

THE CONTENT PROMOTION MANIFESTO

**Getting the Most
Out of Your
Content Marketing**

By Chad Pollitt,
VP of Audience & Co-founder,
Relevance.com



**Dedicated to my
four-year-old twin
daughters,
Autumn & Addyson**

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ABOUT THE PUBLISHER



Relevance is an enterprise-serving agency that puts promotion at the heart of content marketing. Media, content and audience assessments help to understand what your audience cares about, what problems they are trying to solve and how they consume content within the online communities they trust and visit frequently. These insights guide our content marketing strategy powered by strategic promotion.

Next, we work with you to repurpose or create new content that both the media and your target audience will love. And then we finish with impactful and dynamic promotion that ensures that your content will be seen by your target audience and become your industry's next hot topic. Relevance makes sure your promoted content is picked up by the most prudent and authoritative media outlets and shared by industry influencers.

Just ask our enterprise customers. Our enterprise content promotion campaigns consistently earn coverage from top media outlets in their industries.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FOREWORD BY KEVIN BAILEY, CO-FOUNDER, RELEVANCE



If you're not interested in your branded content reaching its maximum potential, then this manifesto is not for you. If your branded content goes viral every time you hit the publish button, then you can set this document aside and go on about your business. You're not part of the majority of marketers surveyed by the Content Marketing Institute who feel that their content is ineffective.

If, on the other hand, you know the pain and anguish of pouring every fiber of your being into a content piece that gets metaphorically kicked to the Internet curb, then read on, my friend.

Chad Pollitt has experienced the shame of content marketing defeat and the spoils of content fame. For much of his career as a top thought leader in the content marketing space, he let fate and the whims of search and social networking decide if his content would sink or rise above the fray.

He would spend weeks laboring over a comprehensive marketing guide only to have it earn shares in the double digits, and then whip out a quick post outlining the top ten marketing quotes from Chuck Norris and watch it achieve a quadruple-triple. A quadruple-triple is one hundred or more social shares across four different social networks, and in that case it was achieved because a key influencer happened to like the post and shared it across his networks. It was just luck.

Chad knew there had to be a better way. He coined the current content marketing paradigm based mainly on luck, "Publish and Pray," and he went out in search of the most effective ways to promote content for consistent success. This manifesto is the result of several years of hard work by Chad, with an entire enterprise marketing agency at his back, learning the ins and outs of how to make sure great content never went unnoticed and unread.

In this manifesto Chad helps you understand where you're at in the content marketing maturity model and how to reach the goal line of consistent success. He takes a holistic look at the various strategies, methods, and tools for content promotion. From earned media and digital PR to paid native advertising, he exposes the truth about why search and social algorithms might not be showcasing your content as much as you'd like. All this while teaching you how to win their favor by creating the buzz that precedes algorithmic success.

And if you're in one of the growing number of industries experiencing a disproportionate surplus of branded content, then take close notes. Content promotion is how you'll be able to take your content's success into your own hands and stand out from the noise.

INTRODUCTION

1

If 2013 was the year of content marketing, 2014 shaped up to be the year of content promotion. It was merely a few years ago when early adopters of content marketing could publish blog posts, infographics, and ebook on a regular basis and see large influxes of traffic to their sites. Both search and social channels would serve up visitors in droves. Those days are long over for the vast majority of industries.

As a result, an ecosystem of tools, networks, and techniques have been developed to help content marketers converge paid and earned channels with the owned media they've deployed in order to quickly build the audiences they seek. In other words, content promotion as an industry was born.

This manifesto seeks to define content promotion as an industry and to give marketers and communications professionals of all stripes the mindset, framework, and tools they need to secure support, resources, and buy-in to amplify their current content marketing activities. So, without further ado, let's see if this story sounds familiar.

AN ALL-TOO-COMMON STORY

Ever pour your heart and soul into an article, guide, slide deck, infographic or some other form of content only to see it become published and quickly die on the vine? Maybe a few co-workers, friends, and family members shared it to try to conjure up a smidgeon of "virality." The public-facing performance of the content looks absolutely pathetic – just a few social shares and a big fat zero next to the Google Plus button.

Luckily, you're the only one who can see the analytical results. Fifteen unique views are not what you intended for the six hour labor of love you created for your target demographic.

If you could have spent just one more hour doing research and then pushed it through another round of edits, it would have been on target, right? If the marketing department had published five blog posts a day instead of two, it would have taken off for sure because the audience would have been larger, right? Maybe if the word count had been a little longer or the title had been punchier more people would have seen it. These are all comments and questions marketers publicly quibble about online.

This scenario can be pretty demoralizing for a content creator.

CONTENT MARKETING FAILURE FATIGUE

It is stories like this that can dishearten marketers and communications professionals alike and quickly wane any content contributions from colleagues who were excited about submitting. Unfortunately, this story is a reality for most marketers creating content today.

The natural inclination for content creators is to blame themselves for not making it good enough or not creating enough of it. Over time, these folks and the organizations they represent may start questioning the value of content marketing altogether. Can you blame them? Failure fatigue is quickly becoming content marketing's biggest enemy.

When the hype wears off, someone will be left to explain what value content marketing actually delivered. It's difficult to justify large investments in marketing when the payoff is limited page views and scant conversions. This is especially a problem for enterprise organizations because they're typically expected to show a return in the quarter an investment is made – not likely to happen with a relatively new content marketing deployment.

THE BRANDED CONTENT MYTH

We've all been led to believe that if we just publish great problem solving content on our company's blog and do it often enough, it will be served up to the masses by the search engines and social media in a big way. This might have worked back in 2010, but today more than 2.73 million blog posts are written and published on a daily basis.¹ Great problem solving content goes unread all the time.

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TWEET THIS!



The myth of branded content is that if you will build it, they will come. And if for some reason they don't come, it's because your content wasn't good enough or you didn't publish enough of it in a consistent way. That's what we're led to believe when branded content fails. Just keep creating and publishing it, but create more and make it better. Marketing talking heads and software companies don't want marketers to stop creating content because if they do their revenue will dry up.

In the meantime, marketers who can't seem to strike it big with content marketing feel like they're chasing their tails. Guess what? The content quantity/quality chase is a lie. Just because a brand publishes a lot of great content doesn't mean it will gain an audience. It can, but in today's noisy content-spewing environment it's harder than ever. Branded content is not the problem. Lack of audience is.

THE PATRON SAINT OF CONTENT – PROMOTION

The branded content myth above is selfish. Subscribers to it either believe or want to convince others that the brand alone can influence the Internet to pay attention to it through only one channel – owned media. They invest almost exclusively in owned channels and expect significantly to increase audience with these efforts.

