraud. Others are taking it a step further, collecting data that can identify customers by these "behavioral biometrics." But in protecting you from hackers, are they violating your privacy instead?

"What we have seen across the board with technology is that the more data that's collected by companies, the more they will try to find uses for that data. It's a very small leap from using this to detect fraud to using this to learn very private information about you," Jennifer Lynch, senior lawyer, Electronic Frontier Foundation, told *The New York Times*.

What can banking and retail marketers do to let your end users know their data is protected? Make sure you:

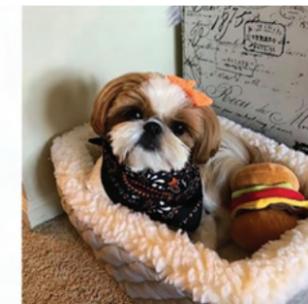
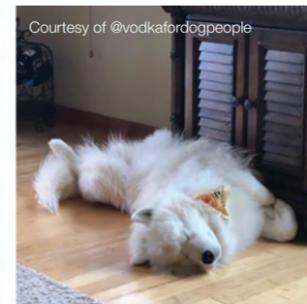
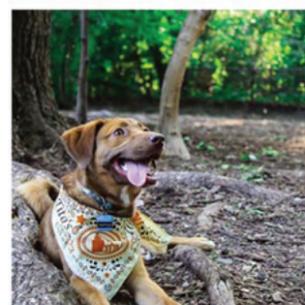
- **Create a privacy policy** and be transparent.
- **Limit how much data** is collected and how it's shared.



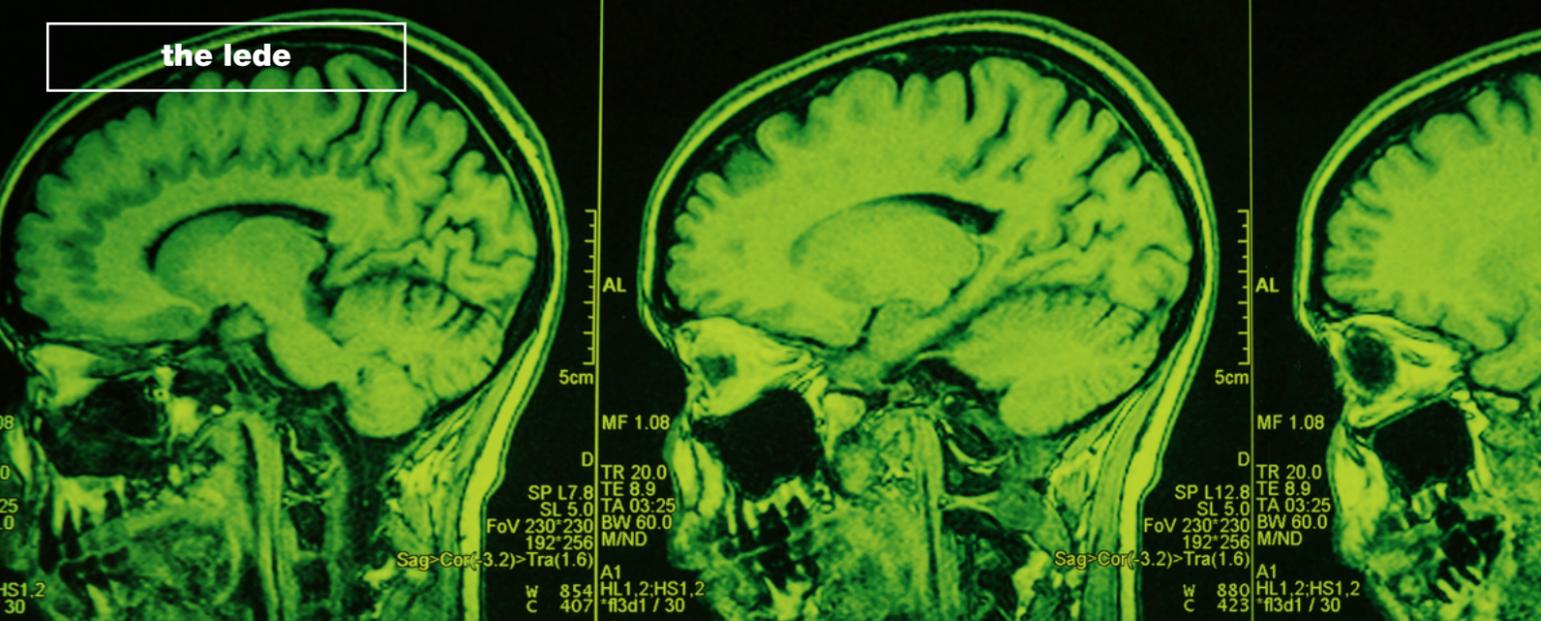
Barking Up the Right Tree

People love booze. People love their dogs. People even love #otherpeoplesdogs. So, tapping into the power of UGC, Tito's Handmade Vodka set up @vodkafordogpeople across major social channels as a destination back in 2013 to share shots of furry best friends, raise money for The Humane Society and other rescue organizations, and ultimately promote the Texas-based spirits brand. Cheers to Bert "Tito" Beverage for his successful (and "aww"-worthy) UGC idea.

Sources: Bazaarvoice, Tint



the lede



Once Upon a Neuron

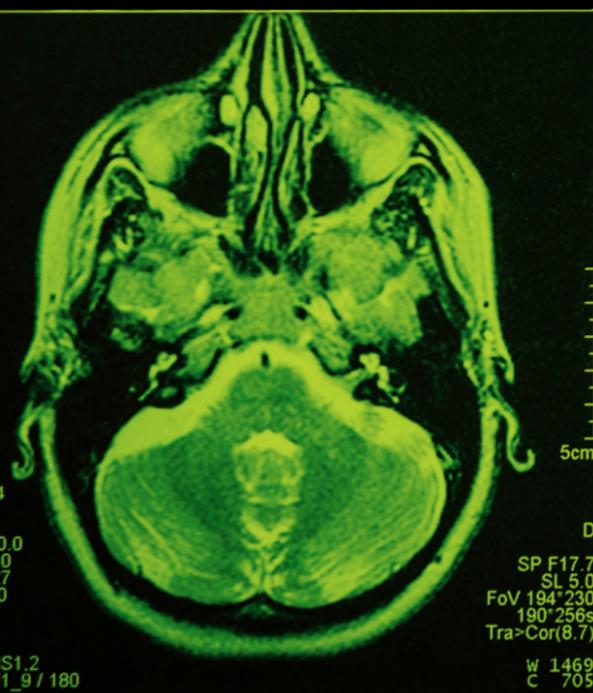
“Storytelling” has long been a buzzy catchphrase in the content marketing space, and for good reason: When done right, it works. Any topic, no matter how technical or esoteric, becomes more consumable if presented within an effective narrative structure—usually with the ROI to prove it.

But why? A 2018 report from Ipsos Connect and Marketing Land offered biological insights to explain the science behind the success of quality storytelling.

- Plots have a natural progression from beginning to end. These journeys **create tension**, which means better engagement.
- The story format itself is more likely to **stir emotional reactions**, from laughter to sadness to self-reflection. This emotional connection leads to improved information retention.
- Good stories capture an audience’s attention in a way that can impact heart rate and **release oxytocin**, a hormone associated with feelings of empathy and generosity.
- Our brains react to metaphors, creating a neurological experience that sticks. Words that describe physical experiences **activate sense and motor cortices** as we comprehend the language itself.

Content marketing has long claimed to be an art and science—and now we know it wasn’t kidding about the science part.

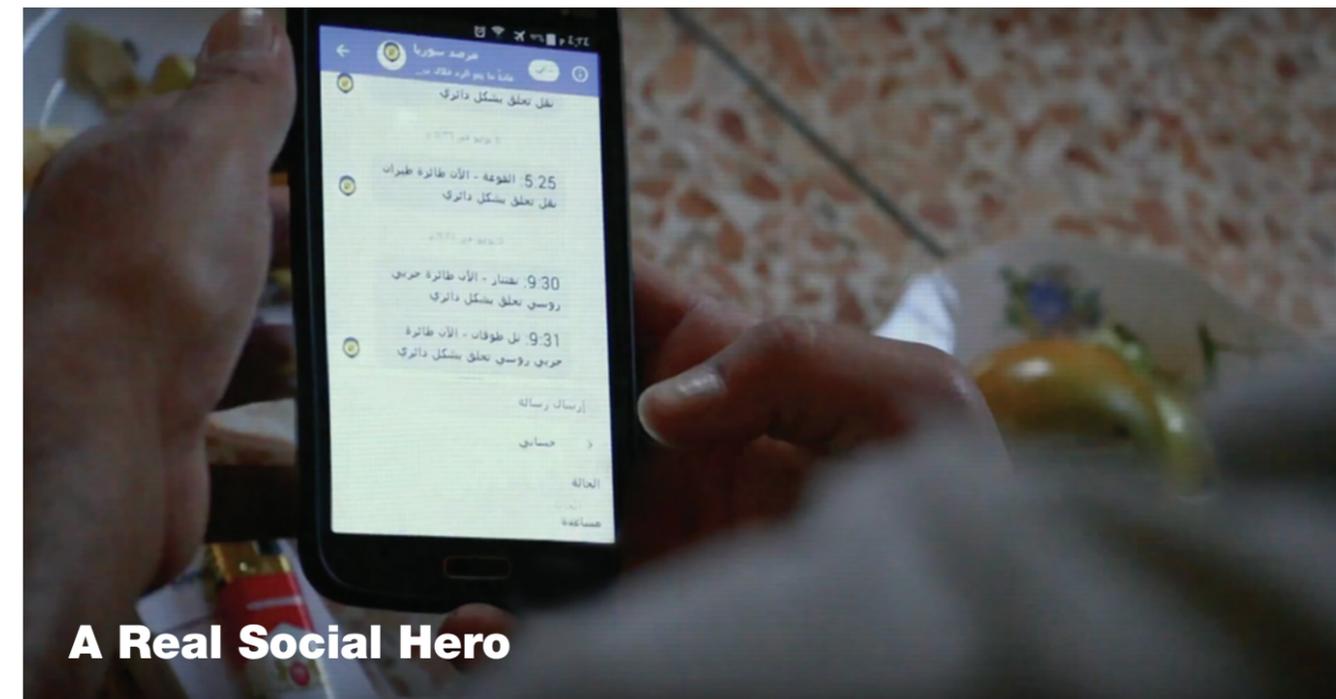
Sources: Marketing Land, *Psychology Today*, The Drum, Ad Age



Storytelling Hall of Fame

Those of you around in the early '90s may remember the sudsy goodness of the Taster's Choice saga. Enigmatic spots featuring two (former? current? future?) paramours brought the instant coffee brand into water-cooler discussions and helped catapult the java brand past Folgers and Maxwell House to become the No. 1 instant coffee that decade. The lesson remains timely: TC's 30-year-old storytelling efforts hold true for modern marketers.

A Real Social Hero



Social media helps you find your friends on weekends and brands connect with next-gen consumers. It could also help save lives across the globe: Real-time crowdsourcing is being tested for its potential to lower casualties in parts of the world plagued by the constant threat of airstrikes. Sentry, a threat detection and prediction technology developed by Hala Systems Inc., is tapping artificial intelligence and social media to deliver real-time airstrike warnings via mobile phone.

SENTRY BY THE NUMBERS:

- 2.1M+** People warned of an impending threat
- ~140** Warnings per day
- 105K+** Number of observations
- 250K+** Civilians benefiting from reduced traumatic anxiety
- 6,981** Airstrikes predicted
- 20-27%** Reduction in casualty rates

Hala's motto is “Protect everything that matters,” and its system is implemented in Syria—with expansion plans for Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of Congo and beyond. Now working on what *Wired* calls “Shazam for airstrikes” (using atmospheric sounds to generate warnings), the company founded by two Americans and one Syrian coder is hoping to use tech to do its part to help protect humanity.

On a lighter note: Marketers, how might you take a cue from Sentry and use crowdsourced AI plus social momentum to make a quantifiable difference in your goals this year?

Sources: Hala Systems Inc., *Wired*

Down on Desktop

Sure, you have a mobile-friendly website, but is it optimized? Or perhaps you're still playing catch-up: Maybe there's no mobile version at all? Stop scrolling past these to-do's, because it looks like Google is entering the final stage of updating its transition to mobile-first indexing. That was the consensus of search cognoscenti posting on Twitter and Facebook in October 2018, as they reported increased mobile-first migration alerts.

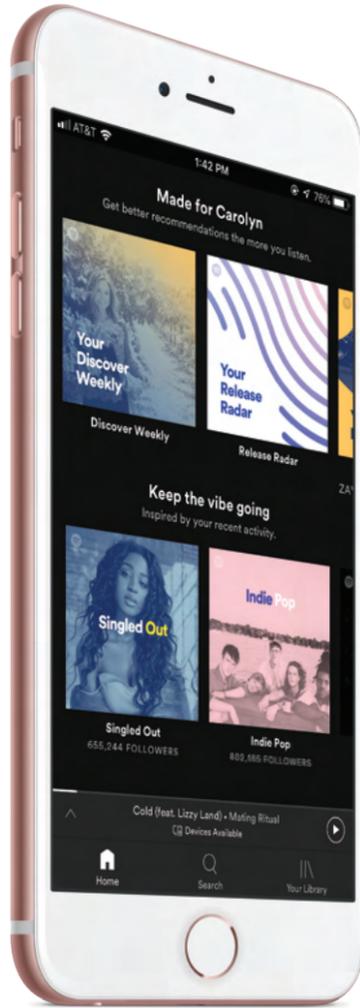
Because the majority of today's Google searches come from mobile devices, the tech leader has been responding by prioritizing mobile in its search algorithm.

What does this mean for your site rankings? While the rollout has been happening gradually throughout 2018—and the content on desktop versions is still considered—Google's new search algorithms crawl mobile first to ensure its content results are crowned king.

Time to check on your site and ensure your mobile platform's offerings and UX are as up to date and optimized as your desktop's.

Source: TechCrunch, Search Engine Journal





Customization Without Over-Personalization

You're logged into Spotify, jamming to your tunes for the millionth time. Ready to switch up your listening experience? You're in the right place: Spotify has the inside advantage. That's because unlike other streaming music platforms, the Swedish music platform recommends genres and artists that *complement* your tastes instead of just playing bands that simply mimic or repeat what you're already listening to.

Thanks, AI. Using technology bolstered by artificial intelligence, Spotify can DJ personalized playlists for audiophiles everywhere, delivering a customized—and presumably better—user experience.

“Marketers who master personalization and broaden consumers’ horizons will be at the forefront of business in the years to come,” writes Julia Stead, vice president of marketing at Invoca, in her September 2018 *Adweek* column. “Loyalty will not be based so much on what you offer but what you recommend.”

But where's the line between customization that expands your comfort zone and over-personalization that retargets a narrow set of interests? Striking that balance can be tough, but Stead claims Spotify has found the sweet spot.

For starters, marketers can take a cue from how much information consumers are actually willing to give up, according to 2018 research from Salesforce.

Sources: Salesforce, Adweek

In exchange for personalized offers and discounts, **88%** of consumers share personal data with companies before they buy.

91% of consumers are more likely to trust companies that demonstrate commitment to protecting their personal information.

Consumers are **almost 2x more likely** to view personalized offers as important versus unimportant.

Our CEO and founder, @Jim Meyers, just published *Becoming Essential*, a book for association leaders looking to futureproof their association in an ever-changing world. Learn how your association can keep pace.



