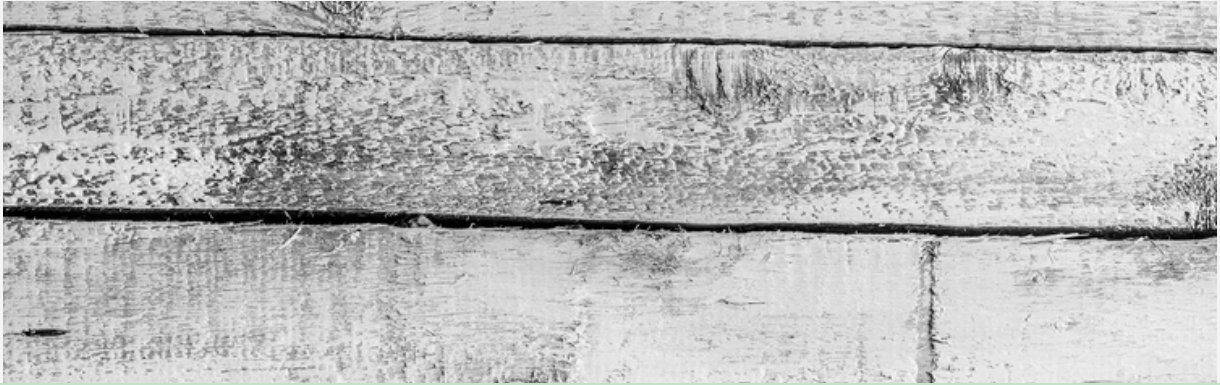


**THE BRANDED
CONTENT PROJECT**



The Branded Content Guide

FIRST EDITION

PREPARED BY
The Branded Content Project

PRODUCED BY
Local Media Association
Local Media Consortium
Facebook Journalism Project



**The
Branded
Content
Project**

THE BUSINESS OF STORYTELLING



Our vision for this industry project

Branded content uses the strength of storytelling to provide a valuable benefit to advertisers while increasing audience engagement and revenue for local media publishers. This powerful revenue stream has shown to be a success for many media organizations. The Branded Content Project is designed to help facilitate additional growth, engagement and success for more publishers of all shapes and sizes.

The Branded Content Project is part of a \$1 million investment from the Facebook Journalism Project to help more than 2,000 local newsrooms across both the Local Media Association and Local Media Consortium membership better understand, develop and implement revenue streams through branded content both on and off Facebook.

LocalMedia
association


**local media
consortium**


facebook
Journalism
Project



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WHAT IS BRANDED CONTENT

*How do we define and describe
branded content?*

We define branded content as any sales initiative that uses content to engage the user and is paid for by a client who participates as part of the content, helps supply the content, or sponsors the content that is distributed across any platform.

Examples included inside this definition of branded content:

- Native advertising articles
- Social videos with a sponsor tag or elements
- Product placement
- Sponsored live events
- Sponsored collections of stories
- Paid video segments



A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONTENT MARKETING

OPENING ACT BY:
STEVEN GOLDSTEIN, CEO of Amplifi Media

From podcasts to social to digital video, content marketing is attracting a lot of attention of late, but this “it” marketing tactic is actually one of advertising’s more enduring traditions. Like a classic novel or a beloved movie, advertising that emphasizes storytelling is proven to be both memorable and effective. While new media choices and new gadgets have expanded how Americans can consume content, branded content endures because it engages the audience. At its best, it also spotlights a brand in unexpected ways.

From print to video to audio, in a cluttered media landscape, branded content elevates a brand from commercial to stand-out. Through the history of advertising, the most effective examples of branded content have been audience-centric, rather than an extended commercial. These campaigns have created value for consumers, whether that is informational, entertainment -- or both. The secret sauce has been content that feels less like marketing and more like exclusive, original programming, no matter the medium.



WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

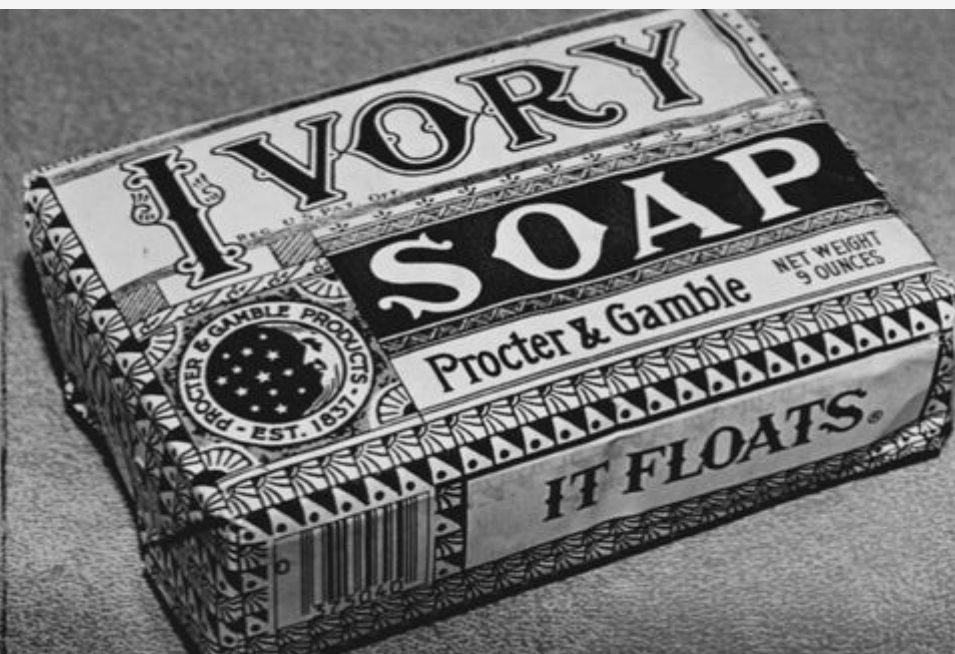
The art of sponsored content has a rich history that dates back to the country’s agricultural roots. In the 1850s, John Deere, the iconic lawn mower and farm equipment company, launched a print magazine, *The Furrow*, to be a resource for its farming customers. Another pioneering example was all about taking consumers on a journey. In 1900, French tire company Michelin created a travel guide, *The Michelin Guide*, for French motorists. It encouraged drivers to go on adventures and -- no surprise -- wear out their tires from their travels. Four years later, they expanded to neighboring Belgium and, nearly a century later, in 2005, Michelin published the first American edition. Michelin stars are now the gold-standard for restaurants worldwide. How’s that for an enduring campaign? And, yes, Michelin still sell tires.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONTENT MARKETING



THE SOAP OPERA

Some of the best content marketing projects are subtle, but highly effective. Did you know that soap operas got their names from the consumer packaged goods companies, including soaps, that sponsored them? In the 1930s, Procter & Gamble created audio dramas, called “soap operas” that were sponsored by its household products. In 1950, P&G expanded its work to video with the first television soap, *The First One Hundred Years*. While the direct connection might between these shows and products may have faded over time, some of these “soaps”, as generations of mostly female fans have called them, are still on the air today. Although many viewers may not know the direct connection with cleaning products, they still see female-targeted ads during breaks.



THE WORLDS LARGEST STORE

In another testament to branded connections in media, Chicago's venerable radio station WLS, pays homage to its original owner Sears-Roebuck through its call letters, short for “The World's Largest Store”, the retailer's nickname. The station launched in 1924 with a variety of programming that included music, arts and farming information. The relationship between the station and its owner was symbiotic: Sears marketed its products on the air and sold radios in its catalog to boost listening.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONTENT MARKETING



LEGOS AND DOVE

Despite the declining audience for print publications, there are some success stories for print branded publications. Toymaker Lego, for instance, publishes a quarterly magazine that feels editorial, but is essentially a catalog for the latest Lego products. The magazine offers kids building inspiration, and likely sends them begging their parents for new sets. (In a sign of shifting consumer trends, in 2017, the company added a corresponding app.)

The Lego Life app is just a single example of the explosion of content marketing opportunities on digital. As digital video streaming explodes, there's fertile ground for brands to make video series that can reach a large and highly-engaged audience. Legions of Americans, particularly younger consumers, stream videos on their smartphones and scour YouTube for content, allowing marketers to produce video branded content beyond traditional -- and expensive -- TV campaigns. Take Skincare brand Dove's "Real Beauty" project with veteran TV producer Shonda Rhimes, who partnered on a series of stories about real women -- the type who might use Dove products. The series of short videos featuring real women defining what makes them beautiful. The brand connects with women through honest, relatable content created for women, by women.

SOMETIMES THE BRAND FINDS YOU



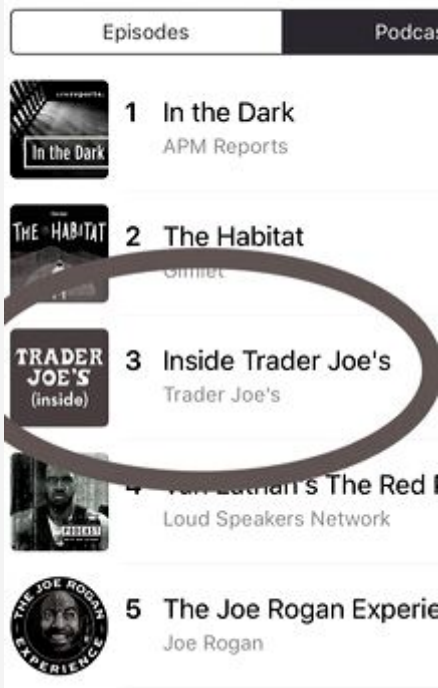
Some brands connect with content once it already finds an audience. Since his eponymous TV show went off the air, comedian Jerry Seinfeld launched a web series "Comedians in Cars", that started on comedy streaming service Crackle and then moved to Netflix. Along the way, carmaker Acura signed on as the exclusive sponsor, but Seinfeld retains full creative control. The show isn't about Acura, or even about cars, but rather there was a subtle connection between high-brow comedy and automobiles, and that made Acura look good.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONTENT MARKETING



PODCASTING AND JOHN DEERE

Top Charts



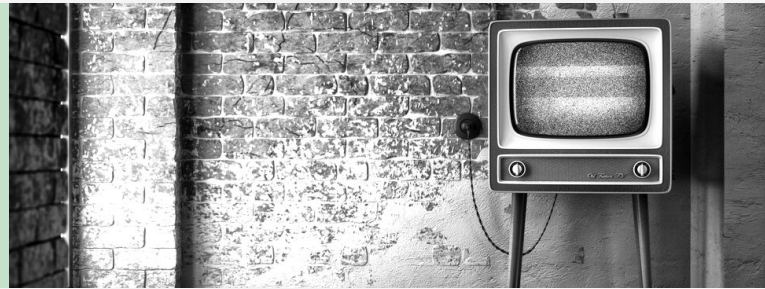
The rapid growth of podcasting is similarly inspiring a new generation of audio content marketing. One-quarter of Americans listen to podcasts weekly and marketers want to reach them. Beyond sponsoring a podcast or inserting pre-roll ads, branded podcasts unite a brand with a passionate audience, creating a sense of community. Just like their predecessors, these podcasts shouldn't feel overtly commercial, even if it is created by or funded buy a brand. An effective podcast -- regardless if it is branded or not -- must offer the audience value or they'll abandon it for one of the 700,000 other podcasts in the Apple podcast app. If a podcast doesn't deliver something of value for the consumer, it will miss its mark.