It's the other channels that empower marketing and communications professionals to lose their selfishness by converging owned, paid, and earned media. Branded content presented to small or nonexistent owned audiences will always fail to deliver profitable views and conversions. It's the leveraging of paid native distribution, earned media, bloggers, and industry influencers that puts branded content in front of larger more established audiences. This earned and paid exposure expedites audience growth today.

Without promotion, experiencing true content marketing success may never happen. Content creators can feel demoralized and the investment will likely not be justified in the quarter it's deployed, if ever. This isn't a branded content problem or a quantity/quality debate – it's an audience dilemma, and content promotion on earned and paid channels is required to fix it.

Marketers who publish branded content and get lackluster results shouldn't feel demoralized; they should be asking their boss why he or she didn't promote it.



THE CONTENT MARKETING Maturity MODEL

2

Before we dive headfirst into content promotion we must first step back and make an honest assessment of the content marketing landscape. The maturity model outlined below helps marketers benchmark where they reside in the adoption curve and decide what they have to strive toward. Without this context, discussing content promotion becomes merely an exercise in tactics and tools.

Many marketing analysts, writers, and thought leaders have chimed in on what they believe the content marketing maturity model should look like. The Altimeter Group, Forrester, TopRank, and likely others have offered opinions. What do they all have in common so far? They simply haven't gone far enough.

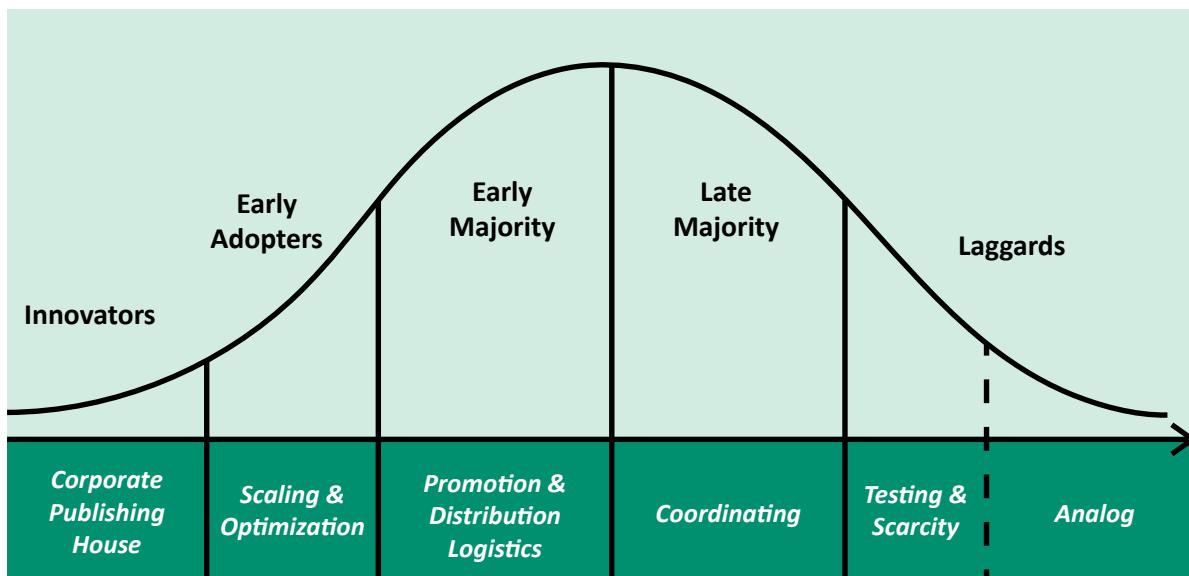
Marketing and communications professionals leaning on their insights could believe that being mature is simply monetization. Monetization can happen much earlier in the model below. In other words, landing some new customers by blogging and embracing storytelling does not make a brand content-mature.

The below content marketing maturity model was developed to stand the test of time. Technological advancements and new emerging channels should have a fairly neutral impact on modifying it. It also highlights one of the most critical, but little deployed or known stages in corporate content marketing maturity – *promotion*. Ignoring this phase is the primary reason most marketing and communications executives believe their content efforts are ineffective.

THE ENTERPRISE CONTENT MARKETING MATURITY MODEL

1. ANALOG	2. TESTING & SCARCITY	3. COORDINATING
Averse to online publishing and promotion at most stages of the buyer's journey. Focuses mostly on offline content toward the bottom of the decision making journey (catalogs, spec sheets, sales slicks, coupons). Online efforts are primarily controlled by IT.	Individual contributors or small teams within departments create the content they think should be published online without much coordinated effort or vetted organizationally-aligned goals. Resources are scarce and red-tape is a hindrance.	Leadership begins to develop processes and coordination across departments. Marketing automation, demand generation, and CRM software is used. Measurement is a priority and sales and marketing are more tightly aligned. Focus is almost exclusively on owned and paid media.
4. PROMOTION & DISTRIBUTION LOGISTICS	5. SCALING & OPTIMIZATION	6. CORPORATE PUBLISHING HOUSE
Paid and earned media channels are used to promote, amplify, and enhance owned content. Research prior to content production and promotion is standard practice. Communications, PR, and marketing are more tightly aligned. Monetization and thought leadership is realized.	The relationship between content and the entire customer buying journey is accurately mapped with cost and revenue figures calculated across most deployed channels. Rapid growth of a significant revenue-driving online audience is sought. Customer service is brought into the fold.	Complete organizational buy-in. Brand reach is epic across the industry. Return on content is proven and scaled. In addition to driving revenue and share of voice, it also strives to earn a disproportionate share of popular culture through brand awareness developed using content.

The research conducted by the Content Marketing Institute and others every year is invaluable for marketers. Unfortunately, the people surveyed run the maturity gamut – from stage one to stage six -- and are likely bottom-heavy. Challenges, goals, strategies, tactics, measurement and what's considered a *win* at each stage of the model can vary greatly. Disappointingly, current research doesn't address this, and we're left with very skewed data.



In the meantime, let's see what some of these challenges look like at each stage of the enterprise content marketing maturity model.

LAGGARDS: ANALOG STAGE

Marketers and communications professionals with enterprises at this stage are very frustrated. The keys to publishing anything online and the resources needed are in the hands of IT. Sales mostly values offline printed material and senior marketing executives are stuck in the 90's. Television and other traditional outbound channels own almost the entire marketing budget.

LAGGARDS: TESTING AND SCARCITY STAGE

Individuals or small tribes within departments begin to take action. They've earned the ears and made champions of a few executives. Resources traditionally owned by IT now become accessible, but are still scarce enough to prevent full content marketing implementation. Access to the website or websites is easier, too. However, the compliance department makes deploying any type of meaningful and ongoing content marketing campaign very difficult.

LATE MAJORITY: COORDINATING STAGE

This is the stage where many enterprise and midmarket executives find themselves today. This can also be called the honeymoon phase. Marketing departments become poised to reap the rewards of content marketing by focusing on production, email, social media, SEO, demand generation, conversion rate optimization, and marketing automation.