Email Economy

“**30% OF B2B MARKETERS PLAN TO INCREASE SPENDING ON EMAIL IN THE NEXT YEAR.**”

—2018 Email Marketing Industry Report, Emma



iStock/MissTuni, sandr2002, YvanDubé

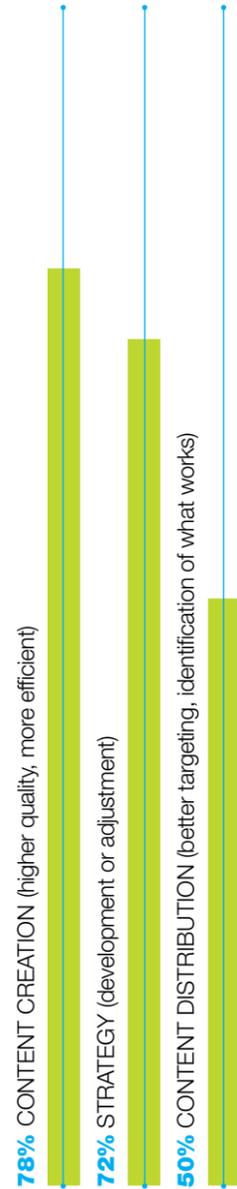


The romance book industry—that's right, purveyors of bodice-ripping historical ardor—are reaching a wider audience with strategic, creative content marketing, offering inspiration for other marketing specialties. Here's how:

Publishers are forging connections with readers and new authors through professional magazines, conferences, dedicated online communities and book-review blog influencers. The Romance Writers of America, a nonprofit trade association, holds an annual conference with panels dedicated to industry education and keeping members informed on what's selling. Harlequin, a romance-publishing giant, even hosts an annual writing competition, “So You Think You Can Write,” to recruit new writers for its imprints.

Authors are offering exclusive bonus content for their print and e-books: everything from recipes to teasers for future projects. And since readers often enjoy revisiting beloved characters and worlds beyond happily ever after, services like BookBub allow authors to reach new and old readers via subscription newsletters to generate buzz for upcoming releases and connect with fans.

The three top ranking factors that contributed to B2B marketers' increased success:



Source: Content Marketing Institute

The B2B Top 3



The third in our comic series starring Calvin Content!





Sources: Edison Research 2018, Statista 2018, Invesp 2016



“In a world with a cacophony of supposed thought leaders competing for air, people are clamoring for authentic, authoritative voices that lead on issues.

Associations need to be that voice.”

James E. Meyers, *Becoming Essential*

Read More
becoming-essential.com

Data Rules

Without analytic insight, content can't be king

Yes, yes, we all got the memo years ago: Content is king. But your content will never dominate Google if it's not driven by data.

We tracked "blockchain" as just one example of how content marketers can master search analytics to identify a content gap within financial services—and move in to royally rule the opportunity.

What is Blockchain?

It's not a cryptocurrency. It's an evolving technology that's digital and decentralized. It's a public record of every cryptocurrency transaction that takes place.

It's constantly growing, learning and becoming more secure. And, it's simple. In fact, its simplicity has the potential to disrupt the financial services industry.

Search Inquiries

In those searches, users are trying to understand what blockchain means for financial services.

2018 top-searched blockchain queries include:

- What are the uses of blockchain technology in banking?
- How would blockchain disrupt the financial service industry?
- What are the blockchain applications in financial services?
- What is blockchain technology in the banking sector?
- Could you build a bank with bitcoin blockchain technology?
- Will bitcoin make financial institutions obsolete?
- How will the blockchain transform banking?
- How could blockchain technology change finance?
- What are the blockchain advancements in fintech?
- How can blockchain disrupt banking and insurance?

Top Performers

In the blockchain conversation, financial service institutions are oddly nowhere to be found. Instead, SERPs are dominated by tech, consultant and news outlets:

- CNN Money
- Financial Times
- Deloitte
- CoinDesk
- PwC
- IBM
- Business Insider
- Microsoft
- Harvard Business Review
- Accenture

Content Opportunity

So what is the takeaway for content marketers? Finserv thought leaders need to get their POV out there, earn market share and win the audience game. At the intersection of **business objectives**, **audience interest** and **keyword volume** awaits your content throne.

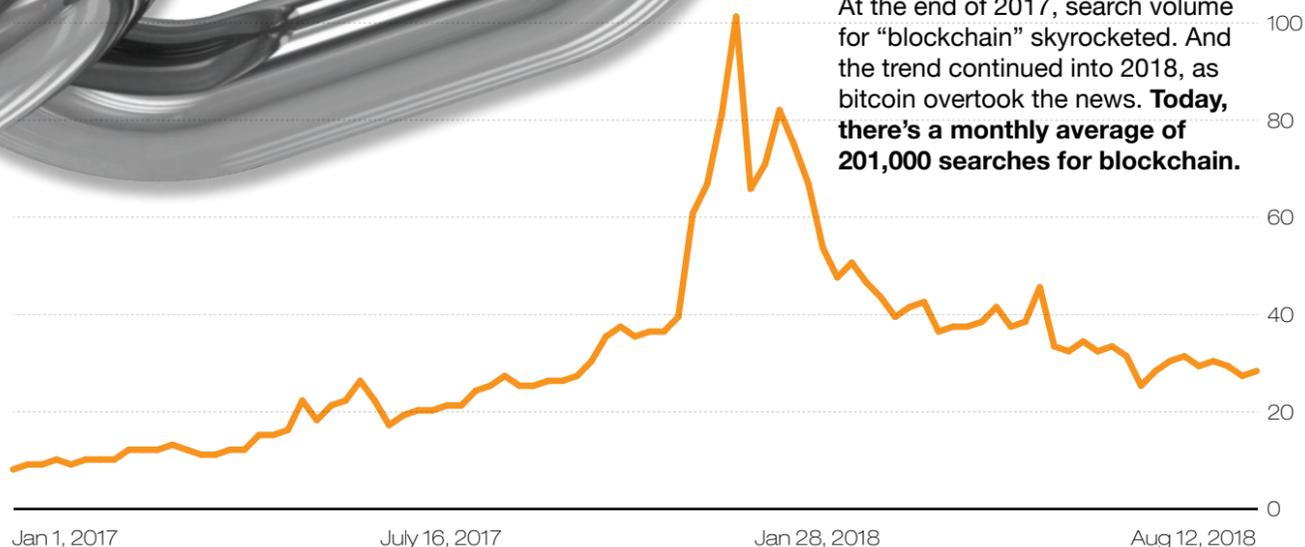
AUDIENCE INTEREST

BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

KEYWORD VOLUME

Search Volume

At the end of 2017, search volume for "blockchain" skyrocketed. And the trend continued into 2018, as bitcoin overtook the news. **Today, there's a monthly average of 201,000 searches for blockchain.**





RICARDO VIANA VARGAS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
THE BRIGHTLINE INITIATIVE

Brightline tests and learns its way to thought leadership

It's tempting to want to go big at launch. Startup Brightline's content growth is strategic and steady—for the win

By Simona Covell

Two-year-old think tank The Brightline Initiative has run strategy workshops and supported networking platforms at high-profile events like TED and Davos, published three books and released a set of guiding principles for leaders. It has conducted thought leadership research and published reports with lauded publishers like The Economist Intelligence Unit, Quartz, Forbes and Harvard Business Review Analytic Services.

How does a young nonprofit think tank—you can count its team on the fingers of your hands—accomplish all

of that in such a short period?

Brick by brick, says executive director Ricardo Viana Vargas. Creating a global movement isn't a simple undertaking. Brightline Initiative's goal is to help leaders close the often too-costly gap between strategy design and strategy delivery. But it isn't a consulting firm; it's a coalition led by the Project Management Institute and global organizations Bristol-Myers Squibb, Saudi Telecom Company, Lee Hecht Harrison, Boston Consulting Group, Agile Alliance, NetEase and the

Technical University of Denmark. It targets C-suite executives and senior leaders of large enterprises, no matter the industry or location.

Yup, we'll say that again: We're talking about a not-for-profit initiative with an audience of extremely busy global executives and a mission that's undoubtedly ambitious.

That makes thought leadership content even more important in explaining Brightline's mission to its audience. When it comes to marketing itself, the potential for impact makes a brick-by-brick build essential. "Global awareness does not come with one big initiative. We started with a promise," says Vargas—that is, to begin to close

the divide between strategic ideas and great results. From that promise, "we started delivering—one event, one article, one social media post at a time." Because the programs were delivered in rolling waves and piece by piece, the team was able to test and learn to find a strategy that would reach the C-suite executives—a tough goal for a brand-new initiative.

The initiative was launched in January 2017 and officially debuted its first major outreach program via an October 2017 event with The Economist in New York City. From that grew research partnerships with globally recognized institutions, native advertising, networking platforms, and a stream of education delivered through articles, videos, infographics

and, most recently, a massive open online course headlined by a veritable who's who of corporate strategy.

Whether it's a workshop, an infographic or a book, "when you have the voice of your target audience talking about their challenges,

**"Global awareness does not come with one big initiative. ... We started delivering—one event, one article, one social media post at a time."
—Ricardo Viana Vargas, executive director, The Brightline Initiative**

it conveys credibility." Earning testimonials—from high-level executives, not just faceless references to "company x" or "company y"—and adding them into much of what the young organization produces engenders unmatched trust. Not everything has worked, and that has meant the team has had to pivot quickly, sometimes midstream. When a Brightline-supported event did not attract the expected senior executives, the team did not hesitate

to collaborate with the organizers to change course. When the demand for a workshop ran overcapacity, the team created an instructor's guide for leaders so they could take the workshop to their own organizations without a Brightline team member present.

When you're aiming to develop and promote new insights, "you have to adapt all the time," Vargas says. That means not getting hung up on the plans you made or the tactics you thought would work. "I flew several hundred thousand miles globally this year just trying to be close" to Brightline's core audience, Vargas says. Sometimes plans materialized, and sometimes they didn't. "If you're building a new movement, you need to take some risks."



iStock/skegbydave

BUILDING TRUST

The team at The Brightline Initiative spends their days connecting with the C-suite. But when it comes to getting buy-in from their board of directors, building trust is the key. Getting there is all about keeping it simple.

That means explaining every detail as clearly as possible, and making sure the mission and the process are clear, Vargas says. "If people cannot understand, they will not buy in," he says.

Members of the board "must trust you." That trust is critical when a planned initiative takes an unexpected turn. When a board is fully bought in, they are supportive of the kinds of midstream changes that are essential for a young, fast-moving initiative.

"Don't be afraid," Vargas advises. Honesty—especially in the face of failure—"will increase your reputation."

To Gate *or* Not to Gate?

That is the question. But it's just one you should be asking about the exchange of content for user information. Here are four more to get you started.

By Chris Blose



Y

ou're scrolling through LinkedIn or slogging through your email inbox when something catches your eye—a headline or call to action you can't resist.

You click. You land on a page and see the beginnings of the promised content, but a virtual gate blocks your way: the form. You now have a choice. Is that piece of content hiding behind the gate worth a little extra effort and, more important, a little slice of who you are?

This scenario plays out repeatedly in our digital world, and the resulting interaction doesn't have to be negative or intrusive. Shape your strategy by putting yourself in the shoes of the person on the other end of the interaction. (This should be easy, since you are a consumer of content, too.)

"We always ask ourselves, what content can we create that people would be happy to exchange their information for?" says Lindsay Kolowich, senior marketing manager for HubSpot, a marketing software company with a track record of experience and experimentation in the practice of gating content.

The gate debate doesn't yield a simple conclusion. Every content program comes with its own business objectives, goals and audiences. A program designed around mass awareness may skew toward open access, for example, while a lead-gen campaign will use selective gating to gather information about your readers.

Still, a few deeper questions can lead you to a sound strategy. Start with these four.

Unsplash/Rowan Heuvel



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Is Your Content Better Than What People Can Find for Free?

"The biggest misconception I see is that you can gate anything and everything," Kolowich says. "I see far too many companies gating content that is not valuable enough to gate."

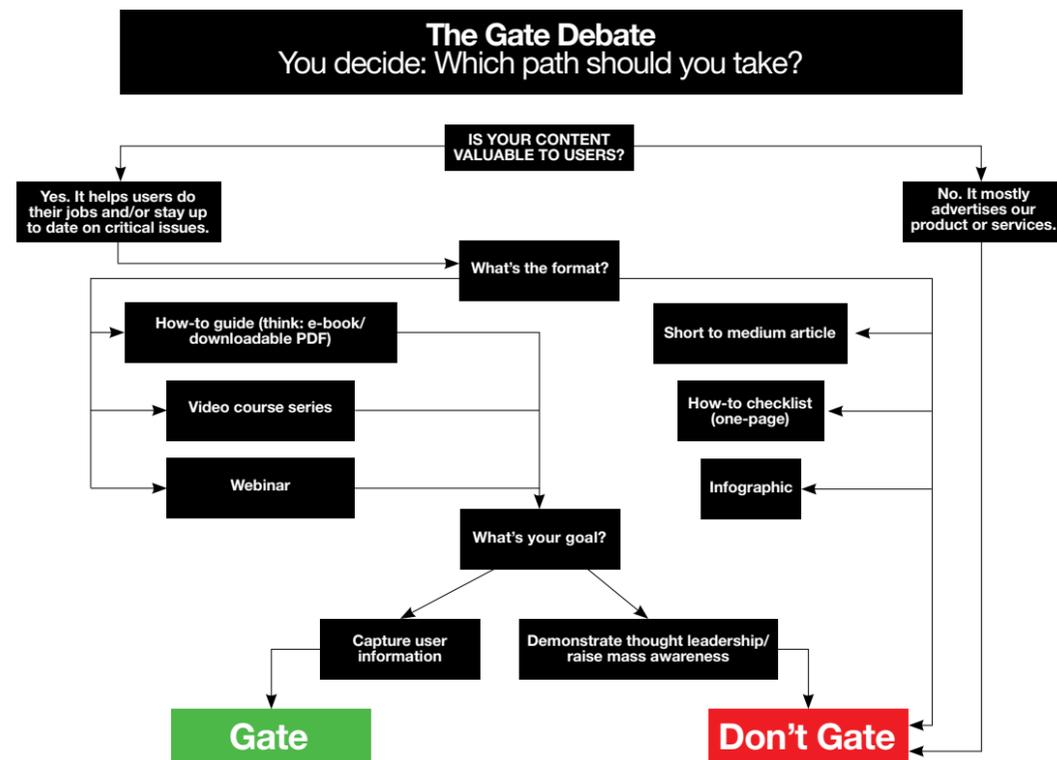
Even if you're providing content free of charge, it needs to offer clear value. A transaction is taking place even if no money changes hands—X content for your information—and transactions work best when both parties walk away with something.

This mindset often leads to a "premium" approach to gated content. Comprehensive guides, data-rich whitepapers and similar premium pieces that promise to help readers in their professional lives feel more valuable and are less likely to be duplicated elsewhere.

For example, Kolowich says HubSpot has had its best results with e-books, live video webinars and master classes that feature subject matter experts—in other words, insider, high-level resources that help professional marketers do their jobs better.

So be selective with your gating, and when you create premium pieces, think about what perspective or practical wisdom only your organization can provide to set it apart from the free resources that are readily available.

Is It the Right Content Type and Format for Gating?



When asking for personal information, short and simple content won't cut it. "Gating things like infographics or short one-page checklists typically doesn't work, especially in B2B," Kolowich notes. "Those simply aren't meaty enough for people to fill out a form."