More than a century after its print branded content, John Deere launched a podcast, "On Life and Land", about agriculture, rural life and farming history. Like the company's magazine before it, John Deere's podcast doesn't explicitly talk about their sponsors; In fact, the brand might only be mentioned a handful of times, but the audience and the brand are united by common interests.

TRADER JOE'S

At its best, branded content can make its way into mainstream entertainment. On cult food retailer Trader Joe's "Inside Trader Joe's" podcast, foodies and loyal customers get a peak behind the curtain, with executives and staffers dishing out insider information. Want to know how the company's secretive taste kitchen works or where they travel to source new products? How about why staffers wear those colorful Hawaiian shirts and how bananas can cost just 19 cents each? The podcast answers these questions and more. The podcast is such a hit that it soared to no. 3 on the Apple podcast charts -- a significant achievement for any podcast, let alone a brand-created show. In testaments to its consumer appeal, "Inside Trader Joe's" regularly catches the attention of food bloggers and earns segments on NBC's "Today Show".

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONTENT MARKETING



WHAT'S IN IT FOR THE LISTENER?

In another widely-cited example, GE's fictional sci-fi podcast, "The Message," is regarded by many as one of most successful branded podcasts ever. The show has nothing to do with the medical devices or aircraft parts the company manufactures. Rather, it is a fictional sci-fi series about messages received from space. But GE is synonymous with invention and innovation, and that's the halo that shines on its brand.

Whether your branded content is audio, video, print or social, done properly, it will create positive associations with your brand. That halo effect produces action and increases engagement. Branded content is so popular now that an estimated 88% of brands now deploy content marketing campaigns. Unfortunately, while media industry boasts some standout examples of branded content, there are countless projects that fall short of delivering value for consumers.

To avoid the pitfalls of over-commercialization, you want to create value for the audience and approach content with the "WIIFL" filter, or "What's in It for the Listener?" Don't focus on how the content will benefit your brand. (We know it is hard, but forget about sales for a minute) Rather, consider how a consumer will connect your company with the content and build a relationship. The best branded content leaves a lasting shine on your brand. And that creates value for your brand and your customers.



THE EXPERT: STEVEN GOLDSTEIN - AMPLIFI MEDIA

Steven Goldstein is CEO of audio innovation firm Amplifi Media. Amplifi works with top media companies, corporate brands, podcasters and individual talent to define and create effective digital strategy and content for on-demand audio including podcasts and smart speakers. Amplifi also produces content for brands via its Amplifi Originals initiative. Goldstein has long been recognized as a thought leader in audio programming, marketing, and management. He has created and developed scores of successful radio brands around the country, as well as nurtured and advanced local and national broadcast talent.

**THE BRANDED
CONTENT PROJECT**



**DEVELOP
IT**

DEVELOPING YOUR INITIATIVE

PREPARED BY

The Branded Content Project

FEATURED EXPERTS

Eric Brandner
Jerrid Grimm
Mike Mocklar
Rachel Watkins
Liz Huff



**The
Branded
Content
Project**

THE BUSINESS OF STORYTELLING

6 REASONS WHY YOU NEED BRANDED CONTENT NOW

Your marketing team can't do it all.

You invest in traditional and digital advertising while dedicating long hours to tweaking your strategy in hopes of boosting your return on investment. You do all this while trying to keep up with the latest trends and watching your budget like a miserly Disney villain.

Wouldn't it be nice to have a go-to tactic in your ever-changing media arsenal that's both high-quality and enriches the lives of your core audience? Something you can deftly recycle without fear of the message going stale or engagement tapering off? You need branded content. And you need it now.

We get it. Branded content is a prime target when you have to cut 10 percent of your marketing budget. It's not an easy tactic to execute well, either. And to top it off, these thoughtful, often multilayered storytelling campaigns designed to attract and educate your core audience usually don't even include a revenue-producing call-to-action. On purpose.

But the risk is low compared to the potential reward. Eric Brandner, General Manager of Creative Lab @McClatchy has six reasons why.



01

TRUST

Branded content is necessary specifically because it isn't selling your audience. Branded content is sharing and teaching. You're adding value to someone's life. In many cases, you're creating opportunities for your current and future customers to experience something that benefits them before buying your product or converting in some other way. And that engenders trust.

Don't get us wrong. Ads are great. And you absolutely need them to sell your product. But branded content earns you fans. And you need fans to thrive in the long term.

A 2017 Time Inc. study showed roughly two out of three people polled trusted branded content more than ads. While that's not shocking, the same pool of respondents went on to emphasize the creativity and alternative approaches that go into making quality branded content vs. advertising products are significant in that equation. That was especially true among younger respondents.

6 REASONS WHY YOU NEED BRANDED CONTENT NOW



02

AUDIENCE RETENTION

Your ad may be great, but it's still an ad. You're going to need to expose people to it over and over, hammering them with your message until you finally hook them. And does breaking your customer's resolve sound like a great way to start a long-term relationship? Branded content, on the other hand, lets you create stories people remember. It lets you stretch your creative legs. Would you rather see 40 Lexus commercials or watch a spoof crime drama starring Colin Quinn and Seth Meyers? We're not suggesting you need to choose one over the other. We're saying you need both. And studies show you need fewer touch points for it to be effective. (A 2016 IPG/Forbes/Newhouse study showed brand recall was 59 percent higher on branded content compared to ads.)

03

YOU MUST STAND OUT

Everyone makes ads. But you want to be remembered. The branded content retention points above are largely fueled by the unique ways the content is being presented. And as a marketer, attention is the scarcest of all the commodities you chase. Branded content gives you an opportunity to show why you're different, taking chances you wouldn't in your ads while telling great stories. It also takes a bit of the pressure off from figuring out how to translate a captivating piece into a sales pitch. Be honest, be different, and see how your genuine brand values and beliefs start converting some of your customers into true believers. And that means ...

04

YOU NEED TO SHARE YOUR PURPOSE

Sure, you have a mission statement. But what does it look like in action? What stories embody those lofty words in your presentation decks? This matters more now more than ever. Why? Millennials — who have far more buying power now than five years ago when frustrated marketers were making fun of their idiosyncrasies — care a lot about how brands act, not just the products they sell. And this norm-breaking generation — the oldest of whom will turn 40 next year — is ascending to its eventual place as corporate America's prime revenue base. Millennials want to engage with companies that are socially conscious. While the Nike sales boost after the Colin Kaepernick advertising campaign may be the risk-reward gold standard, several other brands are building affinity via branded content that supports causes they believe in. Take Patagonia's relentless advocacy for environmental conservation or Dave's Killer Bread's work promoting second-chance employment for people with criminal backgrounds as examples of how it's done.

6 REASONS WHY YOU NEED BRANDED CONTENT NOW



05 YOU CAN EXPAND YOUR MARKETING FUNNEL WITHOUT DISTURBING YOUR TRADITIONAL BASE

Your ads are presumably fine-tuned conversion machines. Your data operation lets you target your customers on every channel and your communications team has tailored those messages toward strong engagement. Your customers remember your logo and know where to buy your product. And that's all great when the economy is on solid ground. But it's often not going to let you expand your message (with the long-term goal of converting new customers) beyond your traditional base. Branded content gives you a chance to talk about things your audience cares about without disrupting your other tested and trusted communication streams. And when's the best time to expand your brand awareness and potential customer base? Right now, you say? Well, we agree.

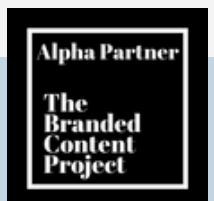
06 WHY JUST CREATE F.O.M.O. FOR YOUR PRODUCT WHEN YOU CAN DO IT FOR YOUR ENTIRE BRAND?

Exclusivity and superior quality will always be great advantages for your products or services. But those ideas work for branded content, too. Branded content can capture and amplify the emotions behind the experiences your business creates. It can also take your audience's shared experiences and create communities centered around your brand where everyone benefits. You can offer exclusive content, contests, and private events where tips, insights or even celebrity encounters can be delivered exclusively to your true believers. This rewards them for their loyalty and increases the chance they'll evangelize on your behalf, whether it's a social share (the least they could do) or word-of-mouth to their friends (still the gold standard). Why stop at turning your audience into customers when you can expend the extra effort to make them lifelong fans?



THE EXPERT: ERIC BRANDNER

Eric has a decade of experience managing worldwide news and branded content teams. He joined the Creative Lab in February 2017 and assumed the general manager position in March 2018, helping the team boost sales significantly and win six industry awards for content during his first year at the helm. Before that, he was a director at the USO, one of America's leading nonprofits. His team changed the way the USO told its story, earning millions of organic views on its branded content and winning 18 industry awards over a five-year span.



16 BRANDED CONTENT STATS THAT PROVE ITS VALUE

Branded content has become way more than a buzzword. This form of advertising has transformed since the early days of advertorial, with more publishers and advertisers investing in it than ever before. Even the biggest names in the business have overhauled their teams to make it an essential part of their digital ad sales. And yet, while we celebrate content studios like T Brand and WP Brand Studio for taking the industry to new heights, what do we really know about the impact of all these stories being created?

The answer is: a lot more than we did a few years ago. Branded content is often a premium product (read: expensive), with prices ranging from \$1,000 to \$50,000 and above depending on your partners and the size of the campaign. As such, more teams have taken it upon themselves to prove the effectiveness of branded content. The good news is that beyond being a powerful awareness tool, content can translate directly into more eyes on your brand's website and more cash in your till.

To help anyone wanting to learn more, Jerrid Grimm and the Pressboard team collected 16 studies and statistics from companies across the industry.