Unfortunately, this is also where the majority of marketers try to start scaling and monetizing. They attempt to skip stage four altogether; likely, because they don't even know of its existence. Scaling and monetizing content marketing is very difficult today without an existing viable audience or established content promotion channels working in conjunction with content production. This is why most marketers feel their content is ineffective.

Last decade, many brands could skip stage four and start scaling and monetizing because the audiences they were targeting were faced with an online content deficit. The digital landscape of today is much noisier than what it was then and many of those deficits are now online content surpluses. The reality is that many of today's audiences have already found and are loyal to their online destinations of choice. Without a way to reach those audiences, scaling and monetization can take many years, if they happen at all.

EARLY MAJORITY: PROMOTION AND DISTRIBUTION LOGISTICS STAGE

This is where the convergence of owned, paid, and earned media takes place. The lines between marketing, communications, and PR start to blur. They know what each other is doing and they're all striving to achieve many of the same goals – especially seeing the content they produce and promote driving thousands of eyeballs daily. Thought leadership and monetization are realized in this stage.

Some brands attempt to promote their content with paid media exclusively. While this can help expedite monetization and the growth of an organic audience, they will likely achieve stage five much faster with full convergence, to include earned media.

EARLY ADOPTERS: SCALING AND OPTIMIZATION STAGE

In this stage, executives have a pretty clear understanding what it costs to drive one visitor, subscriber, conversion, and reconversion from most channels. They also intimately understand what the online personas of their target demographic look like. Their subordinates know what type of content and which channels will likely deliver the returns expected. Granularity and standardization of reporting will likely span across many prudent departments.

Active online listening, customer service, reputation management, and sentiment are all measured. Executives know what it costs to lose a customer, so they dedicate resources to prevent it. Just because they're measuring it and dedicating resources to it doesn't necessarily mean it's working well yet. At this stage, brands find their online voice, but they still may struggle to make a monumental impact on current brand perceptions.

INNOVATORS: CORPORATE PUBLISHING HOUSE STAGE

Marketing, sales, communications, public relations, and customer service all have a realized stake in content marketing. All of their respective roles may not necessarily be mastered yet, but all are either already scaled or are being scaled and monetized. Brands at this stage tend to have many agencies managing or supporting several of the content marketing initiatives and campaigns.

Building, supporting, resourcing, and scaling a proven content marketing machine at this stage affords brands more leeway with new channel experimentation. From Snapchat to other niche networks and devices, these are some of the first brands to be seen.

Brands in this stage have surpassed the audience tipping point and can only incrementally grow their audiences by slowly chipping them away from others. Admittedly, this is a hard task to accomplish, but who said earning a disproportionate share of popular culture was easy?

The enterprise content marketing maturity model serves as a compass for the more than 90 percent of companies that have already adopted content marketing.² Not all aspects of the model have to be realized in the stage suggested. Brands in the early stages have adopted strategies and goals of the latter stages. Those that publish helpful and/or entertaining media in industries with content deficits may realize monetization early. Even so, achieving monetization early does not make a brand content-mature. The model shows that there's much more to strive for.

HOW THREE BRANDS WON BIG WITH CONTENT PROMOTION

3

More and more marketers are finding new and creative ways to ensure their content gets seen by the audiences that matter most to their brands. From native paid channels to influencer outreach, new tactics of content promotion are becoming popular.

There's also an ecosystem of tools that have cropped up to support content promotion. Marketers and PR folks are earning media and influencer coverage for their content while distributing and broadcasting their own media, too.

However, before content promotion was en vogue, the brands below figured out a way to get their content in front of millions of eyeballs. The lessons learned through these narratives are valuable and they all have two things in common – great content and a story to tell.

THE RODON GROUP – CHEAPER THAN CHINA

The Rodon Group is one of the largest injection molders in the U.S. It has been manufacturing high volumes of small plastic parts and molds for almost 60 years.

With all types of manufacturing moving overseas to places like China, their competition is truly international. Many would-be customers just assume that contracting overseas is more cost effective.

However, The Rodon Group challenged this notion in its Cheaper than China campaign which kicked off in 2012. It included an ebook called, "Top 10 Critical Reasons to Bring Your Plastic Injection Molding Back to the U.S."

This message didn't just resonate with their target audience, but resonated with much of the U.S. working class and the media that serves them. So much so that their campaign was covered by virtually every major media outlet.

It was also during this time that the Presidential campaign was in full swing. President Obama decided to stop by The Rodon Group to give a stump speech espousing the same message as the Cheaper than China campaign. His presence drove the massive amounts of media attention described above.

While the content was great and very timely, the promotion was a complete crapshoot. They literally won the content marketing lottery.

They literally
won the content
marketing lottery

It's doubtful that the most optimistic marketer at The Rodon Group could have ever imagined the attention their ebook would receive. Unfortunately, luck is not a content promotion strategy.

CAMPAGN VERDICT: Great content, lucky promotion, and coverage.

SLINGSHOT SEO – CONTENT THAT ADVANCED AN INDUSTRY

Founded in 2006, Slingshot SEO was a pioneer in the search engine optimization services space. Early last year, it rebranded itself as Relevance to take advantage of the emergence of content promotion as an industry.

Prior to the rebrand, Slingshot SEO created the world's most thorough Google and Bing click-through-rate study ever produced.

This study solved an industry-wide problem for SEO agencies and SaaS companies. The calculations enabled them to attach a real monetary value to rankings for targeted keyword phrases – something that was spotty, at best, prior to the study.

It earned coverage and buzz from academia (Purdue and Cornell), media outlets, trade publications, and industry influencers around the world. Its impact was further felt when Rand Fishkin himself presented some of the results from the study on stage at HubSpot's INBOUND 2012 conference.

The amount of coverage was by no means an accident. Slingshot SEO enlisted the help of a seasoned PR veteran to mount a full-on media blitz. The media amplified and promoted the study and got the attention of most in the SEO industry.

To this day, almost four years later, the study still helps deliver business.

Just like The Rodon Group, the study was great content. The biggest difference is that it was purposely promoted to prudent media and trade publications. When faced with such well researched, new information, the media had no choice but to cover it.

The coverage led to a cascade of influencer citations and social mentions that continue today.

CAMPAGN VERDICT: Great content and research with purposeful promotion.

To this day, almost
four years later,
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deliver business.

TERADATA – CONTENT PROMOTION THAT DROVE EIGHT DIGITS OF INCREMENTAL REVENUE

Teradata offers a data-driven, integrated marketing management platform that's on the cutting edge of marketing operations, campaign management, and digital messaging. Their integrated marketing application was obtained through its acquisition of Aprimo in 2011.