Hence the prevalence of guides, e-books and long-form reports that promise proprietary data or industry insights. For instance, a pay-per-click software company such as AdStage might offer a simple proposition: Give us five to six bits of information, and we'll give you PPC benchmark data for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and more—data you can use in your own work. The user gets value; the company gets a warm lead.

Consider this, too: That report or guide is still worth delivering as a PDF, even in 2019.

"Another major misconception I hear is that PDFs are dying," Kolowich says. "Some of us might even wish that were true since there are more creative ways to deliver content—and how can something developed in the '90s be the preferred format? But we've tested, and our personas still love and ask for PDFs."

So while PDFs as magazine-delivery mechanisms may be dead, PDFs as premium content delivery mechanisms are not. More testing is required to know for sure, but Kolowich and team suspect it has something to do not only with the convenience of a downloadable PDF that can be easily accessed offline, but also the experience of gratification one gets from the process: Fill out the form, click download, get a reward. (They're even printable for people who still want to absorb their wisdom via hard copy.)

When HubSpot tested partial gating on long-form digital pages—an alternative to the traditional PDF delivery—it seemed as if the user experience would be one of instant gratification. If users filled out the form, the rest of the content would suddenly appear before their eyes.

"But we got feedback from our users that it didn't feel as fulfilling somehow—didn't feel like content accessed that easily was worth filling out a form for," Kolowich says. "Some people just missed that they had gotten anything at all. So improving that pop—that feeling of 'physically' exchanging value, even if it's still online—is important."

And remember there's one other benefit of the classic delivery-via-PDF process: the thank-you page. That's valuable real estate for making a connection and delivering even more content based on a person's stated interest.



Is It Valuable to People Who Don't Know You Already?

This question comes down to the purpose of your content.

For example, associations often face the need to not only serve existing members but also cast a net to find new members. These two needs create a natural tension: You have the urge to gate all of your ongoing content as a pure member benefit, but if you do so, how will the people who aren't yet members see your value? There's an added challenge when you consider exactly how you'll gather data on those prospective members.

Rand Fishkin, formerly of Moz and now of SparkToro, offers some helpful guidance in one of his iconic whiteboard sessions. For any content program (or individual piece of content), weigh the importance of audience size or reach and ongoing marketing benefits versus the need for detailed information on readers. If the former outweighs the later, maintain open access. If the latter outweighs the former, consider gating.

Under that formula, your daily digital news and recurring magazine content are often going to be most valuable to you as a way to prove your expertise to readers. Then convert them with specialized, premium one-offs that help them do their jobs.

That's good as a general rule, especially for associations, but as Fishkin also points out, open access and gating aren't all-or-nothing prospects. There are always exceptions. Even Moz keeps one of its most valuable pieces of content, the ever-present and often-cited *Moz Beginner's Guide to SEO*, in front of the gate, presumably because it is the company's own gateway to authority.

So your end goals matter. And so does the funnel.



Is It Part of a Journey Along the Funnel?

Any strategic discussion about gating should also include a conversation about where content fits into the sales funnel.

As a basic guideline, it's wise to keep top-of-funnel content open and free to all. You want as many readers as possible to find your expertise and industry insights—all delivered in ongoing coverage via articles, infographics and other content types.

But as you go deeper into the funnel, and as readers trust you more after increased exposure, limited gating opportunities open up. A mid-funnel article with detailed how-to advice offers the possibility for a newsletter sign-up, aka subscription-gen. And then, even deeper, a premium guide on a topic of interest to them is more likely to yield information via true gating such as lead-gen forms.

Even with those bottom-funnel pieces, there are ways to blend open and gated content to get users to supply the data you desire. You might offer a small portion of a whitepaper or guide for free, with a prompt to supply information to get the full guide, for instance.

With that said, Kolowich offers another note of caution on the latter "partial gating" approach. Testing at HubSpot has shown that it works best on content that already has some established search authority. In other words, if you run an ongoing program of reports and premium guides, choose the ones that are already performing well in organic search as candidates for partial gating.

And don't forget that your form, and the amount of information you ask for, will vary based on your goals or content types and sometimes can be expanded in steps along a user journey. Kolowich gives the example of HubSpot Academy's video series. The landing page has the entire first video available for free. If users like what they see, they sign up for more using a relatively simple form. Future interactions may yield increasing amounts of information.

"When it comes to how much information you ask from users, do you need more leads, or do you need more high-quality leads?" Kolowich offers. "That actually changes the length of the forms and also the approach to content. To get more information, we have to offer even more comprehensive, meatier content."

Your own answers, and approaches, will vary based on your ultimate goals, needs and audiences. But in any case, be sure you're asking questions before you ask too much of your audience. ■



What does the age of Alexa mean for content marketers? Waste of time or marketing must-do? And if it's time to get Siri about voice, how do you even get started?

By Linda Formichelli

Talk, Talk

Say someone types “What’s the difference

between a direct deposit and a wire transfer?” into Google. The desired journey is clear: You hope your beautifully SEO-optimized content on that topic soars to the top of the search engine results. The consumer reads or watches it and then takes the next step in your brand funnel goal.

But what about when someone says, “Hey, Alexa, what’s the difference between a direct deposit and a wire transfer?”

Are you ready for that?

Should you be? Is voice a content marketing opportunity your brand should even be going after?

You don’t want to be *that* brand—the one that said “Why bother?” to digital marketing in 1999, and then had to scurry along behind the first-adopters. But you also don’t want to be the one that threw major resources into Google+ in 2011 and ended up regretting it.

We got top voice marketing experts on the line to share their insights on whether content marketers should be involved in voice marketing—and if so, how to get started and how to measure results.

The Rise of Voice

Siri, Cortana, Alexa and Google Assistant are virtual assistants that perform tasks for users, such as doing internet searches and ordering Uber rides. They’re the “voices” of Apple, Microsoft, Amazon and Google, respectively, and they work across many devices, from phones and tablets to video game consoles and smart speakers. Because they’re called up when the consumer can’t conveniently use a screen—or don’t have access to one, such as with voice-first devices like the Amazon Echo and Google Home—the user receives a voice result to their query.

The stats tell us that many consumers would rather talk than type. The March 2018 *Voicebot Smart Speaker Consumer Adoption Report* states 19.7 percent of U.S. adults have smart speakers, up from less than 1 percent of the population just two years ago. And by 2020, 30 percent of web-browsing sessions will be done without a screen, according to Gartner.

Why Voice?

Research shows a growing trend, but for content marketers important questions remain:

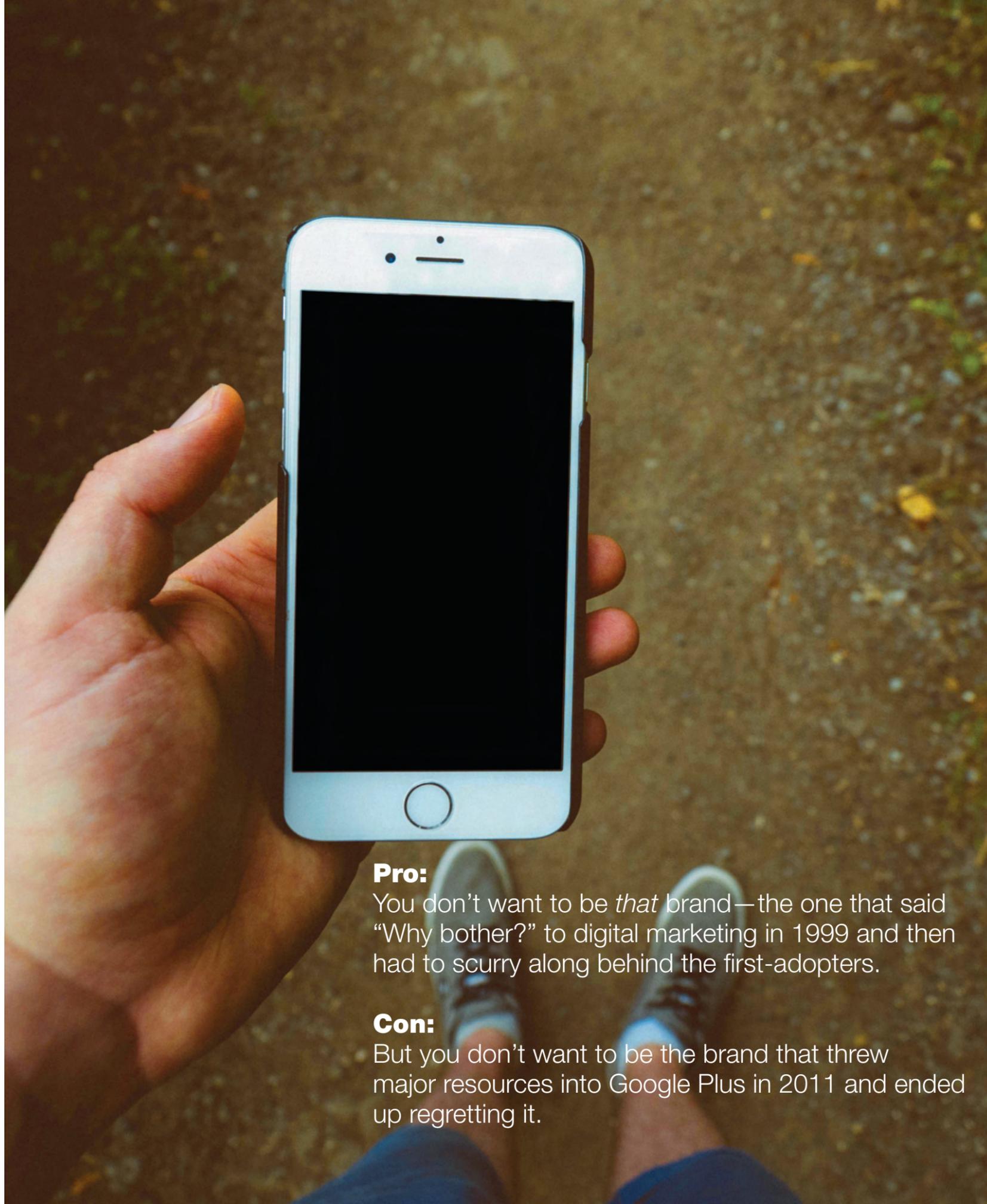
- 1) Will your hard work even get found? (The answer: Maybe.)
- 2) Can you track results? (The answer: No.)
- 3) Should you jump on board despite the answers to 1) and 2)? (The answer: Yes.)

Here are four compelling reasons to get involved with voice, even if you can’t guarantee—or even track—the results.

Voice will be big ... probably.

Since 2016, Google has been signaling in presentations and keynotes that it’s investing heavily in voice. When the 800-pound gorilla of search makes a move, industries follow.

Unsplash/Jamie Street



Pro:

You don’t want to be *that* brand—the one that said “Why bother?” to digital marketing in 1999 and then had to scurry along behind the first-adopters.

Con:

But you don’t want to be the brand that threw major resources into Google Plus in 2011 and ended up regretting it.



QUICK TUTORIAL

How to grab position 0 in Google

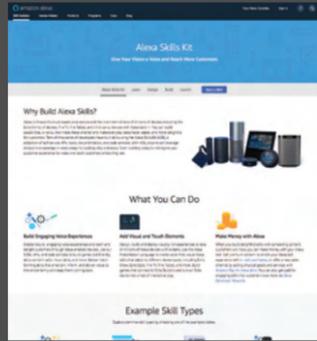
Here’s how to format a successful snippet—which gets pulled in by virtual assistants to answer voice searches

`<h1>How do I get a featured snippet?</h1>`
(Format the question in Header 1 style. Use a long-tail keyword with a question word, though you can also play with “implied” question words like should and does. Search Engine Land says questions of six words or more tend to show featured snippets.)

`<p>A featured snippet is also known as position 0 in Google search results. Here’s how to get your answer there.</p>`
(Be quick with your lede; featured snippets are short and sweet.)

`Valuable tip 1.`
`Valuable tip 2.`
`Valuable tip 3.`
(Good organization, like numbered lists, bulleted lists and proper use of bolding, is key here. Instead of a list, a definition, table or other format may work better for your content.)

`<p>Now let’s delve into the details.</p>`
(If you top a blog post or webpage with a snippet, be sure to let the reader know you have more details coming up.)



Alexa, How Do I Launch a Skill?

Want to create your own Alexa Skill or Google Action? Visit developer.amazon.com/alexa-skills-kit to learn how to create and publish Alexa Skills, and developers.google.com/actions for Google Actions. Just as with an app, your skill or action needs to be approved by the relevant platforms before it can be published in each marketplace.

If you want to take it even further, an exciting development for content marketers is that Amazon recently developed “Consumables”—in-skill purchases such as premium content, subscriptions, bundles and other products that are relevant for consumers as they use your skill. Skill creators receive 70 percent of the list price for Consumables. Right now, most of the examples Amazon offers relate to games, but creative content marketers can develop products to go along with their skill. Visit Amazon’s developer site to learn how to create your own Consumable.

Finally, you need to let your audience know your skill or action is available; the voice-first platforms won’t let users know independently. You’re already promoting your brand’s traditional content, like blogs or newsletters, so doing the same for your voice content shouldn’t be too much of a stretch. Your online article CTA may be: “Ask Alexa for ABC Bank’s ‘Know Your Money’ skill to get tips on handling your account balance.”

Now is the perfect time to start. Consumables are brand new as of this writing, and the barrier to entry for Amazon Skills and Google Actions is low. While there are already thousands of the latter two out there, you can still count yourself among the trailblazers.

By 2020,
30 percent of
web-browsing
sessions
will be done
without a screen,
according to
Gartner.

You could adopt a wait-and-see attitude, but if you do you, you may miss out on what’s shaping up to be the voice revolution. “I think you want to be involved now to gain knowledge and experience in the medium,” says Erik Newton, vice president of customer marketing and head of SEO at BrightEdge, an SEO and content management platform business. “That way you don’t risk being left behind on a channel that grows to, say, 33 percent of interactions.”

Rowena Track, former global vice president of digital for Cigna and current CEO of iVitalité, urges content marketers to look back to the advent of social media—and not make the same mistake now that many businesses did back then. Track was in financial services when social platforms started cropping up, and industry leaders joked about the idea of financial services companies using these “teenager” platforms. “And now, as we all know, Twitter can move markets,” Track says.

Voice search boosts brand awareness.

When a voice device reads an answer to a user’s question, it mentions the website the answer came from. “In a way, it’s like a radio mention,” says Newton. “When you sponsor content on NPR, it’s not the most commercial message, but you do get brand awareness.”

Brand awareness is already difficult to measure, and with voice it’s devilishly difficult. After a radio sponsorship, you can measure the lift in engagement and purchases, but with voice, it’s so early that accurate measurement doesn’t yet exist. (We’ll talk more about measuring results later.)

Voice search sends locals to your door.

Working to appear in voice search results is crucial for local businesses like retail stores, banks and restaurants. “People often use voice search because they’re in their car and their hands are busy, and they’re looking for food, things to do or an item to purchase,” says Newton. “Local searches have very high purchase intent, so being the result that comes up is particularly beneficial.” To take advantage of this fact, he recommends that content marketers make sure the local details on their websites are up to date, accurate and optimized. Also be sure your Google My Business listing is current and complete.

Your efforts do double (and triple) duty.

Even if they don’t pan out in terms of voice, all the strategies we’ll talk about next will most

likely improve the results of your traditional content marketing. Even better, it’s not too difficult to repurpose content you already have for voice.