01

BRANDED CONTENT IS 22X MORE ENGAGING THAN DISPLAY ADS

Readers spend an average of 36 seconds engaging with written branded content, which is significantly higher than the average 1.6 seconds they spend with a banner ad.

"Banner blindness" is a real issue for marketers today. Users have become so used to ignoring the ads that frame their content that click-through rates for banners has fallen to less than 0.1%. These ads are generally considered annoying and disruptive, so it's no wonder that they're less engaging than branded content, which offers information readers are already seeking out.

16 BRANDED CONTENT STATS THAT PROVE ITS VALUE



02

BRANDED CONTENT DRIVES HIGHER BRAND RECALL THAN PRE-ROLL ADS

While video remains a strong tactic for digital publishers, branded content outperforms it when it comes to brand recall. According to a Nielsen report, branded content resulted in 86% brand recall, while pre-roll resulted in only 65% brand recall.

03

BRANDED CONTENT DRIVES CONSUMER INTENTION AND INTEREST

An IPG Media Lab-led study found that consumers are 14% more likely to seek out additional content from an advertiser after being exposed to branded content. That said, Forbes chief revenue officer Mark Howard says branded content and banner ads can work in tandem in this process, reminding users of the brand they were exposed to and pushing them down the funnel.

04

BRAND RECALL IS 59% HIGHER FOR BRANDED CONTENT THAN OTHER DIGITAL ADS

According to that same IPG Media Lab-led study, The report also showed that branded content recall has improved 17% compared to when it was first conducted back in 2013. It seems either consumers are becoming more used to it, or we're getting better at it. Or a bit of both.

05

BRANDED CONTENT DISTRIBUTED THROUGH PREMIUM PUBLISHERS SEES 50% HIGHER BRAND LIFT

It pays to partner up. Marketers who distribute their branded content through a publisher's network see 50% higher brand lift than those who publish on their own.

The science behind this comes down to pattern recognition. Humans are really good at recognizing patterns, and when a brand is associated with a trusted source like a publisher, our brains take that as a signal that the company shares the same values and reputation.

16 BRANDED CONTENT STATS THAT PROVE ITS VALUE



06

90% OF MEDIA GROUPS EXPECT THEIR BRANDED CONTENT REVENUE TO INCREASE OVER THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

The branded content space is booming. In a survey of 20 North American media groups, almost all of them said they expect branded content to grow — that's more than any other revenue stream, including subscriptions, video or display advertising.

07

NATIVE ADVERTISING IS PREDICTED TO EXCEED \$402 BILLION BY 2025

Those publishers might be right, too. Native advertising firm AdYouLike suggests that the industry will grow from \$85.83 billion in 2020 to \$402 billion by 2025.

08

74.5% OF COMMUNICATIONS PROFESSIONALS INCLUDE BRANDED CONTENT IN THEIR CAMPAIGNS

And of those, 67% expect their clients to spend more on branded content within the next year.

09

27.5% OF INTERNET USERS HAVE AN AD BLOCKER

That's one in four, and millennials are even more averse to banner ads. Nearly two in three millennials block ads, although they still feel that retargeted ads and social media ads can be relevant to their interests.

10

MOST ADVERTISERS ACTIVELY AVOID ADS. EVEN THEIR OWN.

A Pressboard study showed that 98% of marketers stream ad-free content and 27% report using ad blockers. But since 96% prefer articles to banners, there's hope for us content folks yet.

11

YOUNG VIEWERS WILL WATCH ADS TO SUPPORT THEIR FAVORITE CELEBRITIES

Even though millennials hate ads, 58% of them will watch them if they support their favorite digital personalities. The content still needs to feel authentic, entertaining and useful, however.

16 BRANDED CONTENT STATS THAT PROVE ITS VALUE



12

MORE CONSUMERS TRUST PREMIUM PUBLISHERS THAN TRUST NEWS CONTENT ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER

The “Fake News” issue has had a serious impact on consumer trust in social media. According to a survey conducted through Qualtrics in the UK, 79% of respondents think it’s important to know the source of news content. The same number reported having trust in the BBC, while 55% trust news in Time and The Guardian. Only 36% trust news on Facebook and Twitter.

13

READERS PREFER TO SEE ADS BLENDING IN WITH THE PAGE

Most respondents to a Verizon Media study said that they accept advertising as a form of content, with 79% of them saying they’d rather see ads that blend into the page than obtrusive banners.

14

VIEWERS REACT MORE POSITIVELY TO BRANDED VIDEO CONTENT THAN REGULAR COMMERCIALS

People who watch branded videos are 62% more likely to show a positive reaction compared with those who watched 30-second ads. Happy people remember your brand and are more likely to buy, so keep that in mind next time you’re planning on your media spend.

15

USERS WHO FEEL A CONNECTION TO A BRAND SPEND 2X AS MUCH MONEY AS THOSE WHO DON’T

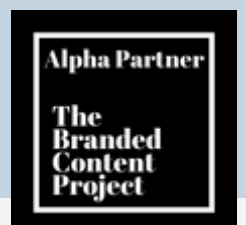
So say 70% of respondents to a study by Capgemini’s Digital Transformation Institute. What’s more, 81% of those respondents then promote their favorite brands to family and friends. Finding a way to connect emotionally with your audience is simply good business sense.



ADVICE FROM AN ALPHA PARTNER

“While branded content has become a core part of the local media offering, it is time that it evolve beyond 'advertorial 2.0.’”

Mike Orren
President of Belo Business Intelligence
Chief Product Officer
Dallas Morning News



16 BRANDED CONTENT STATS THAT PROVE ITS VALUE



16

CONSUMERS WANT BRANDS TO TAKE A STAND

It's not just about catchy taglines and good product. A majority of consumers want brands to have an opinion about social and political issues, according to Sprout Social's recent study. We've already seen companies like Nike and Gillette bring this into their Colin Kaepernick and "The Best Men Can Be" campaigns, respectively, with mixed results. If your company is planning to do the same, make sure your position is genuine and values-driven. Sales will come later, but only if the public believes your message is authentic.

FINAL THOUGHTS

It all goes to show that branded content is an important tactic, no matter what stage of the funnel your customer is in. What other powerful branded content statistics do you share with your team members and clients?



THE EXPERT: JERRID GRIMM - PRESSBOARD

Jerrid Grimm is the Co-founder of Pressboard, the award winning content marketing platform used by the world's most influential publishers and advertisers.

Jerrid grew up wanting Angela Bower's job on the sitcom *Who's the Boss*. His career has since spanned mobile, experiential and digital disciplines, working with some of North America's most innovative brands and publishers. Jerrid believes that stories are better than ads and co-founded Pressboard with a mission of leveraging technology to make content easier to product, measure and amplify.

7 TIPS FOR CREATING A SUCCESSFUL BRANDED CONTENT INITIATIVE

Branded content creation is an important tool every local media publisher and organization needs to have in their toolbox in today's rapidly changing and competitive landscape. Done correctly, great branded content can deepen your relationship with your audience, strengthen your connection with your advertisers, and generate new revenue. Mike Mocklar shares seven tips to help your branded content initiative get off to the right start.



01

GET SUPPORT AT THE TOP

Branded content initiatives are different from traditional advertising. They involve a different type of storytelling, as well as a different sales cycle and sales pitch. They take time and resources, patience and a willingness to be creative and embrace a new media model. The difference between having leaders who understand and believe in the project, and leaders who are apathetic or hostile to the initiative, is frequently the difference between success and failure. Senior leadership doesn't need to get down in the weeds. They do need to ensure there is enough runway and support for the effort to take flight.

02

FIND KEY EVANGELISTS

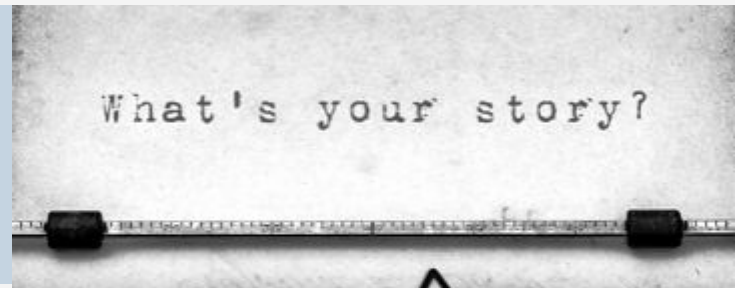
Branded content initiatives need people who will be the day-to-day leaders of the project. They need to be the subject experts, the cheerleaders, the people who can explain what the project is about both internally and externally. Your sales evangelists need to keep sales leadership excited in the project. They need to train the sales team on what the project is about and how they can sell it and be experts in explaining what branded content can do for clients. Your content evangelist needs to understand how to produce engaging content which can be very different from traditional storytelling, while making sure the editorial teams in the organization understand branded content is a complementary piece to what they are doing, not a threat. Find your passionate people and empower them to lead and spread the word.

03

CREATE A SPECIALIZED SALES PACKAGE

When you are starting a branded content initiative, it is not the time to simply take an old sales deck or powerpoint and try to renovate or retrofit it. Branded content is different. Branded content is exciting. And most importantly, branded content needs to be sold a different way from more traditional advertising campaigns. Take the time to make your deck original and unique. It will pay off and add to the excitement around the initiative.

7 TIPS FOR CREATING A SUCCESSFUL BRANDED CONTENT INITIATIVE



04 **BREAK DOWN SILOS**

A successful branded content initiative can't just start in your sales department and live on its own. Your content, marketing, social, and sales teams need to be working together and talking regularly, especially on the evangelist level. Part of this is sheer logistics. Branded content frequently lives next to editorial content. Resources are shared and scarce, and the people selling the initiative and creating the initiative need to be on the same page. However, the real benefit comes when different areas bring different ideas to the table. The sales person trying to pitch a local furniture store gets a great idea from the content person on how to create a great video. The marketing person comes up with a unique way to share the content, and the social person chimes in with a new platform initiative which is perfect. Collaboration and communication breed creativity and increased revenue.

05 **MAKE SIZZLES AND SAMPLES**

Ask ten different people what branded content means, and you're likely to get ten different answers ... and that's just from people inside your organization. Ask your clients, and many of them won't have any idea of what you are talking about. The easiest way to solve this problem is to show, not tell. Show them an example of what the branded content campaign you are creating will look like, whether that's a sample article, video, social post, or anything else. Help your advertisers (and your confused internal colleagues) visualize what this content will look and feel like, what makes it special, and why they want to be a part of it. A great sizzle reel of your best branded content gets your clients excited, and will get the team excited about the project.