Through research, Teradata's Integrated Marketing Management unit discovered that its prospects needed help and guidance navigating the world of Big Data and marketing. They discovered that more than half of the marketers they surveyed saw data as an underutilized asset in their own organizations.

One of the ways Teradata addressed this concern was by publishing the ebook "Be a Big Data Marketing Hero" in 2013. The ebook struck a chord with both their audience and the media to whom it was pitched.

In total, more than 46 media outlets and trade publications mentioned it. Its impact helped deliver over three million media impressions, a 25 percent landing page conversion rate and, ultimately, 30 global brand prospect meetings.

The campaign channeled owned media broadcasting, earned media coverage and native paid distribution to maximize the promotion and reach of the ebook – a converged strategy. It's reported to have delivered eight digits of incremental revenue while returning 36x on the investment.

CAMPAGN VERDICT – Great content and promotion on all three media channels.

BONUS: AMERICAN GIANT – THE GREATEST HOODIE EVER MADE

This San Francisco-based apparel startup operates entirely in the U.S. and offers what Farhad Manjoo of Slate calls “The Greatest Hoodie Ever Made.”

American Giant’s CEO proclaims that its products are built to last a lifetime. They even have a former Apple industrial designer to help fashion these highly sought after products.

One way American Giant can produce 100 percent of its products in the U.S. is by cutting out the middle man. All of its apparel is sold online. A basic sweatshirt will set you back \$69 and a zip-up hoodie runs \$89.

In October 2012, American Giant’s CEO, Bayard Winthrop, cold-called Farhad Manjoo of Slate to pronounce his claim of creating the best hooded sweatshirt in the world. His story and product was irresistible to Manjoo. Winthrop convinced him that he did, indeed, have the greatest hoodie ever made.

Shortly after that conversation, Manjoo published his article telling the world about the hoodie. The demand that ensued likely surpassed Winthrop’s wildest dreams. In fact, he was forced to increase production 15 to 20 times their normal capacity and still barely met demand.

This bonus story is the only one of the group that wasn’t about content promotion, but rather, product and brand promotion. However, Bayard’s methods and story clearly align with the spirit of content promotion and both marketers and communications folks should take note.

CAMPAIGN VERDICT: Great product and story with purposeful promotion.

FINAL VERDICT: GREAT STORIES AND CONTENT WITH PURPOSEFUL PROMOTION ACROSS MULTIPLE MEDIA CHANNELS IS A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS.

The examples above represent very different types of companies, all of which realized bottom line benefits when their content was aptly promoted. With the exception of one, they all were purposeful in their promotion; it was part of their plan from the beginning.

Today, there are still many brands playing the content marketing lottery

Today, there are still many brands playing the content marketing lottery like The Rodon Group did. However, the odds are stacked against them. The best way to get those odds in your favor is by adopting promotion tactics into your content marketing plan.

TWEET THIS!

CONTENT IS KING, BUT DISTRIBUTION IS QUEEN AND SHE WEARS THE PANTS

4

The title of this chapter is a direct quote from Jonathan Perelman of BuzzFeed and was featured in Ryan Skinner's article, "Great Content Is Not Enough," on the Forrester blog.³ The article features takeaways from his most recent Forrester report called "Put Distribution at the Heart of Content Marketing."⁴ The report is a great source for today's marketing and public relations professionals. It explains why, on average, only 37 percent of marketers who use content feel they use it effectively.⁵

THE FALSE DEBATE

For the last several years many thought leaders have chimed in on the quantity versus quality content argument. Marketers are trying to find the right balance. The more time they spend on quality, the less time they have for production. Seems like a fair concern, right?

Here's the problem: 63 percent of content marketers feel they don't use content effectively. That represents a whole lot of campaigns. It's likely that some of them are focusing on quality whereas others are primarily focused on quantity. Neither approach guarantees results. However, the end goal is the same: publishing great content that gets shared on social media and ranks high in the search engines to build audience.

only 37 percent of marketers who use content feel they use it effectively

TWEET THIS!



The amount of content being published online is growing exponentially, and content marketers are partially to blame. In June of 2000, there were fewer than eight million websites. Today that number is greater than 750 million, according to Netcraft.com, and this expansion shows no signs of slowing. This means that it will be harder and harder for marketers to cut through the noise in order to get their content read. Great content continues to go unread every day on the Internet.

Google is helping to fuel this debate, too. With its Panda, Penguin, and Hummingbird algorithm updates and the “Freshness” indexing update to Caffeine, Google is essentially telling marketers to publish as much content as possible and to make sure it’s extremely helpful to the people who read it if they want to do well on the search engines.

Unfortunately, the debate itself blinds content marketers as to why their campaigns are performing poorly. Some may add another layer of editing and/or ideation in an attempt to boost the quality of their campaigns. Others may decide to ramp up production to get the results they’re lacking. Neither of the two options tackles the real problem—lack of a promotion strategy.

THE RIGHT DEBATE

Rather than trying to produce more or better content, marketers should focus on their promotion plans. A pragmatic, goal-oriented promotional plan should be part of their overall strategy. However, it’s likely just an afterthought for most of the 63 percent of marketers who feel they’re not using their content effectively. So, rather than debating quality versus quantity, marketers should be debating how many resources to dedicate to promotion.

Here are a few findings featured in Ryan Skinner’s article, some of which fly in the face of conventional content marketing wisdom:

- ✚ Brands can actually step down content production and step up distribution to get better results.
- ✚ An ecosystem of vendors has cropped up to help marketers drive distribution of branded content.
- ✚ The most effective promotions often come from doubling-down on past successes.
- ✚ Better distribution improves content’s quality as the feedback cycle accelerates.

Great content
continues to
go unread every day
on the Internet

TWEET THIS!



By focusing on promotion using paid and earned channels, content marketers can hasten their traffic, conversions, subscribership, and regular readership.

PAID CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

There are many services available to help marketers with their content distribution endeavors. Companies like Taboola, Outbrain, Adblade, Zemanta and OneSpot are all paid services that distribute content in a native manner. These services can place a company's content in front of millions of eyeballs.

Brands can actually step down content production and step up distribution to get better results

TWEET THIS!



EARNED CONTENT COVERAGE

Content marketers can take a page from traditional public relations by reaching out to the media in order to earn coverage for promotion. This book itself is earned media for Forrester's blog post and report.

By proactively reaching out and pitching influencers, editors, and journalists, marketers can get their content organically featured in some of the most populous corners of the Internet. Earned media coverage in the form of one link citation to one of our landing pages from one popular online media outlet once drove more than 800 business leads in just two weeks.

Too many marketers are forgetting about promotion; instead, they believe the answers to their content marketing woes are to produce more and better content. Without a promotion strategy such as the ones previously described, the vast majority of content being created and published by the brands across the Internet will continue to go unread.