How to Give Voice to Content

Voice search is much more competitive than text search because consumers get only a single result for a search. The big players in voice haven’t revealed how their virtual assistants decide which Google search result you’ll hear. In some cases, it chooses a result that’s in either position 1 or 0 (the featured snippet—see page 31). In other cases, the virtual assistant rotates through the top four results.

However it works, what it means for the content marketer is clear: If you’re not in the first four search results, in terms of voice you simply don’t exist. Here’s how to help your brand rise to the top.

Write like you talk.

Voice searchers use more casual phrasing than they would in a text search, says Sherry Bonelli, owner of Early Bird Digital Marketing. Content professionals should strive to write in a conversational tone to push content to the top of the results. Train your content pros to swap stuffy language, \$10 words and jargon for an easy-to-digest (and -speak) writing style.

Create FAQs.

Voice searches are more likely to be a question than a keyword search, says Newton. For example, while a consumer may type “pineapple peeling tips” into a search engine, with a voice search they’d ask, “What’s the best way to peel a pineapple?”

Content marketers can appeal to both types of searchers by using long-tail keywords with the question words: who, what, when, where, why and how. FAQs are the perfect type of content for this. For example, a produce marketing association may create an FAQ page on how to peel and chop particularly difficult fruits like mangoes, avocados and pineapples.

The more FAQs you have—and the more specific they are—the better. “If you have 50, 100, 200 pages of FAQs about your space and your products, that’s good content for the internet. And it’s also good content for voice,” says Newton. “When people do long-tail keyword searches, they’re much more likely to convert because they’re looking for some-



Erik Newton,
vice president of
customer
marketing and
head of SEO at
BrightEdge, and
Rowena Track,
CEO of iVitalité

If you're not in the first four search results, in terms of voice you simply don't exist.

thing that's very precise. As Google gets better at interpreting intent, it's going to reward you for this type of content."

Wondering what your target market wants to know? Bonelli recommends the tool AnswerthePublic.com. Just type in a keyword, and it will show you the questions people are entering into Google and Bing around that topic.

Grab position 0.

Ever notice how, on some searches, Google pulls up the answer to your question directly from a website? For example, type "How do I shop for a mortgage?" and the top search result (below the paid search ads) is an actual list of tips from investopedia.com. That's called *position 0* or a *featured snippet*. And it's the result a virtual assistant will read in response to a voice search—so you want to get it. See the story on page 31 for how-to smarts.

Calm down and write on.

If you're ready to make the leap into voice but worried about the time and resources it will take, relax. You don't need to overhaul your content department, or even create new content for voice: Simply repurpose and tweak what you already have. "Make it voice-friendly, the same way you made your content YouTube friendly or Twitter friendly," says Track. For example, you might go through old blog posts and optimize them for voice by adding featured snippet copy, or repurpose content from your newsletter into FAQ pages.

Reconsider ROI

The call to action is a key component of content that converts. It also gives you something to measure. With more traditional forms of content, like blog posts and social media, it's easy to articulate your CTA: Visit this webpage. Sign up for that financial newsletter. Download this industry guide. Then you measure how many people visited the page, signed up for the newsletter or downloaded the guide.

But voice-first search results don't allow for visiting, signing up or downloading. Some devices, like Google Home and Amazon Echo, let the consumer send a search result to their phone or tablet, but the extra step makes it difficult for content marketers to track

Unsplash/Ben Koldie



CASE STUDY

How Cigna Found Its Voice on Alexa

The health insurance company is boosting its thought leader cred with Alexa Skills and Google Actions

Setting aside 1 to 2 percent of your marketing budget for disruption and revamping your current content to be more voice-friendly are easy and economical ways to get started. But if you want to be a leader in the voice revolution, consider creating content specifically for voice.

Alexa Skills and Google Actions are the voice equivalent of apps that people can install on their devices, which give those devices more capabilities and access to more websites and information. They're not difficult to develop: You consider a need that your brand can fulfill in a voice-only environment, and build your action or skill using the relevant voice assistant's developer platform.

That's what health insurance company Cigna did with its Answers by Cigna Alexa Skill. The skill launched in March 2018 with answers to 150 common consumer questions, such as "What's a formulary?" Within a few months, the skill garnered 3,142 users, 11 five-star customer reviews and tons of media attention. "We were not expecting the media reaction we got," says Rowena Track, former global vice president of digital for Cigna and current CEO of iVitalité. "That was very positive." By September, Cigna had expanded Answers by Cigna to 250 questions and answers.

Before she moved to her new company, Track had been working on a road map for Answers by Cigna to answer Medicare-related questions—proving that voice marketing isn't just for millennials, even though research from CapTech reports that 53 percent of smart-speaker owners are millennials or younger, and 32 percent are Gen Xers. "All you need to have is a voice, and most people have a voice," says Track. "For seniors, who may have dexterity and mobility issues, voice is a very attractive application to offer information and to engage them.

"We made our information available in as many channels as we can. Some people prefer to call the call center, some prefer to engage us on voice and everything in between," says Track. The benefits are many: Answers by Cigna is showing consumers that the company is progressive, innovative and customer-centric.

"Answers by Cigna was a huge brand moment for us," says Track.

conversion. Measuring results is tricky enough with traditional content.

So how can you do it on voice?

Redefine success.

Bret Kinsella, publisher and research director at voicebot.ai, says we need to stop trying to use the same KPIs for voice that we use for other content. He likens websites to cathedrals, and social media and landing pages to the bazaars we built around our cathedrals to feed people into them.

"Content marketers who attempt to cram voice into their cathedral, to simply imitate their website and track to similar metrics, will quickly become frustrated. Voice is different," says Kinsella. "Sometimes voice experiences will be about new user velocity combined with conversion and other times they will be about the level of engagement. In fact, user attention per session as a corollary for engagement is often much better on voice than you will ever see on the web.

"If so," adds Kinsella, "what is that value and how can you measure it? Are there new metrics you need to set up? Content marketers need to start thinking about how they can define success within a voice-only environment and they should design their voice apps to align with those objectives."

We got this, content marketers. Just as we did with the internet, social and mobile, in the end we'll figure out what metrics to measure for voice and how to track them.

Budget for disruption.

Even if it takes years for content marketers to hash out the right metrics and ways to evaluate them, Track recommends setting aside 1 to 2 percent of your marketing budget *now* to try innovative and disruptive ideas. "We're not talking millions of dollars," she says. "We're talking about a small amount of money that every marketer, I think, should set aside for disruptive technologies if they want to be a modern marketer."

Newton agrees that content marketers need to stay on the cutting edge—and that this sometimes requires taking risks.

"It's always good to be aware of new things, reading about them, and running experiments," he says. "Voice is large and it's growing fast, so businesses should double down on what they're doing with content marketing for voice." ■

A man in a dark blue suit and checkered shirt sits on a patterned bench in a room with dark wood paneling. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the man and the bench against the dark background.

Insuring

Results

**Amica Marketing
Officer Mike Plante
details how content
marketing drives
customer service,
trust and lasting
relationships**

By Chris Matt

Photos by Jason Evans



“Amazon has trained every consumer to expect a frictionless path to on-line purchase, and it’s not just millennials who now expect and want that.”



Financial services marketers have an inherent challenge in selling their products and services because consumers often find those products difficult to understand. That certainly is the perception within the insurance industry. Plus, let’s be honest: Risk management is not always the most fun thing to think about.

Amica Mutual Insurance Co. understood these two challenges and tackled them head-on when building its content marketing strategy for its home, auto and life product lines.

At the core of the Lincoln, Rhode Island-based insurer’s content program are answers to questions current and future policyholders might have about insurance. Amica understands that connecting with consumers who are Googling insurance products could be an important first step in a long-standing relationship.

Because that’s Amica’s mission: Create peace of mind and build enduring relationships with its customers. For the last couple of years, content marketing has been at the forefront of the insurance company’s efforts. Amica launched its content hub for life insurance, Amica Life Lessons, in 2017 and followed up with two more hubs—for auto and home insurance—in 2018.

We sat down with Mike Plante, Amica marketing officer, to discuss why content marketing aligns so tightly with Amica’s brand goals—and explore the lessons he’s learned along the way.

What drove your decision a couple of years ago to consider content marketing?

At the time, most of our campaigns and communications were bottom funnel. They were very much focused on encouraging the audience to get an insurance quote. When we looked at that, and also considered that consumers had the misperception that life insurance was a challenging, complex product, we very quickly realized that there was a hole there.

We launched Amica Life Lessons to better educate consumers on life insurance, very simply. Originally, the site included a handful of articles, some guides and—on the interactive side—a needs calculator and a quoting engine. When we launched the site, though, we very quickly saw, based on observing how consumers were using it, that we really needed to introduce a much deeper level of educational content.

Once we started seeing success, we just knew that we needed to extend that same approach to other product lines—home and auto insurance.

Was it challenging to make the case to your senior leaders? What did you use for your proof points?

The concept of content marketing was supported from the get-go, and we gained support from our



“Consumers are expecting to be able to purchase paper towels and sneakers and insurance in the same way.”

senior leadership team by clearly communicating our objectives. When you think about our brand and our dedication to customer service and helpfulness, the concept made sense and was bought into right away.

We really set out to demonstrate how we could use content marketing to answer simple questions consumers have about insurance—to better inform customers and prospects alike.

We did have to set new expectations on what success looks like, though. Site data was helpful in that we had started to prove out that this type of approach and this type of content, when shared with the right audience, could make an impact.

How do you track content performance?

Historically, a lot of our successful conversations were around cost per lead, quote-complete rate and conversion to issued policy. And those things are all still important, obviously. But we really had to introduce other metrics that were just as important in a content program, those more rooted in engagement. Things like time on page, bounce rate, scroll depth and click-through rate to related content.

What are the core messaging pillars of Amica's content strategy?

At the core of the Amica brand is our desire to provide peace of mind and build lasting relationships. We really strive to provide customers with extraordinary service, helpfulness and advocacy at all stages of their relationship with us. Through content, we truly have the opportunity to create a positive brand impression from that very first touch point.

We strongly believe that content marketing complements what's most aligned to our brand truth. We feel the content we deliver can provide consumers with greater peace of mind and greater comfort in knowing that we're helping them to make more informed financial decisions.

And then there's the trust factor. Before making any financial decision—especially for a financial-related product—consumers need to clearly see the value in it. But they also have to trust the brand that they're about to do business with. And we really do believe that content marketing is a way for us to demonstrate not only the value of our brand but to help consumers realize the efforts we're putting in to help them make more informed decisions.

Content marketing is still fairly new to Amica. What have you learned and switched up thus far?

I think where we've evolved is related to integrating content into other channels. As social media became an even more important channel for us, one lacking



The Amazon Effect on Insurance

Just because you can't add a life insurance policy to your Amazon cart doesn't mean insurance industry marketers don't feel the impact of the retail-disrupter-turned-unstoppable-force.

“They're really masters of aligning the product and recommendations with the consumer,” says Amica's Mike Plante. “They're also masters of removing almost all of the friction in the buying process.”

Plante and his team know the user experience Amazon has created for consumers today extends to the way people research and eventually buy insurance.

“I think Amazon has trained the consumer and has set new expectations for the consumer that buying online can be, and should be, easy,” Plante says.

“We know because of that, consumers are expecting to be able to purchase paper towels and sneakers and insurance in the same way.”

piece of our social program was content. We wanted to take it beyond just a one-way conversation and trying only to drive quotes.

We really saw the need to build engagement through our social channels. And based on the past six months to a year of really integrating our content hub content into our social strategy, our engagement on the social side is stronger than it's ever been.

Consumer needs for information about auto, home and life insurance are by definition different, yet they're all part of one brand experience. How does Amica manage the shifts in voice, tone and goals across three stand-alone content hub programs?

It's definitely critical that we go to market with a consistent message across the three products, where possible. We do have the same core teams working across the three business lines. Part of that was a conscious decision to really allow that team to observe what's working well and what's not working so well within each product line and apply those insights and learnings to the other product lines.

That said, content marketing isn't the only thing that the team works on. That's a huge benefit in that we're always trying to integrate what we've learned from our content marketing program into other channels wherever it makes sense.

What is something that Amica does in marketing that would surprise people?

I think people would be surprised at how small our team is running our advertising and marketing communication programs: We're about 20 people. We, of course, work with a group of agency partners, and we couldn't tackle what we do without them.

The other thing that comes to mind is truly how dedicated and protective we are of our brand. I think people would be very surprised what we're willing to turn down because it doesn't align with the brand. We're regularly approached with opportunities from a sponsorship perspective or with programs that could have massive reach and massive exposure for us. But when evaluating the opportunity, we will turn it down if it doesn't align with who we are.

What role does market research play in communicating with your target audience?

Before making a purchase, specifically from a financial services company, consumers need to trust them, and they need to see value in what's being offered to them. Their behaviors related to that process change constantly, as well as their preferences and how they'd like to be communicated with by a financial services company.



Content Marketing Lessons From the Dead

Becoming a content marketer has provided Mike Plante with a different perspective on one of his all-time favorite bands, the Grateful Dead. Plante talks about how The Dead, as well as Phish and Pearl Jam—his two other favorites—have used their music, and live shows specifically, to build loyal audiences.

Similarly, Plante is using Amica's content marketing program to drive its own audience development efforts—with a little less showmanship than those bands, of course. And no tailgating.

"Those three bands are masters of content marketing and audience development," says Plante. "All of them not only allowed, but encouraged, fans to record their shows and share shows. It's really how each of them took off and built a following."

It's important for us to be able to talk to consumers in the way that they prefer, in the channels that they prefer. We need to keep a constant pulse on that.

So we have a long history of ongoing research, whether it's through more traditional methods like focus groups and surveys or more recent approaches like machine learning and social listening. We use those multiple sources of information to allow us to continue to keep pace with the changing needs of consumers.

What's a recent insight from your research that stands out?

One that has stood out is that it's not just millennials who have made the shift online. Meaning, when we think about improving our online processes, it's not just the millennial that's looking for an easier path to purchase. It's just as much the boomer that's doing that. And we've seen that across auto, home and life. That was definitely an "aha!" moment.

I think we've also seen that Amazon has trained every consumer to expect a frictionless path to online purchase, and it's not just millennials who now expect and want that.

What are Amica's top challenges in reaching its target audiences?

Our target audiences are starting to cut the cord. And they're changing the ways that they interact with advertising. They're not exposed to quite the same level of advertising they used to be from a TV perspective. Also, consumers are continuing to adopt the use of ad-blocking services, and that's another significant challenge for us.

What are some of the biggest lessons you've learned as a marketer working in the insurance industry?

I think there was a time when we believed that the consumer would be ready to ask for an insurance quote on their first interaction with us. For the most part, we've learned that's not true. As I've learned more about our core customer, I've found they are truly unlike any customer I've seen before, in that they want to become as informed as possible before making a financial decision. They're conducting research on their own, they want control over it, and they just want to be informed.

And along the way, if we can demonstrate the value of the brand but also demonstrate how we can help them educate themselves to make the best decision possible, that's a win for us. And that's obviously a very different approach than just constantly being in front of someone asking them to get a quote. ■



"It's important for us to be able to talk to consumers in the way that they prefer, in the channels that they prefer. We need to keep a constant pulse on that."

THOUGHT

**Industry know-how
and audience-first
strategy are
ingredients for
success in B2B
foodservice
content marketing**

By Ashley Greene Bernick

FOR FOOD

When's the last time you looked at a picture of food?

Unless you're on a digital cleanse (in which case, more power to you), it was probably in the last 24 hours. Whether you consider yourself part of the food-culture movement or not, the media supporting it—from the late Anthony Bourdain's *Parts Unknown* to #foodporn on Instagram—is impossible to escape.