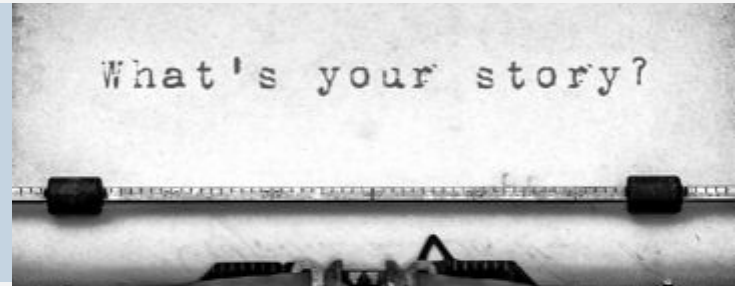
ADVICE FROM AN ALPHA PARTNER

“Branded content is just as much about the content as it is our commitment to our clients. It's not about producing an advertorial; rely on your strengths as storytellers to create an experience that provides value for your audience and then think about a way to organically integrate the client.”

Jennifer Mitchell
Senior Vice President of Content Development
ABC Owned Television Stations and Localish



7 TIPS FOR CREATING A SUCCESSFUL BRANDED CONTENT INITIATIVE



06 SIMPLE IS BETTER

Branded content is an exciting playground for content, sales and marketing teams to play in. As a result, the temptation is to keep adding elements to the project. "We can do a podcast, and a series of videos, and live social media hits, and 100 different articles, and we can sell it 200 different ways!" and so on. Don't do it. Start small. Focus on what you can do well, and branch out from there. Don't ask your content creation wizards to create videos for six different platforms just because you can. Pick the one where you can be most effective and overdeliver. Don't overload your sales teams with 17 different variations of a branded content project when they've never sold one before. Create two or three simple sales packages, at cost A, cost B, and cost C. Cost C will have a few more elements than cost A, but they will be well-defined and created in partnership with your content and marketing teams to ensure their success. Focus on delivering a simple, great product and expand from there.

07 KNOW YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION

This tip is likely the most important one, yet hardest to achieve. At the end of the day, you are trying to create content which will resonate with your audience while creating value for both your advertiser and your media organization. Start with the value proposition of your audience. Who is the audience you and your advertiser are trying to reach, and what do they want? What can you create which will entertain and engage them? What value are you bringing them with this content? Answer those questions, and your branded content initiative will work for your audience, your advertisers and your organization.



THE EXPERT: MIKE MOCKLAR

Mike Mocklar is President and Chief Creative Officer of Mocklar Consulting, an innovative content strategy and production company based in Atlanta, G.A. A Peabody and duPont award-winning producer, Mocklar developed The Southern Weekend lifestyle initiative for Raycom Media, which included a television series, broadcast, social media and digital distribution, sponsored content production, and the creation of a central website and 27 local digital franchises. He also oversaw Raycom's Digital Content Center, which produced and distributed 24/7 national news and lifestyle content to its stations. Previously, Mocklar was an executive producer at CNN in program and talent development, documentary and long-form programming, and sports.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY MATTERS: 5 REASONS CSR SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A BRANDED CONTENT STRATEGY

Many companies are working behind-the-scenes on compelling corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives – programs that many people don't even know about. At the same time, those companies don't always have the channels to spread the word about their CSR stories – and many aren't even thinking about using that part of their business in their advertising and marketing plans.

That's where branded content comes in.

Rachel Watkins, senior marketing manager at Belo Media Group, has 5 reasons you should consider CSR as a branded content strategy.



CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY MATTERS

Branded content offers a strategic and compelling solution for companies to connect with audiences in a meaningful, purpose-driven way across a range of media channels. Big brands have already been doing this to spread goodwill and to support the causes they champion – all with an eye toward the bottom line. Look no further than Dove's Evolution of Beauty, Coca-Cola's Arctic Home, and Jersey Mike's Month of Giving campaigns, among many others.

Publishers can do the same thing for their clients, customizing and amplifying the channels by which these CSR platforms are heard.

But, why does this celebration of social good matter?

The message behind a brand is more important now than ever, with 90 percent of consumers saying that they want companies to tell them how they are supporting causes and making a difference.* Consumers expect businesses to invest in their community and beyond, making civically minded and socially responsibly companies the ideal partners for branded content. And, when a brand's messaging is based on things that really matter, consumers engage differently and even volunteer their attention. It's a shift from ad interruption to ad attraction.

SOURCE: *Cone Communications CSR Study

5 REASONS CSR SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A BRANDED CONTENT STRATEGY



01

HEART MATTERS

Increase visibility and amplify the mission, vision, and impact of CSR initiatives that matter most to clients by producing content that reflects their social and community priorities.

02

STORYTIME MATTERS

Strategically elevate CSR platforms that local and national companies are already championing through the power of custom storytelling to bring their social-good impact to life.

03

POSITIVE HALO EFFECT MATTERS

Powerfully showcase companies and their causes to build brand reputation and drive competitive advantage as well as awareness, acquisition and loyalty, targeted revenue results, and millennial/Gen-Z impact.

04

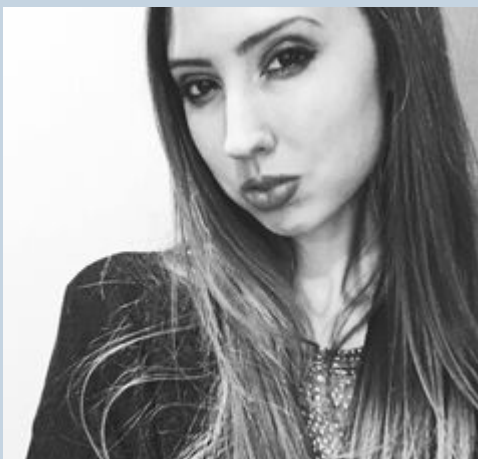
TALENT MATTERS

Help companies retain and acquire talent by celebrating their social responsibility as well as focusing on diversity and inclusion.

05

COMMUNITY MATTERS

Encourage volunteer and donor engagement, as well as other civic engagement priorities such as voting, advocacy, and more, all while setting the stage for the next generation.



THE EXPERT: RACHEL WATKINS

Rachel Watkins, Senior Marketing Manager at Belo Media Group, has been with Belo for nearly seven years, and now primarily works on The Dallas Morning News brand marketing, FWD>DFW brand marketing and content, and B2B strategy and sponsorships. She started her career at Modern Luxury publications, spending five years in both a content and marketing role.

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3 REASONS TO MAKE PROMOTIONS PART OF YOUR BRANDED CONTENT STRATEGY

Developing a great branded content campaign takes effort and planning. You want to educate and inform your audience, but you also need to deliver meaningful, measurable results to your advertiser. Promotions like quizzes, photo contests, and ballots are your key to answering this challenge. Liz Huff, Director of Affiliate Success for Second Street, has 3 reasons promotions should be part of your branded content strategy.



01

PROMOTIONS DRIVE THE RESULTS YOUR ADVERTISERS WANT

Your advertiser wants a unique opportunity to connect with your valuable audience. Whether this is their first dive into branded content or not, they're ultimately looking for you to bring them results they can use. According to data from Borrell Associates, Inc., in addition to traditional advertising, your advertisers want something trackable. Promotions are optimized for lead-generation. With a registration form, you can take a simple piece of content and make it something that delivers results and at the same time give your users an interactive and meaningful brand experience.

02

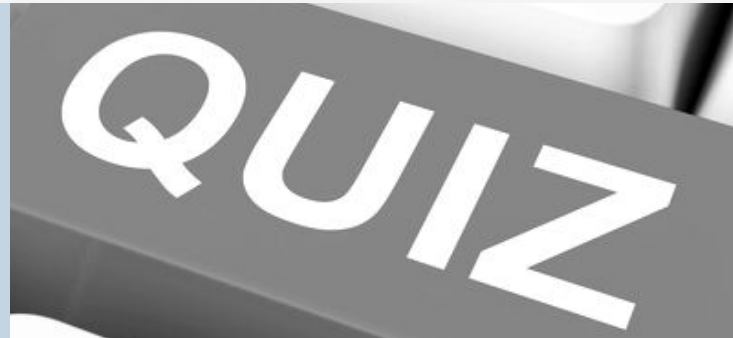
PROMOTIONS ENHANCE YOUR STORYTELLING

While revenue is good, your storytelling is what keeps your audience coming back to your site. Branded content relies heavily on audience interaction with your content. It's your responsibility to create pieces that not only deliver the results your advertiser is looking for, but create content meaningful to your audience. Create a more robust branded content package by incorporating promotions. If you're creating written content or on-air content, a promotion is an excellent way to make your branded content campaign an interactive experience that will drive your audience to take action.

90%

of people like custom content as a way for brands to engage with them.

3 REASONS TO MAKE PROMOTIONS PART OF YOUR BRANDED CONTENT STRATEGY



03

PROMOTIONS CREATE STANDALONE CONTENT

Branded content can be daunting and time-consuming if you're just getting started. However, promotions are a simple way to jump into the ring and create powerful branded content campaigns. While they can be a way to elevate existing content pieces, the benefit of quizzes, photo contests, and ballots is they can stand alone as their own branded content experience. Promotions are engaging content experiences that users interact with eagerly. While your competitors may be writing another article or presenting another on-air feature, a promotion allows you to tell the client's story in a unique, interactive way, setting your client's company a step above your competition.

FINAL THOUGHT

Promotions are an excellent way to get started with branded content or enhance an already existing program. They're ideal for creating a meaningful experience for your audience while delivering measurable results to your advertisers.



THE EXPERT: LIZ CRIDER HUFF - SECOND STREET

Liz is the Director of Affiliate Success at Second Street and has extensive background in media. Having spent nearly ten years working in sales at two St. Louis television stations, Liz led her team to achieve and surpass their revenue goals by delivering measurable results for their advertisers and significant sponsorship revenue. Liz helps media companies of all sizes deliver outstanding results on a daily basis within their organizations including sales, marketing, audience development and editorial.



#brandedcontentproject DEVELOP IT

- Get all departments involved in the process
- Find your evangelist
- Build content for the audience first
- Create simple, multi-platform sales packages
- Establish an education plan for sales teams
- Discuss disclosure with your legal team
- Set up rules and definitions for your team
- Ask for help at sellbranded.com

THE BRANDED CONTENT PROJECT



CREATE IT

CREATING BRANDED CONTENT

PREPARED BY
The Branded Content Project

FEATURED EXPERTS
Adrian Fulle
Carolina Esbaile
Apryl Pilolli



**The
Branded
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THE BUSINESS OF STORYTELLING

9 BRANDED CONTENT PRODUCTION TRICKS

Through the Branded Content Project we are able to bring expert advice, unique voices and marketing leaders from across the industry to help educate and share best practices with all publishers. We recently talked with Adrian Fulle, Executive Producer of Variety's Content Studio, about what he has learned from years of branded content video production and working with advertisers from around the country. Here are his top 9 video production tricks to keep your audiences engaged and your clients happy.



WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

This production guide is a brief look at some production “tricks-of-the-trade” I learned while producing digital video content for brand clients at the Variety Content Studio. This top 9 list has helped the content perform better on social and across all of Variety’s and our brand partners’ digital channels, and was evidenced by our positive analytics results over time. It’s important to note that the results that led to these concepts were related to our specific campaigns and content, and may or may not apply to all branded video content in the market. In other words, take all of this with a grain of salt and think about the platforms where your content is being displayed and what audience is viewing it.

01

FIRST-FRAME FACE

Starting a video with a closeup of a human face greatly helps to capture the attention of the viewer and keep them engaged with the content longer. Video content that starts in black, or with a graphic or a wide shot, or anything else, typically did not perform as well for us. This is true for both mobile and desktop, but particularly true for mobile (see No. 4 for why).

02

NO BRAND LOGOS UNTIL THE END

If possible, only show brand logos at the very end of the video. We have done both front end title cards and back end, but the videos that performed best for us did not have front end brand logos, and only back end, or no logos at all. As you can imagine, one of the harder aspects of this rule is convincing the client to accept it. We had mixed results in doing that.

10 BRANDED CONTENT PRODUCTION TRICKS



03

GRAPHICS OVER PICTURE

When using title graphics, they should be over picture and off to a corner, not center frame. When viewers see the show's title graphics (title of the series, or the individual video clip) they tend to click off the video. Our branded content videos typically have a title (usually the same title as the campaign we're running for the brand partner), and we would have a title graphic on screen near the start of the video. Sometimes this graphic was coupled with our brand logo graphic, and/or the brand partner's logo. We discovered over time that graphics over black lead to a disproportionate number of viewers clicking off. We literally could pinpoint the moment where the majority of click-offs happened and that usually lined up with the introduction of title graphics. We then experimented with graphics over picture and that produced better results. However, once we moved the graphic titles to a corner of the frame, or the lower third position, and not over center frame, we had even greater success. In other words, the video performs better when the show's title is essentially in a lower third position and over picture. This way the video imagery isn't covered up and the story continues unhindered.

04

MOBILE-FIRST STRATEGY = MORE CLOSE-UPS

When conducting a strategy that is mobile-first, you will want to include more close-ups in your video content than medium or wide shots. Because the screen sizes for most mobile devices are smaller than desktop screens, close ups are easier to see and convey more emotion than wide shots do. Imagine a close up of an entrance to a building, rather than a wide shot of the building and its surrounding area. Some issues with needing a wide establishing shot for a scene can be mitigated with lower 3rd graphics over a closer shot (even if not technically a close-up, but at least closer than a traditional wide). Establishing shots aside, close-ups provide a more intimate experience for the viewer which keep them engaged longer. Most times they are viewing the content on a phone in a public place where there are many distractions in their physical environment. Wider shots don't convey as much, if any, emotion and it's easier for the brain to become distracted.

05

NO PRODUCT PLACEMENT OR BRAND INTEGRATION, UNLESS ...

We constantly struggled to get clients to accept NOT placing products in the content in any way. Our reasoning was that true branded content is just great content that the brand can be aligned with. I often suggested to clients to imagine that really awesome video piece they saw recently and only if their brand could have been aligned with it, imagine the number of views they would've been able to rack up. As you can imagine, most clients did not want to agree to this. OR, what was worse, many DID agree to this, then during production would go back on their word and ask for product integration. Every story is different, every client is different and sometimes product integration makes perfect and organic sense. But when possible, it's always best not to have it.

9 BRANDED CONTENT PRODUCTION TRICKS



06

NO TALKING HEADS

Seeing people sitting and responding to interview questions, or talking to another person sucks. Period. If you must have a talking head interview, then show as little of that interview as possible and use the audio from it as voice over for something that is visually more interesting and stimulating. We were pigeonholed into producing talking head interviews quite a bit at Variety primarily because the clients always wanted the celebrity we were interviewing seen as they believed it led to better results. Certainly some celebs did, but most did not. It's far better to employ a structure of voice over mixed with interesting visuals to tell a story where an interview is required. Imagine the interviewee is narrating the story. In fact, you can write a great story from their audio.

07

LONG FORM IS BACK ... SORT OF

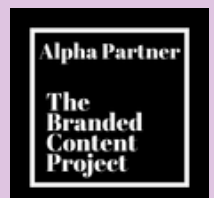
We constantly struggled with viewer retention and completion rates with our content. Taking Facebook's mechanism for optimizing for retention (paid for 10 seconds or longer views) out of the equation, we discovered that over the last three years, longer form content has been trending, but mostly on Facebook only. All of our content on Instagram or Twitter was always short-form (30 seconds or less), but the purpose of that content was to drive traffic to the longer form content. It worked and it didn't work. Audiences interact with platforms in different ways and generally speaking we'd see higher completion rates on longer form content on Facebook. When we started, regardless of the length of our content, we see anywhere from three seconds to 18-second length views. It was frustrating. We also know that for most clients, completion rates are not major KPIs. They usually go off of views. However, for us, that sucked. We wanted real completion rates, or at least much longer retention because we were filmmakers and believed that the stories we told, although branded content, were compelling and engaging. Plus, we never believed a three-second view really was an actual view.



ADVICE FROM AN ALPHA PARTNER

“There's a lot of value in our branded content products and we want to ensure the materials used to sell them and their quality match up.”

Katie Fulp
Manager of Client Services and Operations
Capitol Broadcasting Company / WRAL



9 BRANDED CONTENT PRODUCTION TRICKS



08 DO NOT CUT CORNERS

When it comes to video quality, do NOT cut corners. Spend the money on the screen. Even if it means lower margins for you. There are certain creative stories that require lower quality video (i.e. some real life type story that would benefit from being shot on cellphone video, or something of that nature), but in general higher quality video production = better results. The old mindset was spend as little on video production as possible because the distribution was across digital and audiences there do not expect quality. That is no longer true. Now audiences expect broadcast quality content on digital and as devices, specifically mobile devices get higher and higher in streaming video quality (4k, 5K, 6K, etc.), and with the advent of 5G... higher quality is the new norm.

09 BRANDED CONTENT IS NOT A COMMERCIAL

Okay, branded content IS a commercial, but it shouldn't feel like one. When producing branded content you should be focused on telling a great story about compelling human beings who are inspiring or engaging. If what the client really wants is a commercial, tell them to go make a commercial, because branded content is not the same.



THE EXPERT: ADRIAN FULLE

As Executive Producer of the Variety Content Studio, Adrian managed all branded, sponsored and advertorial content for Variety's brand partners as well as certain original content initiatives for Variety and Indiewire.com. He led the studio's sales and creative teams to ensure top creative concepts were established for Variety's branded, digital and linear initiatives. Tasked with building, launching and scaling the Variety Content Studio from scratch, Adrian ended up helping to drive a new, multimillion-dollar revenue stream for Variety and garnered several industry awards for the content they created along the way. Originally a filmmaker, Adrian is passionate about telling stories in the branded space.

5 COMMON MISTAKES THAT CAN RUIN YOUR CONTENT CAMPAIGN

Carolina Esbaile, creative director for Creative Lab @McClatchy, has dedicated the past few years of her professional life exclusively to content marketing. And over that time, she watched brands and ad agencies make the same mistake over and over again: they treat content marketing like advertising. It's a common mistake, and almost always results in a waste of money and a frustrated chief marketing officer who may start to believe content just doesn't work for their brand. The fact is: content works. And it can work brilliantly. But it needs a different strategy than advertising and brands have to stop treating them equally. Carolina has 5 common misconceptions from the advertising world that you should avoid at all costs when developing a content strategy for your brand.



01

CONTENT MARKETING IS A FORM OF ADVERTISING

It's not. Advertising is a strategy brands use to increase sales. Content marketing is a different strategy brands can (and should) use to increase sales and awareness. They are two different strategies and should be developed and executed in different ways.

Let's say advertising and content marketing are both contenders in a boxing match. Basically, advertising would be whoever is fighting Rocky. And content marketing would be, well, you guessed it, Rocky. Advertising has always been about aspiration. It's about the unachievable. Advertising is the guy who's already on top: he's got the money, the style, the clever lines, the girl and he makes you want to be just like him. It is aspirational.

Content marketing, on the other hand, is all about what's real. You see, the reason Rocky became such a popular character is because he's not some bigger-than-life hero who can accomplish it all. In fact, he doesn't even win the big fight until his second movie, and his opponent isn't a villain. Rocky is loved by his audience because, in life, most of us aren't big shots who have it all figured out. Sure, Rocky is still a little aspirational, but he's still human and relatable. He's what could have happened to us if we'd pursued our childhood dreams. He's inspirational. And that's the type of content people love, so much so that "Rocky" became one of the most profitable film franchises ever.

5 COMMON MISTAKES THAT CAN RUIN YOUR CONTENT CAMPAIGN



02 IT SHOULD BE ALL ABOUT YOUR PRODUCT OR YOUR BRAND

It's not. That's advertising. Content is all about your audience. While advertising is a tool to make sure people know your product exists and where to buy it, content is what will make them remember your brand forever. Take Dove, for instance, a brand that hasn't talked about how their body wash is better than the competition in a long time. It's still the leader in its category across the United States. While other brands spend millions of dollars on celebrity endorsements, Dove invests heavily in content. No celebrities. No models. No mention of their products' benefits. Just inspiring stories of normal women. And it works for them.

03 OKAY, THEN IT'S A LITTLE BIT ABOUT MY AUDIENCE, BUT MAYBE LIKE 65% ABOUT MY BRAND

Stop it! Sure, people need to know your brand is behind your initiative, and that whatever content you're putting out there is only available because your brand produced it and cares about your consumers' interests. But when you read an article about the best cars of 2019 and then realize all the cars listed are Fords because it's sponsored content produced by a local Ford dealership, you aren't going to feel enlightened. Instead, you'll immediately think, "I've been fooled. This is an ad."

Content cannot be a Frankenstein hybrid made out of advertising and journalism parts. Remember the Rocky analogy: we love him because he is real. Once that trust between brand and audience is broken, the campaign is more likely to backfire. Your audience will feel fooled or even angry. And that's a long way from the whole purpose of your content campaign, which was to create a positive emotional connection with your audience so that, over time, your brand will become top-of-mind.