CONTENT SHOCK - THE ECONOMIC PRINCIPALS OF CONTENT MARKETING

5

Many in the online marketing and PR arena have seen Mark Shaefer's article on a concept he terms "content shock."⁶ Its implications have the potential to impact the rookie content creator to the Fortune 50 CMO. After publication, his article was followed up quickly by Chris Penn, who added that content shock will force marketers to rely more on paid and earned media channels.⁷ Chris later published another article discussing the nuances of the content shock concept and the role of content quality.⁸

WHAT IS CONTENT SHOCK?

Content shock introduces basic economics into content marketing. There are a finite number of people in the world, and they can consume only so much content. And the content developed by marketers shows no signs of slowing.

According to Mashable, 347 WordPress blog posts are published, 48 hours of YouTube videos are uploaded and 571 websites are launched every minute of every day. Those numbers continue to grow year after year.

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TWEET THIS!



According to this shock principle, this content deluge will force marketers who wish to succeed in creating only the highest-quality content. For this to happen, the tangible and intangible costs of content creation will continue to rise over time and begin to create barriers to entry for some businesses in their respective industries.

Mark suggests that when content shock happens, it will have this impact:

- + Deep pockets win
- + The entry barriers become impossibly high
- + The cost-benefit will flip

Based on the velocity of online content creation and publishing it's certainly plausible that content shock is, indeed, a real phenomenon and that it's already hit many industries. Many experts believe it's real — with no question. However, its implications are nuanced and debatable.

CONTENT DISTRIBUTION AND PROMOTION

Chris was right to evoke the power of both paid and earned media to add some color and hope to the implications. These channels are crucial for brands to reach the audiences their content is intended for. He explains that content shock will force marketers and PR professionals to converge the three media channels — owned, earned, and paid. The 63 percent of marketers who feel their content is ineffective are likely relying exclusively on owned media and have no promotion strategy at all.

THE RISING COST OF PRODUCING CONTENT

Both Chris and Mark believe that the pressure from content shock will incrementally increase the tangible and intangible costs of creating and promoting content over time. Chris writes, "Mark makes the point that deep pockets will win the content marketing battle, to the extent that it can be won, and he's correct."

Chris also explains how the increasing number of media options has empowered consumers with the choice of not tolerating mediocre content. He uses the proliferation of cable television—moving from three stations to hundreds—to analogize the content development cost impact of content shock. In time, consumers will congregate only around media of the highest quality (cost).

CONTENT OR AUDIENCE PROBLEM?

Based on the aforementioned articles from both Chris and Mark, I feel comfortable writing that they believe this is fundamentally a content problem and that the solution to content shock is to create the highest-quality content and use earned and paid media channels to help promote it. This is why marketers will need to have *deep pockets*.

On the surface, this seems reasonable as long as you believe this is a content problem. But it's not a content problem so much as an audience problem at its core. This fundamentally changes how marketers and PR professionals should view content shock.

Every day, great content goes unconsumed on the Internet, and that has nothing to do with the quality (cost) of the content. Have you seen the content that goes viral on Facebook? What about BuzzFeed or Upworthy? The term "quality" is the last word you would think of to describe it. There are many industry-specific media outlets, websites, and blogs out there with huge audiences that publish flimsy content.

Instead, it has to do with a marketer's exclusive reliance on owned media, lack of an audience and lack of a promotion strategy. Marcus Sheridan developed a concept he calls the Content Saturation Index (CSI). He explains that many industries are reaching or have reached their peak CSI.

At that point, it doesn't matter how good a brand's content is or how much is spent on it because the intended audience is already committed to consuming content on other websites. Where cost comes into play here is if a brand decides to use paid media for content distribution on the websites its intended audience is already committed to.

RELATIONSHIPS DON'T COST A THING

One of the best ways authors can get their content in front of the right audience is to build real relationships with the media outlets and trade publications their intended audience consumes — earning media. These relationships can result in many different kinds of content promotion opportunities:

- ✚ News Coverage
- ✚ Guest Blogging
- ✚ Editorial Coverage
- ✚ Syndication
- ✚ Byline Column

Joe Chernov, 2012 content marketer of the year, writes extensively about how to use content to earn these opportunities in his article on "hacked media."⁹ Tangible costs associated with earning media occur only if a PR agency is hired. However, good content creators build relationships with their industry peers, editors, influencers and community managers and are afforded many earned media opportunities for free.

In these cases, content quality only needs to meet the standards of the media outlets pursued. As previously mentioned, most industries have plenty of media outlets with large audiences consuming flimsy content. They built up their audiences because they got into the game early when their individual industry's CSI was low.

ENTERTAINMENT VS. PROBLEM SOLVING

People go to the web for only two reasons: to solve a problem or to be entertained. Chris's view that during content shock consumers will only congregate around media of the highest quality (cost) works if the purpose of the content is entertainment. However, businesses are in the business of solving problems. Branded content doesn't have to contain entertainment value, but the vast majority of it better be problem-solving. (Jay Baer discusses the implications of inherently useful [problem-solving] content in his *New York Times* best-selling book *Youtility*).¹⁰

This begs
the question:
What defines
"quality" content?

TWEET THIS!

This begs the question: What defines "quality" content? Well, if the purpose of the content is to solve a problem, then the highest-quality content is the content that solves a problem best, quickest, and on-demand. Does that cost more to produce? Typically not.

It makes more sense to believe the audiences that brands want to get face time with have already congregated around the media that, historically, have done the best jobs at solving their problems and piquing their interests. That's why the sites that built up their audiences with flimsy content early in the CSI game were able to keep them. Those sites have a track record of solving problems quickly, albeit with thin content.

The sites with large existing audiences create the signals that Google and the other search engines use to deem content worthy enough to serve up on the search engine results pages. This further insulates problem-solving, thin-content-producing websites with large audiences from user attrition.

TOO MANY CHOICES

Chris's television channels analogy is compelling. However, television is 99 percent for entertainment purposes and not for solving problems. Even though there are hundreds of channels to choose from with cable, the Internet has a seemingly infinite number of media channels. Too many choices can make people fall back to what they already know and are comfortable with. This means people will likely stay relatively loyal to many of the sites they currently consume.

Ever go to a restaurant with a huge selection of meals on a 30-page menu? Are you likely to peruse everything to decide what you want? Not likely, because there are too many choices. Many customers would simply ask the server if they had a specific dish or not — a dish that person was already familiar with.

THE FALLOUT

The implications of content shock are nuanced. Mark and Chris did an excellent job and displayed the utmost thought leadership in their articles. I agree with more than 90 percent of what they wrote. However, the implications need additional examination.

The deepest pockets will not be the only winners, and barriers to entry will exist only for brands that rely exclusively on owned media. Large and small brands alike that create problem-solving content and build real relationships with the popular websites in their respective industries will more than just survive content shock; they'll flourish. And it won't be because they had to spend more to create higher-quality content.