Greater exposure to global cuisines, evolving perceptions of health and a deep hunger for memorable food moments have created a generation of highly educated and vocal diners who are choosier than ever. That means food pros and restaurant brands are serving a clientele that's increasingly knowledgeable about flavors and cooking techniques and interested in their food's back story. Once behind-the-scenes work is now taking center stage, from ingredient sourcing to labor practices to plating.

The stakes have been raised. Operators—chefs, restaurateurs, culinary directors, general managers and others—have to stay ahead (or at least keep pace) with this food movement. They need deep insights into who they're feeding as well as creative inspiration to get their own brand messaging noticed.

And as part of an industry with notoriously thin margins, foodservice pros need to sharpen their restaurant management and business smarts, too.

Enter leading food industry suppliers, distributors and vendors, who welcome the opportunity. Just over one-third of B2B restaurant and food brands use content marketing, and 24 percent planned to increase their investment in content marketing in 2018, according to a report from Informa Engage.

Attractive, relevant and actionable content educates and inspires their audiences, fuels their own products' success and ultimately nurtures

long-term customer relationships. But in such a saturated food media landscape, how does B2B food content consistently offer value and stand out? We talked to three foodservice brands creating quality experiences about their recipes for content marketing success.

Owning Authority

Getting in front of restaurant pros requires more than artful, well-lit food shots. You need in-the-trenches kitchen smarts, a strong pulse on the industry and publishing know-how.

That's how Sterling, Virginia-based Cuisine Solutions, a premium foodservice supplier that specializes in sous-vide preparation, approaches content marketing. At the crux of its strategy is *Sous-Vide*, a sophisticated biannual culinary magazine aimed at demonstrating Cuisine Solutions' internal expertise and demystifying the sous-vide process. Once a cooking method reserved for high-end dining, sous vide (in which food is vacuum-sealed in plastic and submerged in temperature-controlled water) is showing up everywhere from Starbucks pastry cases to Williams-Sonoma shelves.

As with any culinary trend though, there's a ton of misinformation about sous vide out there, says Jennifer Prophet, director of marketing at Cuisine Solutions.

"We're trying to make sure people do their due diligence with food safety," she says.

In addition to ingredients and food preparation, *Sous-Vide* profiles innovative chefs and explores dining trends and destinations, as well as lifestyle topics like travel and gift ideas.

Prophet's team has found success leveraging the 2-year-old magazine at trade shows, university campus demos and events like Maker Faire, attracting creative artisans of all types.

"[The magazine] creates open lines of communication and more engaging topics of conversation when we have meetings with clients," she says. For a recent event for chefs working at Hilton Hotels & Resorts, the hospitality company requested copies of *Sous-Vide* to distribute for training and educational purposes.

Precision Content Creation

The magazine's parameters are strict, which amplifies Cuisine Solutions' thought leadership and allows it to dominate its niche. "Every article that we've put in the magazine has to focus on sous vide in some way," says Michelle Thomas, managing editor at HZ, Cuisine Solutions' agency partner, based in Washington, D.C. "That includes the interviews with the chefs—talking about how they use sous vide—to when we did a roundup of the trendy food halls, looking at how food vendors are using sous vide in that context,



"They love seeing beautifully plated dishes, interesting ingredients and techniques. And they love meat—meat, fire, knives. They love that stuff."
—Frans van der Lee, president and co-founder, Chef's Roll

Clockwise from bottom left: Getty Images/Ronnie Kaufman, Getty Images/Ansonmiao, Chart Van Rooy, Nick Karvounis

and the process stories—really getting a deep dive into how people are using this specific technique. It seems like such a specific niche, but once you get into it, there's so much content."

To ensure an exact level of accuracy and best practice in recipes, how-to's and other process-specific pieces, *Sous-Vide* leverages Cuisine Solutions' internal expert chefs, many of whom have years of experience in professional kitchens. Some have even earned a Michelin star (or three).

"There's such a precision to sous vide," says Senior Managing Creative Director Gillian Goodman, who also works for HZ. In addition to participating in editorial brainstorming and formulating recipes, these chefs attend magazine photo shoots, ensuring everything from the ingredients to the props to the finished dishes are up to snuff.

For example, issue four featured recipes using eggs from different birds. "What we're calling a perfect egg has to look perfect to a really discerning audience. They would know if it wasn't perfect because of the opacity of the egg white or the consistency of the yolk," Goodman says.

Feeding the Masses: B2B and B2C

While Cuisine Solutions' primary customers are food service operators, the magazine's team found the growing popularity of the sous-vide technique among home-cook consumers is an opportunity to expand the brand's reach. In addition to being available for purchase on the Cuisine Solutions website, copies are available at major retailers like Costco and Whole Foods, as well as Barnes & Noble.

Speaking to different audiences—professional chefs and home cooks of varying skill levels—requires strategic editorial planning. "[We] come up with a nice balance of recipes on all ends of the spec-

"Something that's unique about restaurant owners is they don't have a typical 9 to 5. They're always moving; they're always on the go."

— Meghan Kavanaugh, content marketing manager, Upserve

trum: something for the beginners, something for the intermediate cook and something for more advanced cooks," says Michelle Svechamy, account supervisor at HZ. "Similarly, in all of the content supporting the recipes—what's new in the food space, what chefs we're profiling—we really try to speak to all of those audiences and provide something for each of those groups."

These diverse audiences also affect how food is styled at shoots. Recipe photos focus on finished dishes presented on simple surfaces or attractive, but not flashy, dishware. "Everything is plated elegantly, but simply. The key is: It's not about anything else in the picture, it's just about the food," Prophet says. This prevents readers from placing boundaries around the dishes: They could just as easily be served in a restaurant as they could in a (very trendy) home kitchen.

Required Restaurant Reading

For many foodservice pros, fulfillment comes from feeding others and expressing themselves through the culinary arts. But it's not just cooking-technique content this audience craves. They're also business people, who, at the end of the day, need to manage staff, advance their careers, deal with HR issues and make ends meet. Independent chefs and restaurateurs in particular need business advice and insights specific to their unique operations.

Meeting this need is the goal of Restaurant Insider, an industry blog from Providence, Rhode Island-based restaurant management and point-of-sale software provider Upserve.

"Our typical reader is someone who is trying to do it all themselves, working around the clock, running a family business, having their sister help bus tables," says Content Marketing Manager Meghan Kavanaugh. "If we can help by giving them a marketing

Unsplash/FancyCrave

4-Star Culinary Content

Two best-in-class examples that'll get your creative juices flowing



The Dave Chang Show

The gist: David Chang, founder of restaurant empire Momofuku Restaurant Group and 2018's favorite food icon, hosts a weekly podcast covering, well, whatever he wants, it seems. This isn't Chang's first content rodeo. He co-created *Lucky Peach*, an edgy food and travel magazine that ran for six years, and this past year, he hosted Netflix's critically acclaimed *Ugly Delicious*.



Listen for: Unfiltered reflections on running a restaurant, conversations about gender equality and cultural representation in the culinary world, and a lot of parallels between food, sports and TV. Chang's diverse guest list ranges from teen snowboarding rock star (and Olympic gold medalist) Chloe Kim to filmmaker Rian Johnson to bakery darling and entrepreneur Christina Tosi.



Follow Chang's lead: The word "authentic" is overused today, but there's no better way to describe Chang's style. The show's a mix of thought catalogs and honest, emotional conversations. We also love the emails from Majordomo Media (Chang's new entertainment company) that supplement each pod episode with cheat sheets of terms or names from the episode, additional info about the guest and related media recommendations. They dig deeper into Chang's world and make the reader feel like they're part of his cool-friend club.



Toothache magazine

The gist: *Toothache* is "a food magazine for chefs, by chefs." Unsatisfied with the scarcity of food magazines developed for chefs—rather than home cooks and foodie consumers—San Francisco-based pastry chef Nick Muncy created *Toothache*. The magazine features high-profile chefs the likes of Albert Adrià (Tickets, Enigma and Pakta in Barcelona), Kim Alter (San Francisco's Nightbird) and Gabriela Cámara (Cala in San Francisco), who tell their stories through personal essays, Q&As and recipes.



Why grab a copy: A clean, white-space-rich, minimalist style lets gorgeous chef portraits and full-spread dish shots do all the visual heavy lifting. *Toothache* is almost as enjoyable to hold as it is to look at: The 100-plus-page magazine is printed on thick uncoated paper inside of sturdy cardboard covers (it comes with that amazing cardstock smell, too).



Take a page from *Toothache*: An industry vet, Muncy knows his audience and spares little time on the formalities of magazine writing. In an interview with Stack, he explains chefs are busy and often don't have time to indulge in literary long-form. "Thus, the writing is easy to read, easy to understand and in our own kitchen language," he says.

strategy or by telling them the hot new menu items that people are going to be looking for, it takes some of the pressure off and helps them execute on a small budget, with small bandwidth."

The blog lives on Upserve's main site and exists as a robust content-hub ecosystem, covering restaurant operation topics ranging from seasonal marketing to menu pricing and regulations to beverage trends.

The editorial strategy relies heavily on keyword research and measurement; monitoring site traffic and social distribution has uncovered that labor, training and staffing are popular topics with Upserve's readers, for example.

Industry Intel

This audience demands insider information. Food-service pros rely heavily on word-of-mouth, which inspired Restaurant Insider's "Restaurant Voices," first-person narratives in which owners, chefs and other industry vets share personal stories about culinary inspiration, making difficult business decisions and other restaurant topics. These pieces not only satisfy that need for peer advice but also ensure the authenticity of the storytelling and legitimize the insights.

Alongside these longer-form features are chunkier articles heavy on subheads, pull quotes and images, providing specific, actionable takeaways in a quick-hitting, digestible way. Kavanaugh attributes the success of these pieces to the lifestyle the audience leads: "Something that's unique about restaurant owners is they don't have a typical 9 to 5. They're always moving; they're always on the go."

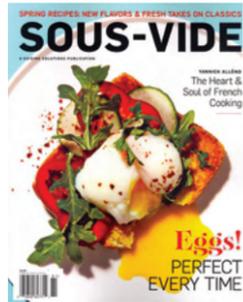
On the go also means formats that are content marketing slam dunks in other B2B industries may fall flat with chefs and owners. When Upserve experimented with webinars, sign-ups were decent, but attendance was low. "When you think about the day-to-day of a restaurant manager or owner, do they really have 45 minutes to stop and watch a webinar?" says Amber van Moessner, Upserve's senior director of communications. "It works for a lot of unique B2B audiences, but it didn't work for ours, so we needed to pivot and reassess."

Upserve recently launched the *Restaurant Insider Podcast*, a series in which chefs share their experience opening a restaurant. "It's a really great way to bring the voices of the restaurant owners right to [the audience]," van Moessner says. "A podcast is something they can listen to in the car." Early results for the podcast are good—nearly 300 downloads—and the content marketing team is excited to explore the format further.

Also on the table for Upserve: a print magazine that repurposes top-performing digital content. "Di-

Getty Images/Maskot, Clem Onojeghduo





Sous-Vide is Cuisine Solutions' biannual magazine aimed at demystifying the sous-vidé process, as well as inspiring culinary professionals and home cooks.

rect mail and printed materials are something we're experimenting with because it may not be acceptable as a restaurant manager to be on your phone even if the restaurant's slow, but it is more socially acceptable to flip through a magazine or a piece of mail," van Moessner says.

Finding new ways to fit into these people's daily lives, rather than pulling them away from it, is key. "Every company I've gone to, the biggest adjustment has been finding what works for that audience," says van Moessner, who previously held content marketing roles at Vimeo, Livestream, Mic and Newscred. "I would encourage people to think about that before they think of any of the traditional building blocks of strategy or measurement."

A Chef-First Content Plan

Placing a priority on being where the audience is has drastically evolved the content strategy for Chef's Roll.

Web developers by trade, Frans van der Lee and Thomas Keslinke created the online community after realizing chefs, cooks and other culinary pros needed a place they could network and flaunt their chops for new job opportunities. Today the site has more than 18,000 members from more than 140 countries.

Content sponsorships from foodservice brands—from ingredient purveyors to dishware companies—created an opportunity for Chef's Roll to make cinematic, social-first videos featuring chefs across the country. These videos have garnered tens of thousands—in some cases, millions—of views.

Speaking about the Chef's Roll's target audience of

restaurant pros, van der Lee, who serves as president, says, "They love seeing beautifully plated dishes, interesting ingredients and techniques. And they love meat—meat, fire, knives. They love that stuff."

For example, last year, Chef's Roll posted a video on Facebook of fishmonger Tommy Gomes breaking down an opah, a huge saltwater fish known for its gastronomic versatility. As Gomes fillets the fish, his voice-over explains its seven cuts of meat and their applications. The video's since gone viral: It has 24 million views and has been shared roughly 268,000 times.

"And the fishmonger is now quasi-famous," van der Lee says.

He attributes the success of Chef's Roll content to a couple of factors, the first of which is a lack of overt product promotion. About 90 percent of the site's videos are backed by brands, but Chef's Roll's in-house creative team works hard to ensure these align with the site's mission to inspire and connect chefs.

"We really push back with clients who say, 'Can you put these points in the voice-over?' We'll say, 'We can hit a few of them, and maybe we'll add some in the post copy instead,' or maybe we'll link to an article featuring the product," he says. "A lot of them understand—now seeing our results—that it's better to not be overly commercial and let us do our job of inspiring chefs."

The opah video was sponsored by knife company Wüsthof, and the only hints of the brand are the blade Gomes uses to break down the fish and a logo on the closing screen.

Another tactic that's central to Chef's Roll's con-

tent strategy is creating pieces specifically for social.

"Chefs are super busy. When they have time, they're on Instagram or Facebook," van der Lee says. "We've even found the best way to get in touch with chefs is through Facebook Messenger. Forget email."

For a partnership with Prosciutto di Parma, Chef's Roll filmed a chef breaking down a whole bone-in pig leg and then creating four unique dishes with the meat. The team also had photographers capture the process. The end result was a content package of under-2-minute Facebook videos, 30- to 60-second Instagram videos of each dish, and about 90 lifestyle and dish photos for social sharing.

While Facebook is where Chef's Roll has seen its content go viral, Instagram's become a primary focus for the networking site. That's partially due to updates to the Facebook algorithm in 2018 that gave friends-and-family posts prominence over branded content in news feeds. In addition, the photo-rich platform's a great way to promote Chef's Roll members and reinforce the culinary community. Van der Lee's team regularly reposts pictures from chefs tagged #ChefsRoll or #RollWithUs. These posts earn those pros a significant bump in follower numbers.

"We've had chefs email us and thank us for reposting their stuff," he says. "A couple chefs have printed out the post and put it up on their wall or in their kitchen."

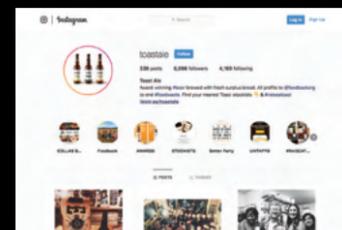
In an industry with such a tight sense of community and where much of the creativity is driven by emotion, that type of engagement and response is a content marketer's dream. ■

Max Delisic

Getting in front of restaurant pros requires more than artful, well-lit food shots. You need in-the-trenches kitchen smarts, a strong pulse on the industry and publishing know-how.

3 Ways to Serve Social

From large food equipment suppliers to small breweries, businesses across the industry use social to power their content marketing.



