

# Five steps to creating clever content



Content-driven communications are increasingly grabbing more of the marketing budget and the technology to create and measure content becomes more sophisticated and user-friendly. But companies looking to master the art of 'story-telling' should beware of jumping in without a clear strategy and goals.

I'm all for stories. They're one of the best ways for a brand to cut through the jargon with an essence that is compelling and understandable.

Turning a 'story' into something valuable, share-able and which engages with your audience, however, is about much more than simply telling a tale.

## 1. Know what business you're in

Just translating your message into a story isn't enough. To create engaging content means understanding your value to your audience. It's the old features versus benefits rule – your audience isn't buying a product or service, they are fixing a problem they have.

If your audience is going to like you enough to trust you and therefore buy from you, they want to know you understand their problem. Your content should show your expertise, not simply in creating a great product but in the knowledge you have about their situation.

## 2. Understand your audience

When you tell a story, you need to appreciate the context, your audience's mood and the surroundings in which they're listening. Taking a moment to pin down your buyer's persona will save wasted effort.

If you're focused on getting to the decision-making director, for instance, should you first look at the manager who actually has the job of finding the

solution? What content would persuade them to sell your product into their director? To find out, you can use desk-based research from your existing customer base and talk to the sales teams, or go further and question your customers – all in the name of giving them more valuable content.

## 3. Have a written content strategy

This point should go without saying, but experience suggests it needs to be said. There are a plethora of channels a marketer can access, but that doesn't mean you should be spread across them all. You may have a great team of ambassadors willing to share your company's great content, but without a defined tone of voice, agreed channels and timetable your efforts may miss the mark.

A written strategy should dictate these variables as well as ensure that once you're jumped in, you have a plan (most often in the form of an editorial calendar) to feed the interest you are going to create.

## 4. Listen, reactively

Pushing out content is the easy part; creating engagement with that content? Not so easy. Observing the language used by your audience's own content is how you become a part of the conversation. Again, a story isn't enough – you must understand the context of the discussion and tailor your content accordingly.

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If your audience is B2B, for example, your language has licence for jargon. Not so with a consumer audience, but here the point is more about getting the right sentiment. Listening to the conversations taking place will give you the ability to present your content in the right tone of voice – happy, funny, considered, authoritative, inquisitive?

## 5. Make your content go further

Every piece of content should spark the question: 'How can I make this go further?' You've put a lot of effort into creating this clever product (and every piece should be considered a product) so be equally creative with the possibilities. Aim high with a 1:10 ratio – can you get ten pieces of content out of one? For example, a piece of research can be refashioned into a blog post, a press release, a video, a white paper, a webinar, an infographic, and shared via social platforms.

Not only will this spread the word across your networks, but it offers greater opportunity to push out your content more than once. As our social streams get busier, content is easily missed – so don't put all that effort into creating something that is quickly consigned to the archives. Instead, give it new life periodically – use it to support future content; revive it for relevant breaking news; or simply fill a gap in your editorial calendar.

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