04 IT HAS TO BE "ON BRAND"

It doesn't. I once had a client who hired several different YouTubers who resonated with the brand's audience for a content campaign. The problem was that the client asked me if I could make it all on brand, with the YouTubers only wearing the colors approved by the client. They wanted the background and videography to look a very specific way, too. Those are all advertising rules. Except this wasn't an ad. And by taking the influencers out of their element, the brand made sure all pieces looked like ads: well-produced, almost fake-looking videos.

The result left the audience wondering what was going on and why those videos looked completely different than all other posts on those YouTube influencers' channels. When using an influencer or a publisher to create content, the rule is actually the opposite of what it would be in advertising: if it has to be on brand, it's better if it's on their brand, not yours.

5 COMMON MISTAKES THAT CAN RUIN YOUR CONTENT CAMPAIGN



05 IT'S ABOUT CREATING A NEED

That's probably advertising's most popular rule, but when applied to content it simply doesn't work as well. A content campaign's main goal should be to inform, inspire or connect with the audience based on the audience's preferences. So let's go back to the basics and talk a little about how we develop emotional connections.

If you want to ask someone on a date, for example, you might want to know what that person likes to do and then plan the date accordingly, because that would increase the chances of a yes. Content works the same way. It's a way to build an emotional connection, and a brand has more chances of building a faithful audience when it tailors its content around what that audience loves. By doing that, you create something much stronger than a need: you create an emotional bond.

Content marketing is counterintuitive because it's not about your brand. It can't be (that would be advertising). Content is about your audience. It's about spending your brand's hard-earned money on something your audience loves, as if you were saying, "I care about you, so I made this because I think you might like it." Don't we all like to hear that? That's how content works, and that's why the brands that have mastered that technique are way ahead of the ones that invest exclusively in traditional advertising.

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THE EXPERT: CAROLINA ESBAILE

Carolina joined the Creative Lab after several years in television and advertising. She started her career as an editor for HBO and later became a documentary producer and editor for the BBC. Carolina has also led branded campaigns for the Discovery Channel, where she produced and directed award winning pieces for Jeep, Unilever and Nissan among other large clients.

8 BRANDED CONTENT CREATIVE BEST PRACTICES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

Wondering how to build successful and impactful social media content for your branded content campaign? Apryl Pilolli, head of innovation for Social News Desk, shares advice for how local media companies can utilize best practices when creating branded content for social media.



01

USE THUMB-STOPPING CREATIVE

The creative is the most important part of any social post. With so much content appearing in a person's social feed, it is easy to get lost in the mix. Your creative needs to earn people's attention and stop their thumb from scrolling past.

02

THINK MOBILE FIRST

96% of users access Facebook through mobile devices.(1) It is essential that you optimize your social content for these screens. This includes making sure your copy and creative is readable on a mobile phone and using square or vertical creative. Numerous tests have shown that maximizing the real estate of your post with square/vertical creative will improve the performance of your content.

03

USE COLORS THAT STAND OUT

When selecting colors for your post, consider the colors that will surround it. On Facebook, nothing will help to camouflage your post like blue, because Facebook's color scheme is based around it. To stand out, you need to use a contrasting color that will pop in the user's feed.

04

WRITE CONVERSATIONAL COPY

When creating content on social media, it is important not to forget to "be social." People don't want to be advertised "at" - but instead, they want content that brings them valuable information and entertains them. When you write the copy, think about how you might share it on your own personal social account. Keep the text short, conversational and ask questions.

8 BRANDED CONTENT CREATIVE BEST PRACTICES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA



05

ADD EMOJIS

Emojis are everywhere on social media. This is because they are perceived to be friendlier than text and it is easier to communicate with images. The human brain can process visuals 60,000 times faster than text. This is the reason why emojis increase engagement by a whopping 48% on Instagram.(2)

06

CREATE VIDEOS OR ANIMATED GRAPHICS

Did you know that video or animated graphic on social media generates 12 times the shares as a text or photo post?(3) The human eye is attracted by movement so using motion in your ads will attract more attention to your content. That doesn't mean you need to hire a professional video team to produce your social creative. Short text animations and movement in images can work just as well to draw the user in.

07

DESIGN FOR SOUND OFF

"Can you hear me now?" Probably not, if you are watching a video on social media. Only 15% of Facebook videos are watched with sound,(4) so it is important that your video or animation can tell the story without people listening to it. Many social networks offer tools to help with video captioning.



ADVICE FROM AN ALPHA PARTNER

“The strength of local news sites is in their content and ability to tell stories, and branded content allows us to put that strength at the forefront and better gain control of the monetization in ways that have been lost on the internet.”

Mike Katona
Director of Digital Operations
Graham Media Group



8 BRANDED CONTENT CREATIVE BEST PRACTICES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA



08

TEST DIFFERENT CREATIVE FORMATS

Facebook and Instagram both offer several different creative formats to let you showcase your message. From carousels, to slideshows, collections to immersive landing pages, you should test different options to see which works best to tell your story. Carousels are great for sequential storytelling and showcasing multiple images/videos, whereas Instant Experiences (formally known as canvas ads) are great for long-form content and immersive mobile experiences.

1. Statista, 2019
2. Quintly, 2017
3. eMarketer 2018
4. Digiday, 2016



THE EXPERT: APRYL PILOLLI - SOCIAL NEWS DESK

Apryl Pilolli is the Head of Innovation at Social News Desk where she is tasked with creating new technology solutions to help newsrooms generate revenue. She is a social and digital marketing expert with 22 years of experience in the local media industry. During that time, she spent 12 years at Cox Media Group leading social strategy across content, marketing and sales. Apryl has earned numerous Associated Press awards for her newsroom work and has been certified by the Internet Advertising Bureau in Digital Media Sales and by Facebook for Media Planning and Buying.



#brandedcontentproject CREATING IT

- Create rules for content quality
- Build templates with proper disclosure
- Organize content calendars for planning
- Build content for multiple platforms
- Set guidelines for advertiser content
- Consider a variety of visual elements
- Educate sales and clients on good content
- Ask for help at sellbranded.com

**THE BRANDED
CONTENT PROJECT**



**SELL
IT**

SELLING BRANDED CONTENT

PREPARED BY
The Branded Content Project

FEATURED EXPERTS
Jack Zavoral
Josh Kaufman
Ariel Giusti



**The
Branded
Content
Project**

THE BUSINESS OF STORYTELLING

10 WAYS TO PROSPECT AND PRESENT BRANDED CONTENT

Wondering when you should pitch branded content to a potential advertiser? Or more importantly, when you shouldn't? Jack Zavoral, Local Media Association's director of member development, shares 10 street level tips to help your teams decide when you pitch a branded content campaign, who is a good fit and how you can position your client as an expert, solution provider and an authority in their area of business.



01

WHAT PART OF THE FUNNEL

This is a mid-funnel strategy, NOT for Awareness, Reach, Immediate Impact. We are looking for quality of leads, not just quantity. In other words, a branded content campaign should NOT be a stand-alone strategy, but rather is intended to move more qualified buyers down the purchase funnel. Your clients still need to have strong awareness and reach campaigns in place while undertaking a branded content campaign.

02

TOUGH DECISIONS

Great for organizations with complex buying decisions, and/or when there is a need for a large amount of information and education to make a buying decision. In general, the higher the dollar value of the product/service, the more research potential customers will do, with much of it online. A branded content campaign will provide information, research, education, and other relevant information to potential customers as they look at alternatives. Providing this information can result in your client becoming seen as a thought-leader in the industry, which is also a benefit to potential customers who are not currently in the market for the product or service, but may be in the future.

03

BIG MONEY

Generally most relevant for higher dollar purchases; think cars, healthcare, education, real estate, professional services, tourism, home services, etc. Think about the last time you personally made a "high-ticket" purchase and the steps you took to find information to support your buying decision. The Branded Content Project can provide examples of how businesses in these and other categories used a content strategy to engage potential customers.

10 WAYS TO PROSPECT AND PRESENT BRANDED CONTENT



04

DON'T JUST ROUND UP THE USUAL SUSPECTS!

When you hear your client say they want; education, consideration, persuasion, research ... you can suggest a content/engagement strategy. This is NOT intended to be a project where it is pitched to everyone on your list, but instead think about your existing clients and prospects who can benefit by providing more information as part of their marketing strategy.

05

TAKE THIS TO THE "NO"

Approach the prospect who always says, "no." Bring them a new concept, not just a media sale. Professional media salespeople know that businesses are looking for business ideas beyond just "spots and dots" or a simple media plan. They gravitate to salespeople who have well-thought out marketing concepts that meet their needs to grow business.

06

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Look for opportunities that you never thought of before: B to B and non-profits, for example. There are many potential prospects who may not be a candidate for a standard media buy, but would welcome the opportunity to build more information for potential customers. Expand your horizon of potential prospects to include businesses that do not currently advertise in traditional media, and learn about their business communication needs.

07

TURN ON THE FOCUS

Great for clients who have a hard time deciding on where to focus message. Give them the ability to explain and engage. We have all spent lots of time with businesses trying to "nail the message" and position the business in a succinct and impactful manner. Your clients who have a hard time deciding on the message, or waffle back and forth between messages are excellent candidates for a branded content campaign. A branded content campaign gives them the ability to provide information on a variety of topics related to the purchase of their product or service.

90%

of media groups expect their branded content revenue to increase over the next 12 months.

10 WAYS TO PROSPECT AND PRESENT BRANDED CONTENT



08

CREATE THE EXPERTS

Create a program called "Ask the Experts" or similar for legal, home services, financial planners, healthcare, and other relevant categories. Create a program with all media elements, and offer tiers to potential participants based on budget, category exclusivity, time frame, and other variables. Engage your audience and get them to ask questions of the experts that are then answered by your experts.

09

EXAMPLES MATTER

Come to the table with content ideas – and visuals. Branded content can be difficult to explain to your clients, so when you have a qualified prospect bring them mockups of the concept. It doesn't have to be complete, but rather include visuals that depict the main idea and points to communicate to potential customers.

10

SO DOES ENGAGEMENT

Don't just sell to your clients – ENGAGE them! Just like a branded content campaign engages potential buyers, selling a branded content to a business should be about engaging them and including them in the development of communication points. Get the prospect to talk about all the points they wish they could communicate to their potential customers. This will go a long way to closing a branded content campaign.