1. Show, Don't Tell

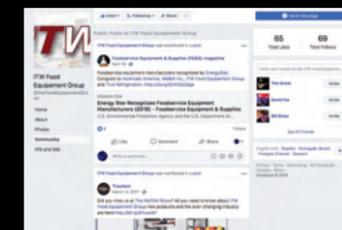
Toast Ale, a B Corp headquartered in London that brews beer with surplus bread, relies heavily on Instagram to court potential restaurant and bar customers. "It's a very accessible way of telling our unique story, and we're increasingly finding that a story is something restaurant owners are looking for," says Toast Ale USA Marketing Manager Matt Paiton.

While posts feature stylized professional shots of beer, bars, bread and the people behind Toast Ale, Paiton's found Instagram Stories work best for serving up raw content that resonates with the brewery's audience. "Users want to see off-the-cuff and organic moments on Stories, so we're mostly sharing behind-the-scenes shots of the company and slightly less-polished posts that feel a little more authentic," he says.



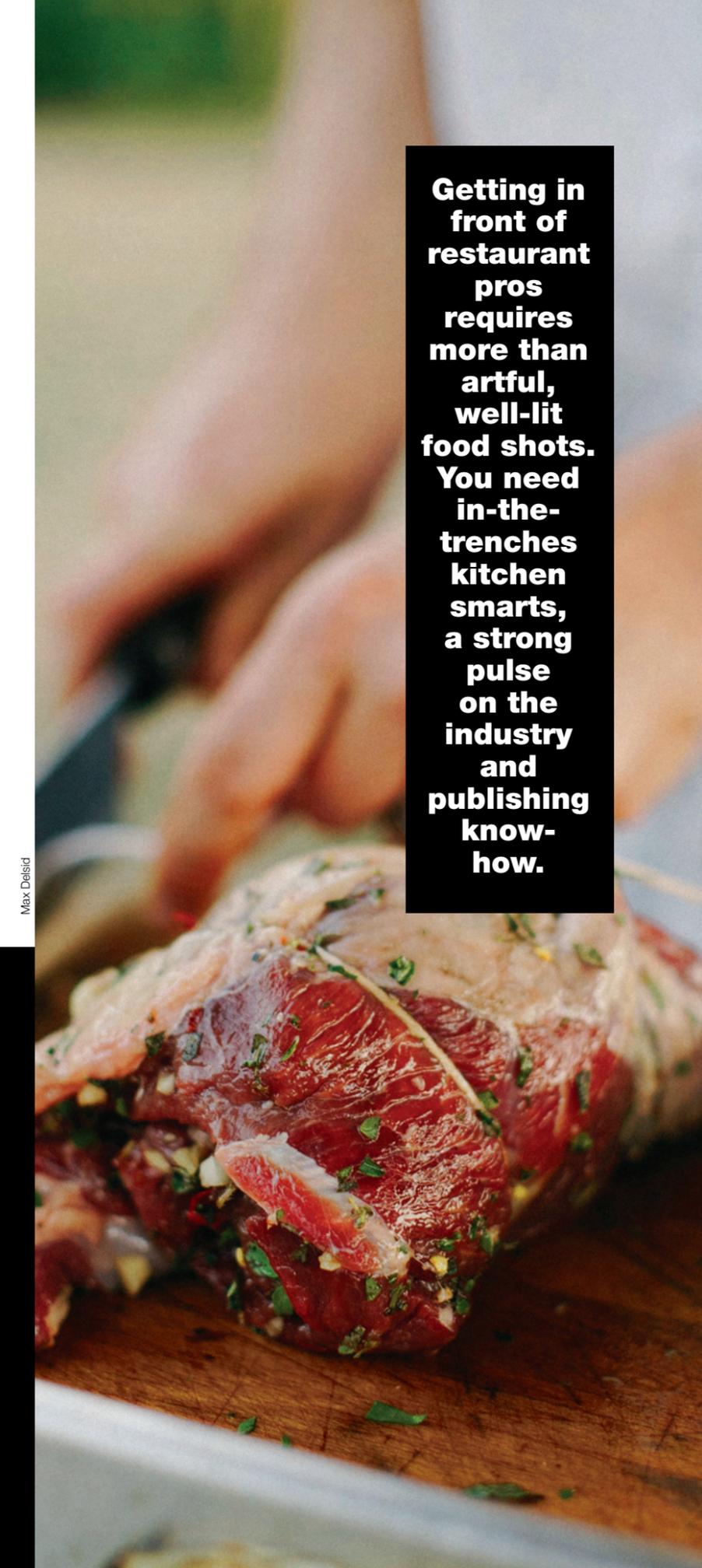
2. Be Part of the Conversation

Restaurant pros are "an audience that will engage," says Upserve's Meghan Kavanaugh. While Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn are crucial distribution channels for the Restaurant Insider blog, "it's not just a matter of pushing out content on social. It's presenting it, then following up and making sure that people are really enjoying it," she says. In addition to crafting posts as conversation starters, Upserve regularly comments on its followers' posts, congratulating a new restaurant on its opening or calling out a dish that looks delicious, for example.



3. Keep Them Informed

Sharing articles, research, videos and other curated content from respected trade publications, news outlets and external industry thought leaders demonstrates the brand's pulse on the industry and its commitment to keeping its audience informed. ITW Food Equipment Group, parent company of brands like Hobart, Vulcan and Traulsen, regularly includes curated content about kitchen tech and food trends in its Facebook mix. "The best thing about social channels, if you're using them effectively, is to engage others in two-way dialogue, share and discuss industry trends and insights, address questions, and ultimately build a more personal and supportive relationship between people and our brands," says Director of Marketing Todd Blair.





**Measuring
the big
kahuna
of content
marketing
formats is
an art and
a science**

By Kim Caviness

The ROI of Content Hubs

We've been on an epic content hub quest here at **orange** magazine. Our mission the past three issues: make the definitive case for why the content hub is the king of content marketing formats. So far, we've explored the nine reasons why the content hub is an essential strategy for thought leadership; how to tell if a hub is right for your brand (with a handy checklist); and the design do's and don'ts of hubs that deliver.

And now, in this fourth and final part of the series, we end, as all things must in content marketing: measurement.

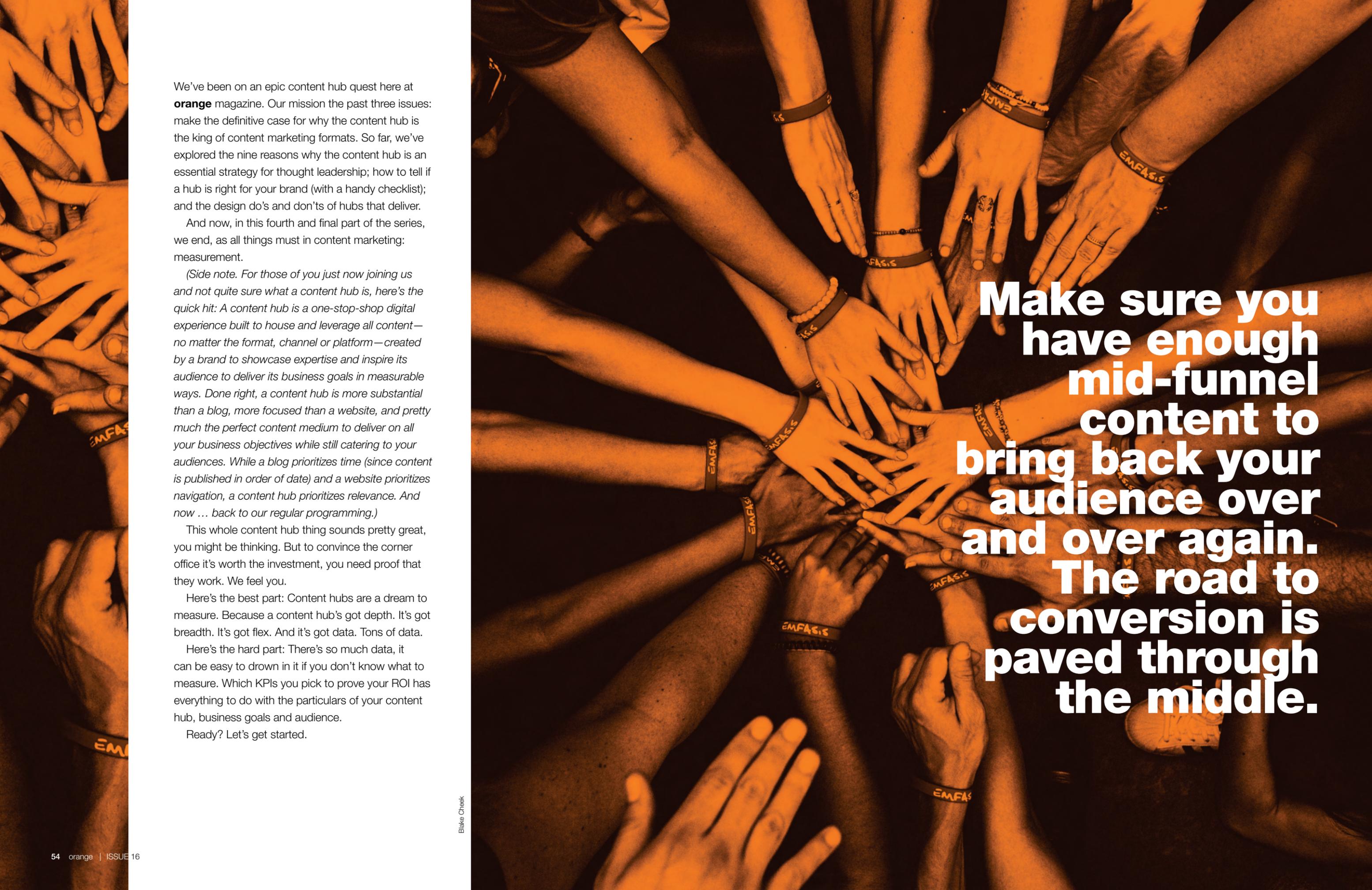
(Side note. For those of you just now joining us and not quite sure what a content hub is, here's the quick hit: A content hub is a one-stop-shop digital experience built to house and leverage all content—no matter the format, channel or platform—created by a brand to showcase expertise and inspire its audience to deliver its business goals in measurable ways. Done right, a content hub is more substantial than a blog, more focused than a website, and pretty much the perfect content medium to deliver on all your business objectives while still catering to your audiences. While a blog prioritizes time (since content is published in order of date) and a website prioritizes navigation, a content hub prioritizes relevance. And now ... back to our regular programming.)

This whole content hub thing sounds pretty great, you might be thinking. But to convince the corner office it's worth the investment, you need proof that they work. We feel you.

Here's the best part: Content hubs are a dream to measure. Because a content hub's got depth. It's got breadth. It's got flex. And it's got data. Tons of data.

Here's the hard part: There's so much data, it can be easy to drown in it if you don't know what to measure. Which KPIs you pick to prove your ROI has everything to do with the particulars of your content hub, business goals and audience.

Ready? Let's get started.



**Make sure you
have enough
mid-funnel
content to
bring back your
audience over
and over again.
The road to
conversion is
paved through
the middle.**

The content hub's got depth. It's got breadth. It's got flex. And it's got data. Tons of data.

The FYI on KPIs

To decode the art and science of data and content hubs, I sat down with our go-to expert for measurement and digital strategy here at Imagination, Kyle Olson, VP, digital marketing and analytics.

Which KPIs do you track for content hubs? Like all data-driven marketers worth their salt, Olson answers: "It depends." He goes on to outline his four rules for determining content hub measurement priorities.

Rule 1: Define What 'Working' Means for You

What do you want your content hub to *do*? That's question No. 1. Always. "Because all content hubs aren't built for one purpose, understanding why your content hub really exists is so important," Olson says.

Define before you data mine. Or you'll measure the wrong thing, wasting everyone's time and effort.

PRO TIP: The definition of "working" can evolve over

time—and that's OK, says Olson. "We see it with several of our clients who originally say, 'We want to do content marketing because we want more leads.' Sure, a hub is a great driver of that. But over time, they might realize the value of a return visitor that doesn't take an action also plays a role in converting." It's fine to keep your goals agile and adjust as you go, but first things first: Commit from the get-go to defining your hub's reason for existence, and measure for that.

Rule 2: ID Your Purposes and Pathways

Next, chart your two P's: purpose and pathways. Define and declare on your hub why you exist, where you want visitors go and what you want them to do next once they arrive at your content hub.

Let's start with *purpose*: There has to be *purpose* coursing through your hub's design, navigation and every content experience on it. Does your content hub

Markus Spiske

Content Hub KPIs

Best-practice metrics to track for each stage of the funnel

CONTENT HUB GOAL: AWARENESS

- Visits**—The total number of times people visit your content hub
- Unique visitors**—The number of individual people who visit your content hub
- Bounce rate**—The percentage of people who leave your content hub after viewing the landing page

CONTENT HUB GOAL: ENGAGEMENT

- Visits**—The total number of times people visit your content hub
- Return visitors**—The number of individual visitors who return to your hub after an earlier visit
- Average time on hub**—The average session duration for a visit to your content hub
- Average pages per visit**—The average number of pages visited during a session on your content hub
- Newsletter sign-ups (if available)**—The number of hand-raisers who committed to receiving email marketing

CONTENT HUB GOAL: CONVERSION

- Visits**—The total number of times people visit your content hub
- Average pages per visit**—The average number of pages visited during a session on your content hub
- CTA response**—What action did visitors take in response to the call to action offered?
- Hard/soft conversion**—Did the visitor take the desired end result?

CONTENT HUB GOAL: LOYALTY/ADVOCACY

- Return visitors**—The number of individual visitors who return to your hub after an earlier visit
- Average time on hub**—The average session duration for a visit to your content hub
- Average pages per visit**—The average number of pages visited during a session on your content hub
- Social shares**—The number of social media shares (by platform)

Host With the Most

Where should your content hub live: on- or off-domain?

Should a content hub live on your brand domain? Or should it sit in a subdomain with its own prominent landing page? Then there's the third option: Should your hub be housed on an altogether different URL, to offer a stand-alone and subtly identified (if at all) brand connection?

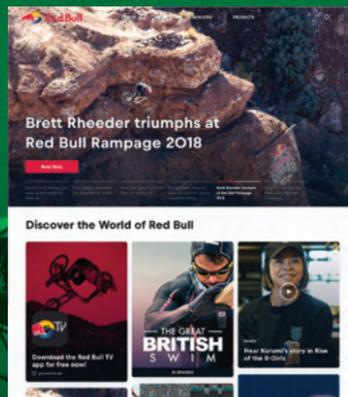
What's the most strategic way to host a content hub?

"It depends," Olson says, wisely. Because it does depend, on factors like your business goals, marketing goals, content strategy and most of all your audience's needs from your brand and what they will—and will not—accept from you.

As a general rule, though: The more you want to offer a journalistic, medialike, church-state-differentiated experience, the more independent from your branded domain your hub should be.

If you want your hub to be closely associated with your brand's halo, products and services, it should be more connected to the primary domain.

Let's break down the pros and cons of where to host your content hub.



Domain (brand.com/ContentHub)

Good for:

- Brands seeking content benefit from brand halo
- Brands prioritizing lead gen
- Brands prioritizing SEO

Not good for:

- Brands uninterested in overt brand alignment
- Brands prioritizing awareness over lead gen
- Brands unwilling to invest in editorial strategy and regular cadence

Example:

Redbull.com is the content hub
Energydrink-us.redbull.com is the U.S. brand product site
Note: Red Bull is an extreme example because the content hub gets the brand URL, and the product site gets the subdomain. That's how much Red Bull has aligned itself at the highest brand level with its content.