THE BIGGEST CONTENT MARKETING MISTAKES BRANDS MAKE TODAY

6

Many brands that have invested in content marketing during the past few years took a strictly owned media approach. They created copious amounts of content and published it on their own websites via a blog or something similar. After that they used their own social channels to broadcast the content and perhaps even had an SEO professional optimize it.

Back in 2010 that type of content marketing could move the traffic and conversion needle because most industries weren't yet saturated with helpful content online. It might have taken six to 18 months, but eventually Google and the other search engines and organic social sharing would have sent enough sustaining traffic to justify content marketing.

Today, this isn't true anymore for many industries because the amount of helpful branded content being published online has reached monumental levels. As mentioned in Chapter One, 2.73 million blog posts are written and published every day. Those numbers continue to grow yearly. It's this trend that ultimately led to the *content shock* concept.

With such large amounts of content being published, many audiences are *dug in* to the websites they perceive can provide the most value – with little hope of abandonment. Just look at your own online and mobile content consumption habits. You likely have your go-to places for consuming the content you perceive as being valuable.

These websites have generally been around since 2005 or earlier, have amassed large audiences, and still hold oligopolies on them. They are the audience gatekeepers, what Marcus Sheridan calls "digital sooners."

Both HubSpot and Moz represent two brands that were digital sooners that attracted large audiences and communities early on by producing large quantities of helpful content and publishing seminal works of advanced content that earned lots of media coverage, influencer advocacy, and citations. This advanced content continues to drive awareness, traffic, leads, and revenue to this day and solidifies these brands as thought leaders in their respective industries.

Most brands aren't digital sooners. As a result, the biggest mistake brands are making today is the *Publish and Pray* syndrome. This syndrome contains the below symptoms and their subsequent cures.

SYMPTOM 1 – Belief that more or better content will build audience faster.

CURE – *Fix this by stepping down or locking in production and focusing on converging the three media channels.*

SYMPTOM 2 – Not having a promotion strategy or budget for it.

CURE – *Do some media research and figure out where the desired audience actually hangs out. Invest time and resources getting your content featured on these sites.*

SYMPTOM 3 – No media or influencer outreach to earn coverage for advanced content.

CURE – *Start establishing real relationships and pitching influencers and journalists advanced content such as ebooks, guides, and studies.*

SYMPTOM 4 – Not including media, audience, and keyword research in the pre-production phase of content development.

CURE – *Use Big Data to your advantage. Tools like Cision, Hitwise, SEMRush and BuzzSumo can help define who your audience is, where it hangs out online, and what its problems are. This information makes content creation, promotion, and pitching much easier and increases the likelihood of success.*

Don't be part of the 63 percent who believes their branded content is not effective. Instead, converge the three media channels of owned, paid, and earned and stop pouring all of your resources in owned media. It's true, there's an audience out there, but it's already committed to other websites it trusts. As Ryan Skinner would say, "Put distribution at the heart of your content marketing."

THE DIRTY LITTLE SECRET OF CONTENT MARKETING

7

**Guess what?
Nobody cares
about your content
quality, but you**

TWEET THIS!



Guess what? Nobody cares about your content quality, but you. Pretty harsh, huh? It's true, even if it has tens of thousands of visitors, thousands of social shares, and hundreds of comments. What people care about is being entertained and/or having their problems solved – not the perceived quality of your content. If it solves a problem and/or entertains the appropriate audience then it is quality content to them. People only go to the Internet to be entertained or to solve a problem. Accomplish this in front of the right audience and that audience will care about your content.

If the content addresses a specific problem needing to be solved and gets in front of an audience with that same problem then its "quality" doesn't necessarily matter. What matters is that it solved the problem and/or entertained in a manner that was acceptable to the audience.

... BUT I THOUGHT IT WAS ALL ABOUT CONTENT QUALITY

As previously mentioned, quality is probably the last word you'd use to describe viral content on Facebook, BuzzFeed, and Upworthy. However, it is usually entertaining in some way to some slice of their audiences. YouTube is the same way. Most of its popular videos have a very low production value.

Not mentioning any specific sites (you likely know of them), there's many highly traveled web properties that publish copious amounts of content that is useless yet people still visit, share, and comment. Serious analysts may decide that this content is silly, worthless, and a waste of time; nevertheless, many others obviously find it entertaining or problem solving.

Low percentages of marketers believe they actually use their content effectively. Is it because those marketers only publish quality content? That's not likely. What's more likely is that they create problem solving content that's delivered to a large and prudent audience. The keyword here is *audience*. Most of the ineffective marketers likely don't have much of an audience to deliver their content to in the first place.

LET'S PRETEND. . . .

Many verticals have reached their peak CSI. For example, if you launched a totally new digital marketing agency from scratch today, how long do you think it would take your blog to reach thousands of page views a day? A very long time, if ever.

What if you produced and published only the highest quality content in the entire industry twice per day? Still, a very long time, if ever. Why? Because there're thousands of websites vying for your same audience, and they already have them. You'd have to poach them away because the digital marketing vertical has reached its peak CSI already.

The point is that the quality or quantity of your content is almost meaningless in this case. You could take your highest quality A+ content and dumb it down to the D version and publish it on Mashable and watch the analytics run circles around its A+ counterpart.

Without a significant audience, marketers should focus on content promotion strategies and not quality or quantity. Besides, with little or no audience there's no feedback loop, so how would you know if its quality content or not?

BREAKING THROUGH THE NOISE WITH DISTRIBUTION AND PROMOTION

Most content marketers truly understand the role of owned media. However, where many of them fall short strategically is their ability to converge owned media with paid and earned media. It's the convergence of these channels that help marketers poach an audience from other sites over time. This is the only way for marketers to build their audiences quickly in industries that have maxed out CSIs. Without it, blogs like the one described above would likely take many years to build an audience with owned media alone, if ever.

... BUT WE DIGRESS

Many of the folks who have read this chapter might assume it's saying that quality content doesn't matter. If content is full of typos, misspellings, and run-on sentences, it's going to leave a poor impression of the author and brand. That's not good.

If a true subject matter expert writes what he or she knows and helps solve the appropriate person's problem then that, indeed, is quality content if it's free from the above. With little or no audience adding additional layers of editing and ideation in an attempt to improve quality is pointless.

As the CSI grows across more verticals, more and more content marketers will struggle to get their content read, but focusing attention on quality will get them nowhere.



ASSUMPTIONS MANY CONTENT MARKETERS MAKE TODAY

8

The assumptions outlined below are the main culprits for why most marketers feel their content is ineffective. Tomorrow's most successful content marketers will discard these assumptions today.