THE EXPERT: JACK ZAVORAL - LMA

Jack Zavoral is a digital sales and marketing professional who has worked in dozens of markets with hundreds of merchants on their digital marketing strategies. He led the digital sales teams at the local broadcast and newspaper properties owned by Quincy Broadcasting, and also led the digital sales team at MyWeather, LLC. He is a regular speaker at digital marketing seminars focused on integrating digital with traditional media. His earlier experience in brand management with packaged goods companies Birds Eye foods and Rayovac batteries put him on both sides of the advertising transaction table. He has been certified by the Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB) in Advanced Digital Media Sales and co-produced the LMA's Advanced Digital Sales course.

5 WAYS TO SET SELLERS UP FOR BRANDED CONTENT SUCCESS

In today's media landscape, clients have dozens of ways to get their message to the consumer. One of those tools is branded content. But is your media company set up for success with selling it? What about executing the creative content? It's time to set up your sales team with the tools they need to deliver and execute branded content for clients. Most media companies will use a creative services, news or production team to execute branded content. It's important that the creative folks are part of the process and work directly with your client. Josh Kaufman shares five tips that will help deliver for your client and increase chances of renewal.



01

DEVELOP DEFINITIONS AND TERMS

You can't sell something if you don't define what it is. Unlike a commercial, branded content can have several definitions. Even the term you use is important. How many of us have heard the terms news integration, product placement, vignette, sponsored content, native advertising, dark posts? Each of these terms are very different things and using them consistently and to describe the right solution for your client is of the utmost importance. Start by having your sales managers and creative service team define branded content and the types of content you're willing to produce. And while you're at it, you should define these other terms - news integration, product placement, etc. - for your media company too. Now you're ready to talk with clients and have confidence in what you're talking about. A sales team armed with an arsenal of easy to understand content options brings success and avoids confusion.

02

LISTEN TO YOUR CLIENT

Now that you have a good understanding of what branded content is, it's time to listen to your clients. Media companies can offer dozens of solutions to advertisers including digital ads, native advertising, prime-time, news, event sponsorship and of course branded content. But just because branded content is the hot new trend, doesn't mean it's right for your client. What is your client looking to accomplish? What do they believe branded content is? Does it match up with your definition and are you willing to execute the content they describe? Branded content isn't for everyone and not every creative idea is your company willing to execute. The sales team, and more importantly the creative team (more on them in a minute), must educate the client on the difference between what they may want and what you're willing to do. This is when those definitions will come in handy and more importantly when showing examples of what you've done for other clients will help. In the end, educating a client, showing them what you can do and setting expectations will help bring a client on-board.

5 WAYS TO SET SELLERS UP FOR BRANDED CONTENT SUCCESS



03

GET CREATIVE INVOLVED IN PITCH

Now that you understand what your client wants and they understand the creative options you can deliver, it's time to pitch them your winning plan. But account executives shouldn't do this alone. When producing creative is involved in your pitch bring a producer with you. That's because sellers sell and creative creates. Keeping these two things separate will drive success with clients. My experience shows that when sales talks with a client they feel like they're being sold something. When a creative person talks to a client they get excited about the content and forget about paying for it. So bringing the creative person to the meeting to walk the client through the creative idea, it gets the client excited. Plus, the producer is better prepared to answer questions about how the creative will be produced and how a client will be part of it. This will make the job easier for sales. And last time I checked, selling is hard enough already and you might as well bring all the weapons you can to get a client to say YES!

04

YOU'VE SOLD IT! NOW GET OUT OF THE WAY!

All that hard work has finally paid off. A client has signed off on your plan! You're excited and immediately place the order into the traffic system and put your producer hat on! Remember, sellers sell and creative creates. Just like with the pitch, it's important to separate the sales side with the creative side. It's time to pass off your important client to the creative person and allow them to take the lead with executing the content, setting up content calls, production shoots and ultimately the review process. Let your client get excited to work with your creative team and as I always say "walk the red carpet" and forget about the cost. Producing content is fun and your client needs to experience this! It will only help when it comes time to talk with your client about renewing this deal for round two.



ADVICE FROM AN ALPHA PARTNER

“We are turning our attention to developing collateral and testing promotional tactics that will help our sales team better communicate and sell branded content.”

Rodney Gibbs
Chief Product Officer
Texas Tribune



5 WAYS TO SET SELLERS UP FOR BRANDED CONTENT SUCCESS



05

RE-ENFORCE EXPECTATIONS

Remember Tip No. 1 when we defined branded content and other creative solutions you can offer clients? The reason you did that is to help set expectations about the creative and what you can offer. The creative process can take time and the branded content may not be ready for 6-8 weeks. Just like you were excited when the client said yes, a client was also excited to be part of the creative. But things change, clients forget branded content isn't about them, their business may be experiencing a lack of sales or a colleague talks about a cool video they made for Facebook. It's important throughout the process to set expectations and explain the type of content you are producing and WHY this is good for them. This can come from both the account executive and creative team.

FINAL THOUGHT

Remember this creative can be really exciting for a client. The process and their experience with it matter. Yes, the results from your media plan do matter, but the experience a client has with the creative team usually will play just as big of a role as the ROI when it comes to renewal. Whether it's branded content or some other sort of creative, executing these tips will help lead to success for not only you, but your client as well. And happy clients means happy account executives.



THE EXPERT: JOSH KAUFMAN

Josh Kaufman is an award-winning content creator and branded content specialist. As Director of Programming/Production at Tribune Broadcasting's Oak Brook Productions, Josh developed multiple content brands, including Chicago's Best, S.E.E. Chicago and Living Healthy. Josh oversaw the brands and developed the strategy to incorporate sponsors into each through branded content, product placement and other innovative marketing solutions. For example, the Chicago's Best brand went beyond linear TV to include content on digital, social and an iOS/Android App. Josh developed a strategic content plan that led to nearly 200-thousand followers on social media and a YouTube channel with 250-thousand subscribers and more than 2-million monthly video views. This initiative helped drive new revenue streams for WGN-TV.

THE SELLING PROCESS: DISCOVER 5 KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Publishers have been hit with a plethora of bad news during the last few years. In this difficult situation, media organizations have two options: stay within their comfort zone and accept the defeat or challenge the status quo and innovate. For those interested in innovation, Ariel Giusti, CEO of KREALANDIA, explains the five key success factors to effectively selling branded content.



01

A PRODUCT THAT SELLS NATURALLY

Create a "market fit" marketing product that sells naturally because it solves the unserved needs of the potential advertisers. Most common needs? Branding, video, native and social media. It is essential to integrate all in the same plan in a logical way and with a compelling sales message.

02

CLIENT SELECTION

This is crucial, the very foundation of any sales process. Since we create the product based on client needs, it should be evident what type of clients we can help best. We all know that that higher ticket products/services do better with integrated marketing solutions that involve branded content because those advertisers have:

- A. Enough investment capacity
- B. Higher need to explain and educate their audience

03

CONSULTATION AGENDA

So you call and set up an appointment to present a sales pitch? Nope, you won't go too far with that. Clients do not want sales pitches; clients want help. That is why the meeting is a consultation with a clear agenda that you must send in advance. The agenda should not cover specifics but rather general objectives such as: objective of the meeting, marketing diagnosis, recommended strategies, action plan, feedback, next steps. Consequently the client values the time he or she will invest receiving you.

04

CONSULTATION VS. SALES PITCH

The concept "sales pitch" is part of the traditional way to sell, where the salesperson pushes the features of the product. The modern sales person is a marketing consultant that is prepared to do a full marketing consultation in less than 45 minutes (that should be the duration of the consultation unless the client requires more). What do you do during the consultation? Exactly what was promised in the agenda.

5 WAYS TO SET SELLERS UP FOR BRANDED CONTENT SUCCESS



05

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRIGGERS

The most important contribution that neuroscience has delivered to the sales world is, in my view, psychological triggers. They are tested ways to influence behavior based on the most common brain reactions. A few examples:

Scarcity and urgency: One leads to the other. This product is not for everyone because our resources are limited.

Need causes pain, and pain causes change: It is imperative to make the client feel some pain, so he/she feels the need to change. Pain causes more change in people behaviors than pleasure. For example: without a branded content strategy, you are losing customers online every day and facilitating your competitor's marketing efforts.

Structure and organization: We all want that in a marketing plan, but few have. The product should include all the necessary help for implementation: planning, producing, publishing and monitoring.

CONCLUSIONS

Branded content should be sold as part of a bigger plan that includes branding because branding drives direct internet searches (google searches with the brand name, not keywords) and direct internet searches drive branded content. The sales process should focus on quality and not quantity with a market fit product and defined implementation steps. Finally, the presentation should not be a sales pitch, the presentation should be a consultation designed to solve client's unserved marketing needs.



THE EXPERT: ARIEL GIUSTI - KREALANDIA

Ariel Giusti is a media sales expert with 12 years of experience across all types of traditional media sectors: newspapers, radio, TV and outdoor. His company KREALANDIA is based in Madrid, Spain and it specializes in the creation and implementation of sales projects that helps traditional media acquire new advertisers through new marketing products.



#brandedcontentproject
SELLING IT

- Define branded content for your team
- Put a premium price on your packages
- Consider annual or long term commitments
- Find advertisers with a story to tell
- Cross platform packaging works
- DON'T sell people stuff - educate them
- Don't be afraid to turn a client away
- Ask for help at sellbranded.com

**THE BRANDED
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IT**

SHARING BRANDED CONTENT

PREPARED BY

The Branded Content Project

FEATURED EXPERTS

Apryl Pilolli

**The
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THE BUSINESS OF STORYTELLING

8 BEST PRACTICES FOR USING SOCIAL ADS TO DISTRIBUTE BRANDED CONTENT

So you built fantastic content, you sold an amazing campaign to an advertiser but now it's time to distribute. We talked to Apryl Pilolli, head of innovation for Social News Desk, about her top eight recommendations when using social ads to distribute branded content.



01

DON'T SPREAD YOUR BUDGET TOO THIN

While social ads can be effective with small budgets, you can easily divide that up too much across multiple social networks, multiple audiences and multiple ads. For shorter campaign flights, a good rule is not to spend less than \$50 per each individual social ad. For longer flights, you should not spend less than \$10 per ad per day.

02

OPTIMIZE FOR YOUR BUSINESS GOAL

One of the best things about social advertising is the ability to choose your desired outcome. From driving website traffic to reaching unique people to increasing the number of video views, there is an option for whatever business goal you might be trying to accomplish. However, it is important to select the ad objective that most aligns with your goal in order to get the right results. If you optimize an ad to drive as much engagement as possible, but your goal is to get people to your website and read your content, you will waste your budget on targeting people that may just give you a thumbs up and move on.