The Last Word From Our Data Pro:

Domain is great for content hub SEO. "You're passing all of that value from that main domain onto those new pages that you're creating on the content hub," says Olson.



Subdomain (ContentHub.brand.com)

Good for:

- Brands seeking the benefits of content marketing without the high-profile pressure of domain presence
- Brands not ready to commit or invest in a media-like publishing program's resources and cadence

Not good for:

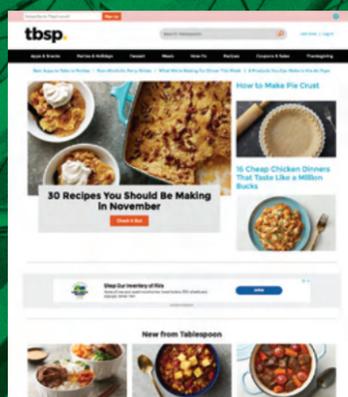
- Brands that prioritize lead gen and SEO
- Brands lacking editorial resources to implement linking back and adding CTAs to domain

Example:

IQ.intel.com is Intel's IQ content hub.
Intel.com is IQ's brand/product site.

The Last Word From Our Data Pro:

"The subdomain is seen as a different value to Google," says Olson, so you have to work harder to support your SEO strategy with cross-linking. "You have to create the heavy lift to add value to that individual subdomain to help it rank."



Unique URL (newContentHub.com)

Good for:

- Brands that seek a church-and-state experience, separate from brand marketing goals and brand restrictions

Not good for:

- Brands prioritizing brand connection for their content investment
- Brands seeking SEO benefits for their parent website
- Brands seeking lead gen
- Brands not ready for the substantial content creation and marketing investment required to launch an entirely separate site

Example:

Tablespoon.com is General Mills' recipe content hub.
GeneralMills.com is General Mills' brand/product site.

The Last Word From Our Data Pro:

When the content hub lives on a separate, lightly or nonbranded URL, it's not "this message is provided by so-and-so," says Olson. "It's less about disruption and more about adding value."

exist to purposely answer questions your *desired* audience (not the one you might be accidentally attracting) is already asking? If you didn't promote your hub with paid efforts, would visitors come anyway?

"We can check [the power of your] purpose by tracking organic search and organic traffic to you," says Olson. Success is when "people are finding you naturally. They're searching for keywords that exist on your website and are associated with your website from a Google standpoint, and they're finding your content as the solution to that search query."

PRO TIP: Make sure you state your purpose prominently on your content hub, either right at the top of your global header on every page or home page as well as in your About section. It's good for search as well as UX.

On to **pathways**. How will your content hub guide visitors from experience to experience in the right way for them—and for you? "Pathways on your hub need to exist for people ... if you want continued conversations," says Olson. You want to be able to "tie, at the right time, products to ideas and to needs."

"If you have a hub that either exists on your domain or off your domain, providing connectors from your brand properties back to it is really important. I don't think companies do that enough with content hubs. They see it as a thing that lives over here, but they aren't connecting those conversations from other brand sites."

PRO TIP: "UX comes into play here," Olson says, "heat mapping, understanding where they're clicking, how they're clicking as an individual user, as a persona. Those are really important for content hub success."

Rule 3: Benchmark

We're almost ready to set KPIs, I promise. But before we do that, we need to pause for Rule 3: Set benchmarks, *tailored to your two P's*. Otherwise, the numbers mean little and can't confidently inform the way forward.

"If you aren't measuring against something, you're just sort of afloat in the ocean, allowing the waves to take you, allowing the visitors to dictate success, versus saying, 'I have a hypothesis about how many leads I'm going to get from content,'" says Olson.

Start by looking at your aspirational competitive set or your own relevant previous efforts to inform your targets. "Use the environment of the industry, of previous websites or previous parts of your website that are content driven to understand benchmarks," he says.

PRO TIP: "There are tools, like SEMRush, SimilarWeb and Alexa, that can help you see how your traffic trends stack up to your competitors," Olson says. Once you

have a handle on that, you can "use your own data on top of that to understand benchmarks and goals."

Rule 4: Funnel Your Strategy

The best content hubs offer value at every stage of the funnel: awareness, engagement and conversion, and their younger sibling: loyalty/advocacy. Ask yourself: Which part of the funnel is most important to the business goals of your content program (not the brand itself)? For which audience segment(s)? And then calibrate your content journey mapping and metrics accordingly.

"The best-in-market content hubs fulfill multiple needs at the same time but also don't try to do that with every visitor," Olson says.

"So they understand, for example, that you are a return visitor. They give you a different environment. They give you different content. They customize the experience."

Note that Olson says *customize*, not *personalize*. That's because "personalization is very tough from a content hub perspective because there are so many variables," he explains. "There are so many people visiting that trying to design it for every single person is going to be difficult." Customizing to a group of targeted audiences? "That's more achievable."

PRO TIP: Mind your middle. "The content hub really should be designed for the middle funnel," says Olson, "that nurturing stage through thought leadership, through content conversations. That's really where [most hubs] should be showing success and value—not just leads."

Instead, says Olson, "It's where we see a lot of content hubs failing."

Content-hubbers, make sure you have enough gotta-consume mid-funnel content to bring back your desired audience again and again. Because the road to conversion is paved through the middle.

Rule 5: Set Your ROI KPIs

You've defined what "working" means to you and determined your purpose and pathways, benchmarks and funnel priorities. Congratulations! You're ready to select your strategic KPI combination for your business and marketing goals. The chart on page 57 lists the best-practice KPIs to track by funnel stage, but remember that there's no single right answer.

PRO TIP: Once you've selected your funnel priority, choose no more than three to five KPIs per content hub program to keep a close eye on. More than five makes it hard to connect the numbers in an actionable way you can use to communicate results to your team, client or boss. ■

HIT OR MISS

A killer app, a moving book and a smart video series get high praise, while an Instagram flop, a fact-check foul and fake feminism get roasted.

By Ashley Greene Bernick



H

A FINE TUNE

Rating: Give Us S'more

Content that demonstrates a brand's capabilities without overtly pushing product? Great. Content that achieves that plus does good in the world? Even better.

Or, as they say in Brazil, "legal!" Samsung Brazil recently launched Samsung Audio Chords, a free app aimed at helping people with visual impairments learn to play the guitar. For these individuals, playing usually requires reading Braille, which means they have to frequently pause their strumming to feel the chords. To overcome this challenge—as part of Samsung Social's global initiative dedicated to helping humans "Do What You Can't"—Samsung Brazil developers worked with a music producer and a blind guitar teacher to create an app that uses voice guidance. As users play, chords are dictated in real time, meaning musicians don't have to stop to read.

The app is aimed at varying skill levels, offering beginners' basics and taking users through the process of refining their playing and learning to perform multiple songs.

In a time when there's truly an app for everything, Audio Chords stands out from the clutter to engage an audience with instructional, useful content.



Toa Heifiba, Rohan Makhaichia, Stock/boonchian



H

PRETTY AWESOME CONTENT

Rating: Sparks Fly

At Imagination, we've got a thing for print (could you guess?). We especially appreciate when print and social intersect to provide an engaging multichannel experience. Throw in user-generated content too, and we're smitten.

In celebration of the International Day of the Girl on Oct. 11, the Integer Group developed a multichannel campaign aimed at promoting self-esteem among girls and encouraging them to measure their worth based on more than appearance. The agency worked with an illustrator to publish a children's book titled *Pretty*, which starts with a little girl asking a parent if she's pretty. The book then explains the many ways she is "pretty awesome," focusing the story on qualities like intelligence, humor, bravery and compassion, rather than looks. Portions of the book's sales went to the nonprofit Girls Inc.

The campaign also included a social UGC activation, calling on parents, teachers, caregivers and others to share what makes girls pretty awesome, using the hashtags #theprettyconversation, #strongboldawesome and #pretty[fill in the blank] (think #prettystrong, #prettytalented or #prettycreative). Submissions have been compiled and shared on @theprettyconversation Instagram handle.



H FOOD GOES CLEAN
Rating: Bonfire

Panera was an early leader of the clean foods movement, and the bread-bowl-slinging fast-casual continues to walk the walk. Alongside initiatives to nix artificial ingredients and use ethically sourced components, Panera's serving up educational, relevant content that tells the story behind the food—something consumers increasingly want. In the fall, it launched "Food Interrupted," a video series exploring plant-based diets, ingredient transparency, animal welfare and other buzzy food topics. Episodes were shot documentary-style, starring influencers like chef Marcus Samuelsson and YouTube star Hannah Hart.

High-quality cinematography aside, we love this application of content marketing because Panera's taking the hot, yet confusing, topic of clean food and making it understandable and tangible through storytelling. And all the episodes connect organically (no pun intended) to Panera's menu.

Also digable: the distribution. Episodes were teased on Facebook and Instagram, and aired on Facebook Watch. In addition, Panera created a snazzy content hub where users can watch past episodes, read about the starring influencers, peruse photos and "Take Action"—learn ways they can support the clean foods movement (Meatless Monday, anyone?).

M

BREWED AND MISUSED

Rating: Smokeout

As the craft beer movement charges ahead, Planters set out to hop on the trend by creating a peanut IPA in collaboration with Noon Whistle, a small Midwestern brewery.

The limited-edition Mr. IPA-Nut, which was only available in the Chicago area, got good reviews. The way Planters promoted the partnership did not.

To announce the beer collab, Mr. Peanut tweeted a zany 30-second video that claims Mr. IPA-Nut is brewed in Cleveland. The problem? Noon Whistle is located in Lombard, Illinois, and its name and logo don't even appear in the video.

The Twitterverse did what it does best: freak out. Users called out Planters for failing to give the indie brewer its due credit. In response, the peanut pushers tweeted a mediocre apology and posted a corrected version of the video that shows Noon Whistle's logo.

We get it, Mr. Peanut; you're desperate to elevate your cool. You know what's always cool? Factual accuracy.



Stock/Joebelanger, DRPAS, Joebelanger



M

#TIMESUP FOR BAD MARKETING

Rating: Backfire

2018 was a fierce year for female empowerment. It was also the year of sigh-inducing, pseudo-feminist marketing gaffes.

Take Dior's latest campaign to promote its J'Adore Absolu perfume, which the company calls "an ode to women." The campaign centers around a bizarre advertising video that does nothing for feminism. In fact, it's a textbook example of female sexual objectification.

The video opens on a dimly lit, steamy bathhouse. Women in thin, glittery frocks lounge frozen like statues. Standing in the water is a naked Charlize Theron with her eyes closed. She opens her eyes, walks across the pool and gets out. Wow. Empowering.

Cut to Theron in a glitzy gown leading a V formation of the same statue women marching out of the bathhouse. Girl power. The end.

Dior created a hub on its site to house the video, and the language it uses to explain the campaign is somehow more frivolous—and enraging—than the video: "The iconic floral bouquet is a beauty with multiple faces, a tour de force of balance where the most beautiful flowers express themselves with sensuality and freshness."

Ah, yes, the fresh scent of freshness, sensuality and the patriarchy (once again) telling women their worth boils down to their appearance.

Dior, please see page 61 for the International Day of the Girl's pretty powerful campaign, because yours is pretty lame.

M

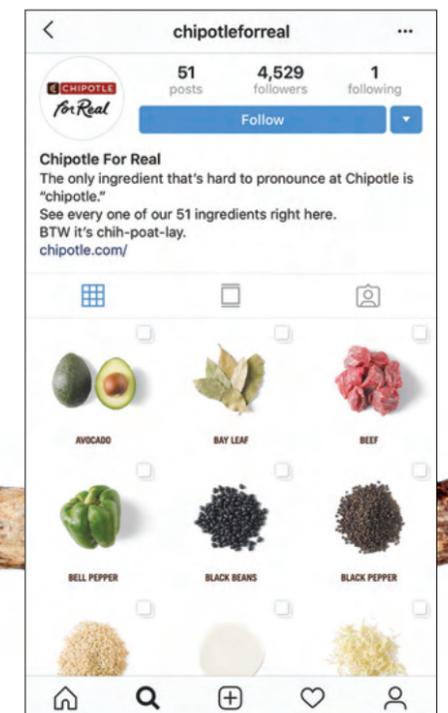
SOCIAL SNOOZER

Rating: Wet Log

Chipotle recently launched its "For Real" campaign aimed at spotlighting the quality of its ingredients. Sound familiar? That's because it's the same marketing message the brand has pushed for years. And we're sad to say this latest iteration lacks substance. In fact, what the fast-casual calls "radical ingredient transparency" feels more like a branding Hail Mary following a slew of food-safety missteps and negative PR.

As part of the campaign, the chain launched a @chipotleforreal Instagram handle, on which it posted photos of each of the 51 ingredients used in the restaurant location kitchens. Each post is a photo of a lone ingredient, all shot top-down with bright light on a sterile white background. Never mind the lame photography style (seriously, the romaine lettuce looks radioactive)—this is a downright horrible use of the platform. Since the ingredient shots went live in September, there's been no activity on the account. Where's the engagement? The storytelling? The 51 individual posts don't add up to much.

As a target Chipotle consumer, what am I supposed to do with this account? Follow it and like your glob-of-canola-oil post? With Instagram holding so much potential for content creation and audience engagement, all this campaign inspired me to do is ask, "For real, Chipotle?"



Email Details

What to read and whom to follow to hit inbox gold

Email marketing is having a moment. I've heard that a lot recently—but email marketing has always been having a moment, so what's new? Nothing, really. Marketing leaders rediscover the power of email every time the wheel of exciting new channels and tactics turns. In fact, email is one of the only true constants in the digital marketer's rotating arsenal of tools.

Digital true north that email may be, it still sees hurdles and roadblocks, industry innovations and landscape shifts. Long gone are the days of managing lists in spreadsheets and sending plain text messages via mail merge. More recently gone is the era of batch-and-blast promotions. We're now in the age of hyper-personalization, complex marketing automation, account-based marketing and predictive analytics. And all of this should affect how we think about email.