The assumptions below persist today because the marketing talking heads who have convinced us that they are true already have large audiences to speak to. They built them up at a time of online content deficits. So, their experience tells them that the below assumptions are, indeed, true.

Unfortunately, most content marketers started (or will start) in the time of online content surpluses and their target audiences will be already committed to other sites.

In these cases, subscribing to the below can be a recipe for ineffectiveness.

1. QUALITY CONTENT DRIVES WEBSITE VISITORS

Whereas it's true that quality content can help drive visitors if given enough time, the degree to which it succeeds is subject to an industry's CSI. Great content gets published every day online without getting read. It's likely that the exact message could be poorly written and drive many more eyeballs if it's published in front of a larger prudent audience. Audience drives profitable visitors.

2. PUBLISHING FREQUENTLY DRIVES WEBSITE VISITORS

In 2011 Google updated its Caffeine indexing system in order to reward the freshest and most recent content. Thus, the SEO community named it "Freshness." This drove many SEOs and content marketers to crank up their content production to take advantage of this update.

Although this can certainly help to drive some incremental traffic growth, it's still not enough. If there's no true audience to receive, consume, share, and cite all of this fresh content, it's much less likely to reach a profitable tipping point. Search engine algorithms rely on the signals generated by an engaged audience.

3. GOOD CONTENT MARKETING DRIVES ORGANIC DISTRIBUTION – EYEBALLS ARE ATTRACTED NATURALLY

Good content marketing can drive some organic distribution. However, it can be a very slow process and can take 18 or more months (or never) to produce a positive impact on the bottom line. Many CMOs aren't patient enough to wait that long for a return.

It takes an engaged audience to help get content distributed organically. Audiences have to be built or tapped into to realize robust organic distribution.

4. CONTENT MARKETING IS THE NEW SEO

Content marketing is a huge part of today's SEO strategies. However, without an audience to validate and link to the content, it can take a long time to realize impactful search relevance. According to Moz's 2013 Search Engine Ranking Factors, the first 48 factors are all related to off-page (earned) signals.

Content marketing can certainly influence these off-page factors, but without an audience it's unlikely to do so within an acceptable timeframe. Again, it takes a lot of time to build an audience with owned media alone.

it takes
a lot of time to
build an audience with
owned media alone

TWEET THIS!

5. CONTENT MARKETING CREATES SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Content marketing doesn't create social engagement. Audiences create social engagement. Some brands can broadcast their content via social media and thereby drive significant traffic and engagement. However, that's because they already have an audience. Most brands don't have the audience to move the social needle substantially with content. Content marketing can help drive social engagement, but just like SEO, it takes time.

Facebook has already started to tweak its EdgeRank algorithm to lessen the organic reach of brands. This is deliberate and forces marketers to use their paid solutions to reach their audience. Other social platforms, including Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn, are likely to follow suit. As a result, the future of branded organic social engagement looks bleak.

The content marketing assumptions above are a recipe for ineffectiveness if a sizeable enough online audience doesn't already exist upon deployment. That's the case for most marketers. However, those who fall into this category can expedite audience growth by using a deliberate content promotion strategy.

FINDING OUT THAT HER CONTENT MARKETING WAS DYING WAS BEYOND DEVASTATING. SO SHE DID THIS... YOU'LL NEED TISSUES.

9

Okay, maybe you won't really need tissues, but this chapter headline was definitely inspired by Upworthy, "that site that publishes those headlines" and further drives home the point that quality content is in the eye of the beholder. Audiences decide what quality content looks like, not marketers. Most brand and product marketers would kill to have the kind of traffic and subscriber numbers they have.

Upworthy doesn't publish quality content. It publishes sensational headlines with flimsy content behind them. In other words, entertaining content – it's a strategy (formula) that drives millions of visitors, mostly through social media. No one is suggesting this formula will work for you, but what I am suggesting is that achieving success requires a strategy.

only 38 percent of these companies even have a content marketing strategy

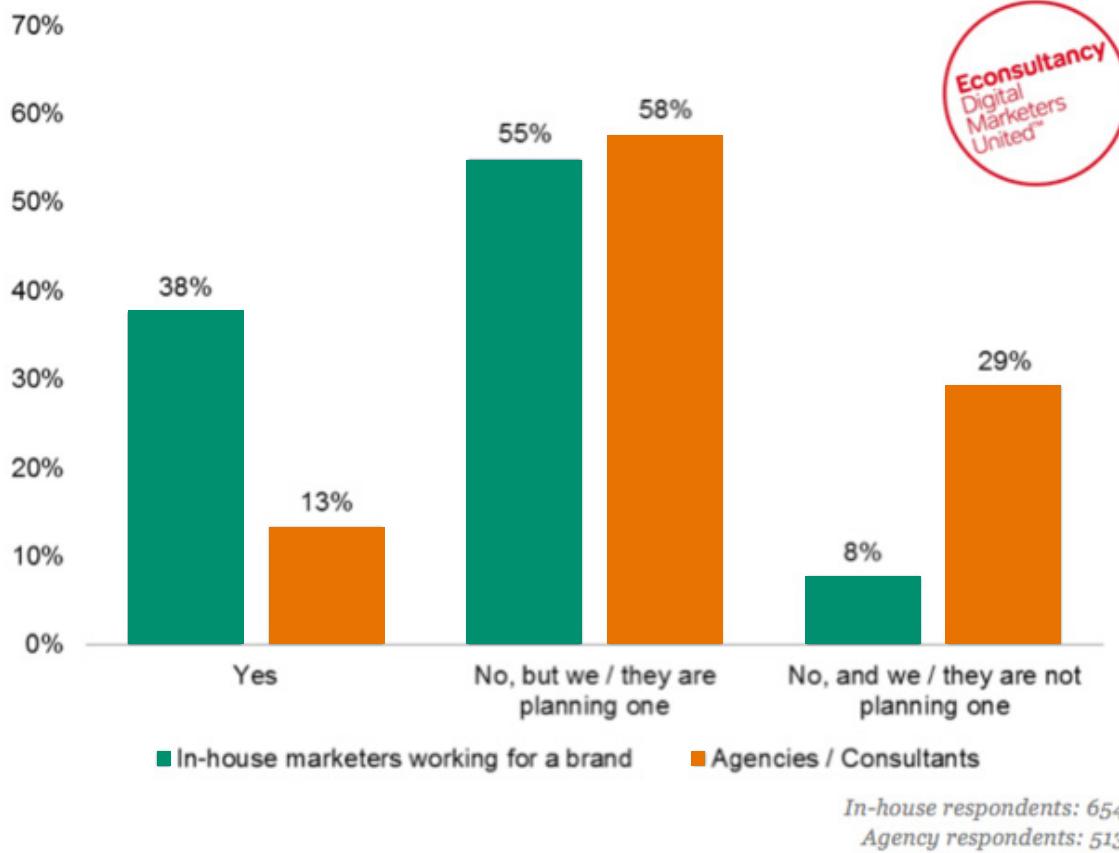
TWEET THIS!