03

KEEP YOUR VIDEOS SHORT

To be effective, social video ads have to accomplish two things: grab the user's attention in 2-3 seconds and have a short duration, no more than 15 seconds total. Users move quickly on mobile so it's critical to engage them immediately. Additionally, to take advantage of all the placement options available like Instagram Stories, these videos cannot be longer than 15 seconds.

8 BEST PRACTICES FOR USING SOCIAL ADS TO DISTRIBUTE BRANDED CONTENT



04

TARGET THE RIGHT AUDIENCE

If your audience is too broad, you're spending money you don't have to. Make sure you use geographic, demographic and custom targeting to make sure your ads deliver to people interested in your content. Additionally, Custom Audiences on Facebook and Instagram (called Retargeting Audiences on YouTube and Tailored Audiences on Twitter) is a great way to go beyond basic targeting parameters to re-engage people that have visited your website, watched your videos or engaged with your social channels before.

05

AVOID BOOSTED POSTS

When possible, it is best to avoid just boosting posts on Facebook and Instagram. Boosted posts are like training wheels on a bike – they are an easy way to get started and provide a safety net, but they don't allow for optimal performance. Building full News Feed ads allows you to use more advanced targeting, creative and ad types.

06

LOCALIZE YOUR CONTENT

An easy but often overlooked way to capture attention on social is to localize your ad copy for the different cities or counties you are targeting. People are drawn into content about where they live, work or grew up. Tap into that by creating different versions of ads that are relevant to them.

ADVICE FROM AN ALPHA PARTNER

“Have a Content Calendar Master!

Lay out content for advertisers for the duration of the campaign. This is so simple yet so effective. It does take a lot of thought but truly it is a huge time saver and helps the reps and clients. Clients must sign a minimum six-month agreement, have a content calendar ready and show them examples. If they do not know what native is, the best way to show them is examples.

”

Evie Kevish
Project Manager - Shaw Media

Alpha Partner
The
Branded
Content
Project



8 BEST PRACTICES FOR USING SOCIAL ADS TO DISTRIBUTE BRANDED CONTENT



07

WATCH RESTRICTED CATEGORIES

Every social network has its own set of policies for what they will and will not allow on their platforms. If you are working with content in categories like alcohol, gambling, drugs, pharmaceuticals, tobacco, etc. it is essential to review the platform policies for each network you plan to advertise on.

08

ALWAYS TEST

Social media is always changing, and it's important to keep testing different methods to find out what works for your brand and your budget. Social advertising makes it easy to run several ads and find out quickly what's most effective for your business goals.



THE EXPERT: APRYL PILOLLI - SOCIAL NEWS DESK

Apryl Pilolli is the head of innovation at Social News Desk, where she is tasked with creating new technology solutions to help newsrooms generate revenue. She is a social and digital marketing expert with 22 years of experience in the local media industry. During that time, she spent 12 years at Cox Media Group leading social strategy across content, marketing and sales. Apryl has earned numerous Associated Press awards for her newsroom work and has been certified by the Internet Advertising Bureau in Digital Media Sales and by Facebook for Media Planning and Buying.

A stack of several dice, with the word "Brand" printed on the top die. The dice are arranged in a slightly offset stack, and the word "Brand" is clearly visible on the top die. The background is a light, neutral color.

#brandedcontentproject PROMOTING IT

- Decide how to brand your brand
- Pay extra attention to creating sales materials
- Build a sizzle reel
- Do you need to promote your own initiative?
- Consider education events for sales & clients
- Multi-platform strategy for promoting
- Focus on utilizing social platforms
- Ask for help at sellbranded.com

Meet the experts



LIZ CRIDER HUFF

Liz is a Director of Affiliate Success at Second Street and has extensive background in media. She is a huge advocate of the power of promotions for every department within an organization.

Find Liz @ [linkedin.com/in/emcrider/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/emcrider/)



JOSH KAUFMAN

As Director of Programming/Production at Tribune Broadcasting's Oak Brook Productions, Josh developed multiple content brands, including Chicago's Best, S.E.E. Chicago and Living Healthy.

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APRYL PILOLLI

Apryl Pilolli is the Head of Innovation at Social News Desk where she is tasked with creating new technology solutions to help newsrooms generate revenue.

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Meet the experts



ADRIAN FULLE

As EP of the Variety Content Studio, Adrian managed all branded, sponsored and advertorial content for brand partners and original content initiatives. He led the Studio's creative and sales teams for Variety's branded, digital and linear initiatives.

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JACK ZAVORAL

Jack Zavoral is a digital sales and marketing professional who has worked in dozens of markets with hundreds of merchants on their digital marketing strategies. Jack is currently the Director of Member Development for the LMA.

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ARIEL GIUSTI

Traditional media sectors: newspapers, radio, TV and Outdoor. His company KREALANDIA specializes in the creation and implementation of sales projects that helps traditional media acquire new advertisers through new marketing products.

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Meet the experts



CAROLINA ESBAILE

Carolina joined the Creative Lab after several years in television and advertising. She started her career as an editor for HBO and later became a documentary producer and editor for the BBC.

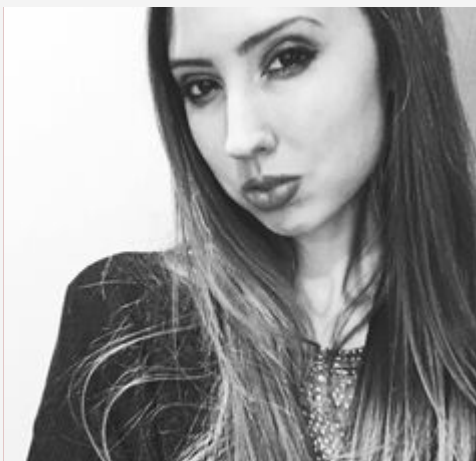
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ERIC BRANDNER

Eric has a decade of experience managing worldwide news and branded content teams. As general manager of the Creative Lab, he is helping the team boost sales significantly and win six industry awards for content.

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RACHEL WATKINS

Rachel Watkins, senior marketing manager at Belo Media Group, primarily works on The Dallas Morning News brand marketing, FWD>DFW brand marketing and content, and B2B strategy and sponsorships.

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Meet the experts



MICHAEL MOCKLAR

Mike Mocklar is President and Chief Creative Officer of Mocklar Consulting, an innovative content strategy and production company. A Peabody and duPont award-winning producer, Mike developed The Southern Weekend for Raycom Media.

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JERRID GRIMM

Jerrid Grimm is the Co-founder of Pressboard, the award winning content marketing platform used by the world's most influential publishers and advertisers.

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STEVEN GOLDSTEIN

Steven Goldstein is CEO of audio innovation firm Amplifi Media. Amplifi works with top media companies, corporate brands, podcasters and individual talent to define and create effective digital strategy and content for on-demand audio.

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Working together with publishers around the world through trainings, programs, and partnerships, we can help strengthen communities by connecting people with meaningful journalism.

LocalMedia
association

LOCAL MEDIA ASSOCIATION

The Local Media Association is a thriving and innovative association that serves local media companies as well as research and development partners in the industry. They are intensely focused on helping local media companies discover new and sustainable business models.



**local media
consortium**

LOCAL MEDIA CONSORTIUM

The Local Media Consortium delivers economic value through strategic partnerships on behalf of nearly 90 local media companies in top markets across the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico, and includes more than 3,300 outlets.

**THE BRANDED
CONTENT PROJECT**

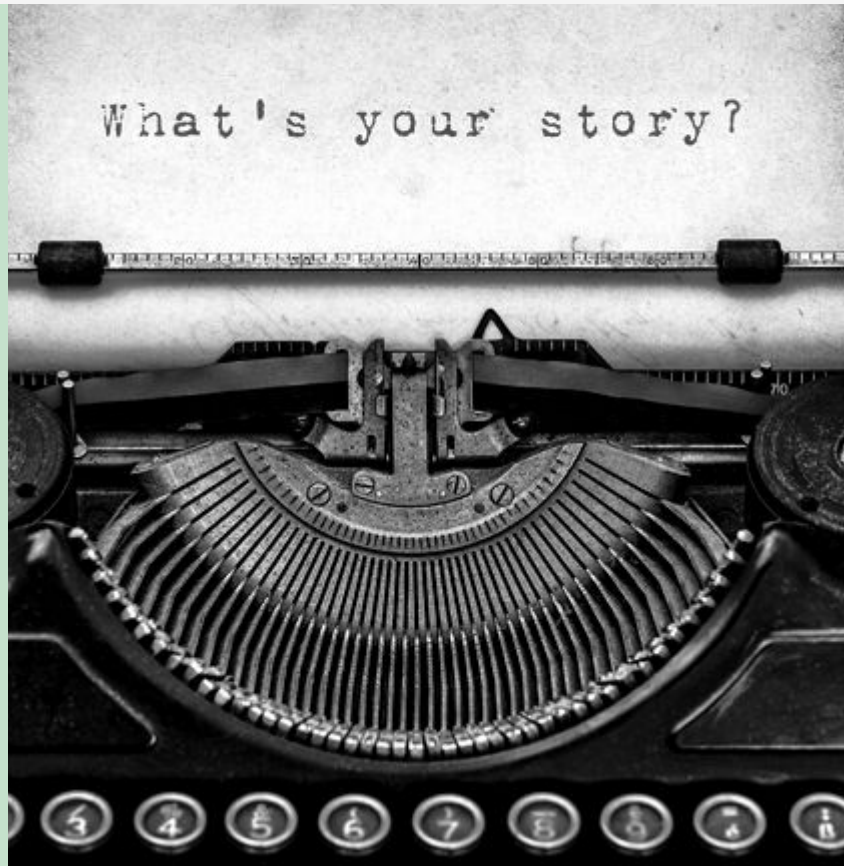
GET INVOLVED

JOIN THE PROJECT

The Branded Content Project's main goal is to assist the industry in growing sustainable branded content initiatives for all. We have a strict "everyone wins" philosophy for this project and we'll be announcing several ways your local media teams can get involved.

Don't miss any updates on the project. Discover ways for your teams to join in the innovation. Find more details on all these exciting developments and more by visiting:

SELLBRANDED.COM



LocalMedia
association



“We are encouraged by the initial progress from our Branded Content Project research, which has shown this powerful revenue stream is helping many media organizations succeed and grow. We believe there is potential for more growth, more engagement and more success for publishers of all shapes and sizes.”

GET YOU AND YOUR ORGANIZATION INVOLVED!

Find Julia Campbell at julia.cambell@localmedia.org
Or visit sellbranded.com