It's no longer a stand-alone tactic, or even a stand-alone strategy. Email needs to fit holistically into your larger marketing ecosystem to engage prospects and customers through content. If we're going to intrude in the personal space of our prospects' inboxes, we better have a good reason. We need to be offering individualized communication at the optimal moment, ideally triggered by a hand-raise action, whether that's a newsletter sign-up, abandoned shopping cart or other web behavior. That's a tall order, but these email thought leaders are here to guide us through it. —*Lydia Gordon*

NEWSLETTERS

HubSpot

Email as an integral piece of big-marketing thinking

Emma

Your hip email BFF

Freshinbox

Inside baseball for email design

PODCASTS



Litmus Email Design Podcast with Kevin Mandeville and Jason Rodriguez of Litmus
Everything from email foundations to breaking industry news



Marketing Over Coffee with John Wall of EventHero and Christopher Penn of the University of San Francisco
Nerd out weekly about how tech impacts marketing



COMMUNITY HASHTAG

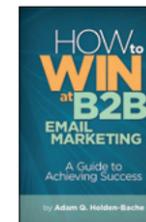
Follow along on Twitter and join the Slack Channel [#EmailGeeks](#)

BOOKS



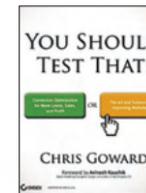
Email Marketing Rules by Chad White

Go-to, ground-up reference chock-full of key checklists and best practices



How to Win at B2B Email Marketing: A Guide to Achieving Success by Adam Holden-Bache

Takes B2B email from strategy to set up and design to campaign analytics



You Should Test That: Conversion Optimization for More Leads, Sales and Profit or the Art and Science of Optimized Marketing by Chris Goward

The subtitle says it all

Jon Tyson, Rohan Makhecha, Thinkstock/popba, Getty/Zoonar RF



Genna Matson
@gemiz
Email development and design



David Baker
@Social_C_R_M
Digital marketing macro-trends applied to email



Kristin Bond
@EmailSnarketing
Co-founder of networking site Women of Email



Kath Pay
@kathpay
She knows absolutely everything



Dan Oshinsky
@danoshinsky
All newsletters, all the time



Chris Arrendale
@Arrendale
Deep dives into privacy and security



Jeanne Jennings
@jeajen
Email program optimization hacks and best practices

THOUGHT LEADERS

BLOGS

Really Good Emails
Exactly what it sounds like

Emailmonks
Best practices galore

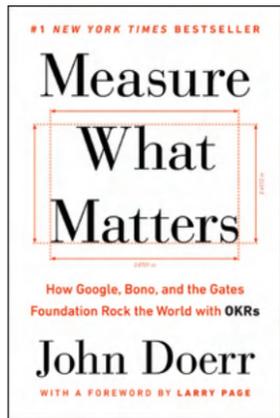
Emailmonday from Jordie van Rijn
Email life lessons

Emailonacid
How-to's and inspo

I'm OKR, You're OKR

Ideas are easy. Execution is everything. Here's how to set mountaintop goals and hit them—just like Intel, Google, Microsoft and Bono

When you start a company, there is no end to the advice people will offer—much of it completely unsolicited. The day we started Imagination, we heard everything from “you need better business cards” to “I have an uncle who...” Now, when I need solid work advice, I still gravitate toward books. And, to this day, I am amazed at how much useless advice manages to get published. My aim with this column is to help you avoid bad books and discover the good ones offering worthy smarts for content marketers. —Rebecca Rolfe



Measure What Matters: How Google, Bono, and the Gates Foundation Rock the World with OKRs

by John Doerr

John Doerr worked for Andy Grove at Intel for six years and calls him the greatest manager of all time. In this best-seller, he takes the lessons from Grove's books—*High Output Management* and *Only the Paranoid Survive*—and distills them into a simple tool that works company to company and industry to industry. OKRs (objectives and key results) plus “sound judgment, strong leadership and a creative work environment” will “guide you to the mountaintop,” Doerr writes. As he says, “Ideas are easy. Execution is everything.” These days you can measure almost anything, but goal-setting and then measuring only those things that help you get there will give you the single-eyed focus you need to succeed.

TAKEAWAY: Now *Forbes'* 91st richest man in the world, thanks to his investments as the chairman of venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins, Doerr knows whereof he speaks and is generous in sharing how he does it.



Daniel Hazard, Thinkstock/Suradech14



Influencer: Building Your Personal Brand in the Age of Social Media

by Brittany Hennessy

The hotties on social media—those influencers who can make you buy, fall in love with, covet, follow and be loyal to a brand—have one thing in common: authenticity. They don't manipulate. They don't sell. They talk about brands without anyone asking them to, without anyone paying them. And then they get so big that brands hire *them*. Hennessy, director of influencer strategy and talent partnerships at Hearst Magazine Digital Media, once paid a dog \$32,000 for two Facebook posts, one Instagram post and one tweet. How hard is it to look perfect 100 percent of the time? How hard is it to turn down five figures for wearing a dress you wouldn't be caught dead in? How hard is it for marketers to find authenticity in a sea of wannabes?

TAKEAWAY: If you think to yourself, “I eat avocado toast. I wear mascara. I could do that,” read this easy-breezy book to find out how much work goes into making yourself an influencer worth hiring.

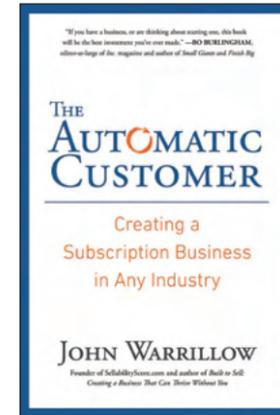


Subscribed: Why the Subscription Model Will Be Your Company's Future—and What to Do About It

by Tien Tzuo

“Ownership is dead. Access is the new imperative.” You can rent anything—a runway gown or a Netflix movie, a Maserati or a dentist chair. Better yet, you can subscribe, and new items simply turn up on a regular basis without your even asking. For \$275 a month, you can subscribe to Hyundai's Ioniq Hybrid car. Porsche has a similar plan called Passport. The real money is no longer in the product, according to the CEO of leading software-as-a-service subscription company Zuora, it's in the service. From a content marketing standpoint, this has flipped the media business model on its head. Instead of advertisers paying for access to an audience, the audience pays for access to high-quality content. A publication lives or dies based on quality, not on circulation. Think about it: The subscription business model is the only one “entirely based on the happiness of your customers.”

TAKEAWAY: The strength of this book is that Tzuo is one seriously smart guy who does make you think about it. For one thing, he's smart enough to use a professional writer as a co-author *and* give him credit. You get the feeling that the knowledge comes from Tzuo but the wordsmithing comes from Gabe Weisert, who knows what he's doing.

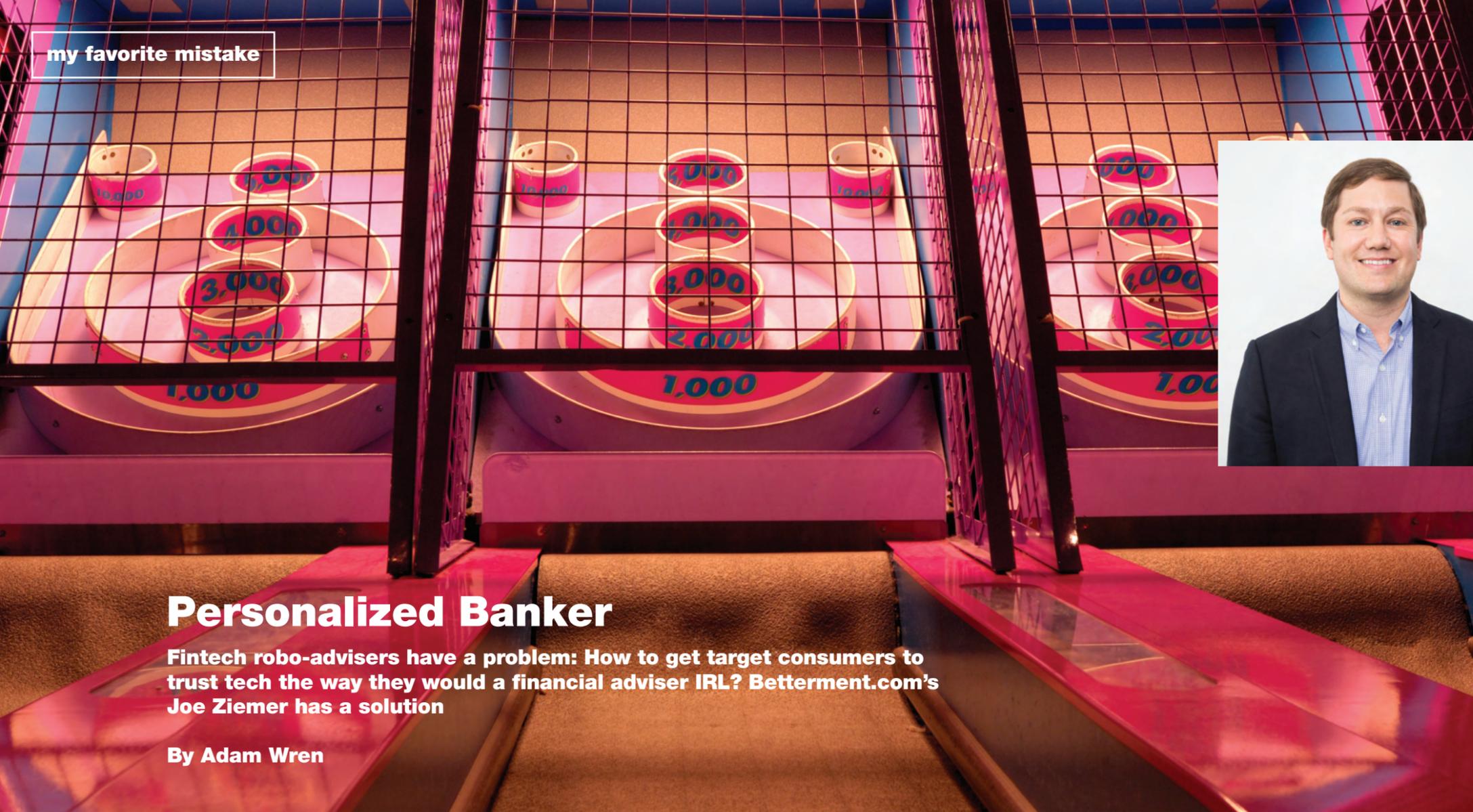


The Automatic Customer: Creating a Subscription Business in Any Industry

by John Warrillow

Sometimes, you gotta go old-school to see how far we've come on a topic. This subscriptions book was published in 2015. The one below was published in 2018. There's nothing really wrong with Warrillow's book. Its how-tos are useful. Its insights are valid. But it lacks the specificity of Tzuo's tome. Not surprisingly, it feels generic and dated compared to the other one. The Tzuo book will date quickly too—when, for instance, *The New York Times* is no longer growing faster than Google. But for right now, it's the better book and a more compelling read.

TAKEAWAY: If you're going to read one book on the subscription economy and why it matters, read Tzuo's rather than this one.



“THE ONE WAY WE CAN REACH ALL OF OUR CLIENTS IN A COST-EFFECTIVE MANNER IS CONTENT.”

JOE ZIEMER
VICE PRESIDENT, MARKETING, BETTERMENT

Personalized Banker

Fintech robo-advisers have a problem: How to get target consumers to trust tech the way they would a financial adviser IRL? Betterment.com’s Joe Ziemer has a solution

By Adam Wren

When Joe Ziemer first worked at the intersection of content marketing and financial services, he was a 12-year-old Indianapolis kid obsessed with Nike. He even owned three stock shares, a Christmas present he’d begged for earlier in elementary school. All he wanted out of life was to meet the company’s iconic co-founder, Phil Knight. So he did what any marketer-in-the-making would do. He crafted quality content highlighting his unique value differentiator and included a killer call to action that nailed his KPI: an invitation to the company’s Beaverton, Oregon, headquarters.

In a letter to Knight, Ziemer identified himself as “the youngest Nike shareholder” and mentioned that he’d be in town soon, accompanying his father on a business trip. He wondered: Could he get a tour of the place?

The enterprising tween received a letter back from Knight, who informed Ziemer he would be traveling but promised the dreamt-of invitation. And so, Ziemer soon found himself in Beaverton, escorted by Knight’s chief of staff. He landed a chance to sit in Knight’s chair, swing by Michael Jordan’s office and visit the employee store.

ADULT EDUCATION

Decades later, Ziemer again put persistence and ingenuity to work trying to solve one of his current company’s top challenges.

Now a vice president of marketing at Betterment, the largest U.S. independent online financial adviser, Ziemer was again working at the intersection of content and fintech. But soon after joining the New York City-based company in 2012, he realized Betterment’s content outreach was falling flat with its target audience. His challenge? Convincing consumers to trust a robo-adviser with their money.

“Historically, people view your adviser as someone who kind of educates you and shares information and guidance through the traditional human experience,” Ziemer says.

How does an online financial tech company replace the intimacy of sitting down once a year over coffee to talk retirement strategies with a trusted, graying, golf-playing financial adviser?

“We have to think about how can we relate and

communicate and educate our clients about something as personal as money online,” says Ziemer. “The one way we can reach all of our clients in a cost-effective manner is content.”

Ziemer realized the content he had been commissioning didn’t seem to land well with his target audience. Neither was the content he was posting via native advertising platforms, which weren’t bringing in qualified traffic. “A lot of people get caught up in vanity metrics,” he explains. But “if you’re driving unqualified traffic, it just doesn’t matter.”

What to do? Ziemer recalibrated Betterment’s entire approach to content. It was time to beef up expertise in the company’s POV pieces and change the mix of internal, agency and freelance assignments.

“We used to treat a lot of the content the same ... from a staffing perspective,” Ziemer says. “Sometimes we attempted to rely on freelance writers for some of our more internal-focused pieces. Some of our content is more evergreen focused, and those can be written by a wide range of people. But then we have content that

is Betterment-specific: our specific view on something. We were trying to force-feed those pieces to freelancers, and that became hard.”

Betterment turned away from freelancers in favor of a hybrid approach: work with a boutique content agency knowledgeable about its audience goals, paired with an internal team of content marketers with subject matter expertise. Ziemer also abandoned native ad platforms for targeted, key pieces of content with customized distribution.

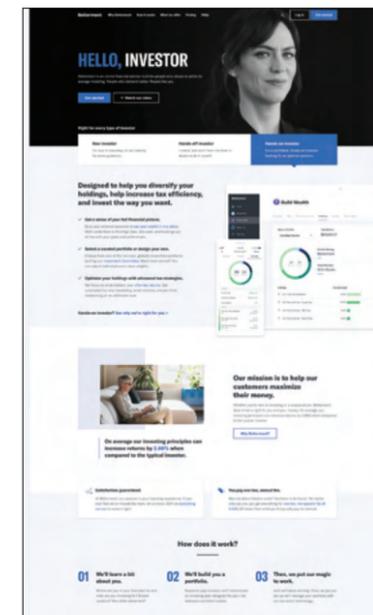
Today, Ziemer steers content strategy with a customer-relationship-management-guided mix that includes monthly newsletters, targeted content pieces and whitepapers driven by customer insights. “A major driver of what type of content we do comes from our customer support—what trends are we seeing in inquiries from customers, and how can we develop content to answer a lot of those questions in a thoughtful and detailed way?” Ziemer says.

One of the company’s key differentiators: using stunning data visualization to show how each client’s risk may change over time with different saving strategies.

The bottom-line results?

Ziemer’s solutions to Betterment’s early content marketing “mistake” helped fuel the company’s growth. Betterment today has more than \$10 billion in assets under management—in less than eight years.

“People might first view Betterment as an impersonal experience, because it’s so high-tech,” Ziemer says. “Content is a way to show our expertise. It humanizes our brand.”



Stock/lyast, MoInia



who's inside

SOCIAL SEEN

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- 2 Jason Fried, CEO, Basecamp
- 3 Keith Weed, CMO, Unilever
- 4 Chandar Pattabhiram, CMO, Coupa Software & Marketo
- 5 Philippe von Borries, founder, Refinery29
- 6 Raja Rajamannar, CMO, Mastercard
- 7 John Zissimos, VP of Creative, Google
- 8 Jonathan Becher, former CMO, SAP
- 9 Jon Iwata, former chief brand officer and senior vice president, IBM
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- 12 Charisse Ford, CMO, PANDORA Americas

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MY FAVORITE MISTAKE

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Tune in each month as we talk shop with top content marketers serving up insider smarts and creative inspiration, always over an iconic Chicago beer. Be sure to catch Ep. 6: "The right ingredients for culinary content marketing."

5 TRUTHS ABOUT B2B CONTENT MARKETING

We bust the myths to help you build buzz with your marketing game.

FUTUREPROOF YOUR ASSOCIATION

Associations, download our essential whitepaper on the four M's that will redefine how you communicate: member value, myopia, millennials and messaging.

HOW TO WRITE FOR THE HUMAN EAR

3 expert tips to write text that rolls off the tongue for podcasts and audio.