According to CMI, 90 percent of B2C and 93 percent of B2B marketers report using content marketing. A report from Econsultancy suggests that only 38 percent of these companies even have a content marketing strategy.¹¹

CMI also reports that 28 percent of B2C and 30 percent of B2B marketing budgets are spent on content marketing. There's a lot of money being spent on something that, admittedly, isn't effective for most of these brands.

That's what motivated the sensational headline you see above. Upworthy actually has a strategy, and it is working. There's a lot of failure happening in content marketing and seemingly not a lot of solutions to address the problem.



WHAT SHE DIDN'T DO... THAT MOST DO

So, what is the problem? If you've read this far you already know that this book's theory is that the quantity and quality chase is at the core of the problem. It's this way of thinking that's driving companies to spend more and more on content marketing. CMI's own studies show that most companies are increasing their budgets for content – a likely pursuit of higher quality and an increase in publication frequency.

The reason most marketers believe their content isn't effective has little to do with quality and/or quantity in many cases. Most believe their ineffectiveness is a content problem. In actuality, they lack a true strategy to expand an audience.

WHAT SHE DID... AND YOU SHOULD, TOO

The rate of online content creation and publishing is increasing by enormous strides. The number of eyeballs available to read and consume this content is increasing, too. However, content publishing is far outpacing the rate at which Internet connectivity is growing. This means that it's getting harder and harder for brands to be noticed in the deluge of content being published every second.

So, rather than spending all of a content marketing budget on content creation and measurement, a large chunk of it should be invested in paid and earned media channels for content promotion. This is how brands can break through the noise and make their content much more effective. In Chapter 17 we'll dive deeper into the content marketing budget mix.

It's the promotion tactics, coupled with the owned media production already happening, that come together to form a real content marketing strategy. This is the way forward for the majority of marketers who admit not to having a strategy. If after reading this chapter you still need a tissue, it's okay. I won't tell anyone.

INTRODUCING INDUSTRY CONTENT DEFICITS AND SURPLUSES

10

Fact: there's more perceived content marketing failure than there is success today. That's been proven time and again by many CMI studies. The excuses for perceived failure range from limited staff to inability to measure impact. Even worse, as stated in Chapter Nine, only 38 percent of companies even have a content marketing strategy to speak of.

If all of this failure doesn't turn into some form of success soon, brands may start to abandon content marketing altogether. How should this be addressed?

DOES YOUR INDUSTRY HAVE AN ONLINE CONTENT DEFICIT OR SURPLUS?

This is the very first question all marketers should be asking themselves prior to deploying full-fledged content marketing. Why? Because the answer to this question will determine the actual strategy and tactics deployed, and it can point to exactly why campaigns are failing. The answer does not impact the goal of the campaign. Goal setting is not typically a challenge for most marketing organizations. It's the strategy, tactics, and/or measurement that all fall short.

Fact: there's more perceived content marketing failure than there is success today

TWEET THIS! 

CONTENT DEFICITS

Many marketers who have been doing content marketing since 2005 or earlier still remember the time when publishing content would attract large numbers of people quite easily. It literally was “you build it and they will come.” It was that simple. Niche media outlets such as Social Media Today, Business2Community, Social Media Examiner, and SocialFresh thrived in this environment.

These websites were formed in a time when the online marketing industry, in general, had a content deficit and social media, specifically, was emerging as a marketing channel. Translation: Lots of people were looking for marketing answers, and there weren’t very many websites providing and delivering the content they desired.

CONTENT SURPLUSES

Around 2011 the age of content deficits came to an end for the digital marketing industry

TWEET THIS!

Around 2011 the age of content deficits came to an end for the digital marketing industry. Hundreds, if not thousands, of agencies ramped up their blogs and so did marketing SaaS companies. Social broadcasting became the norm, and content about digital marketing was everywhere. The industry entered into a state of content surplus.

Companies in the digital marketing space that launch content marketing campaigns today find it extremely difficult to stand out in the marketplace if they deploy the *Publish and Pray* philosophy. It likely won’t work in today’s content overload.

Audiences were built, grown, and nurtured during the time of content deficits, and they’re going to be really tough to pry away. Owned media alone is unlikely to do it.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO YOU

Content deficits represent one of the only windows of opportunity for owned media alone to have a quick, meaningful and sustainable business impact. BuzzFeed and Upworthy are rare exceptions. If a brand’s industry is experiencing content surplus, then earned and paid media channels can be leveraged to produce successful and repeatable results.

With more than 90 percent of companies reporting content marketing adoption, fewer content deficits exist today. Blogging alone will likely fail to achieve meaningful returns if an industry is experiencing a content surplus. This is because the audience a brand is trying to reach is likely already committed to the websites that delivered industry-specific problem solving content and did so back during the time of content deficits.

To overcome this, brands must get their content on the websites their target audience frequents. There are several ways to do this. Some native paid channels include sponsored social promotion, content recommendations, and sponsored articles. Earned channels include media coverage, bylined articles or columns, syndication, and influencer advocacy.

The mix of the content promotion channels used above will define a brand's content marketing strategy. Marketers who question the impact of their current content marketing efforts or are just getting started must identify whether their industry is in a content surplus or deficit. It's likely in surplus.

If that's the case, content promotion can deliver a brand's content to a much larger and targeted audience. Building an audience from scratch using last decade's *Publish and Pray* approach is likely a recipe for ineffectiveness in the age of industry content surpluses.

THE AGE OF INDUSTRY CONTENT SURPLUSES

11

What should brands do when faced with a content surplus in their industry? Finding content marketing success in an industry with a content surplus requires content promotion, which can take many forms. Below are some specific forms of media to consider when devising a promotion strategy for content amplification.

PAID CHANNELS

- ✚ Advertorials (sponsored content)
- ✚ Native Social Promotion (featured in-feed)
- ✚ Native Advertising (sponsored content recommendation)
- ✚ Native Newsletter (sponsored content in third-party email)

EARNED CHANNELS

- ✚ News Coverage (pitching the media to cover owned content)
- ✚ Editorial Coverage (pitching editorial writers to cover owned content)

- ✚ Bylined Articles or Columns (writing for online publications)
- ✚ Syndication (pitching other sites to syndicate the brand's owned content)
- ✚ Guest Blogging (submitting blog posts for publication on other blogs)
- ✚ Influencer Advocacy (pitching industry influencers to cover, share, or talk about the brand's owned media)

Both channels help drive more eyeballs to branded content. However, according to a recent Nielsen report commissioned by inPowered (details will be outlined in Chapter 18), media coverage from subject matter experts increases brand familiarity 88 percent more than owned media alone across all stages of the buyer's journey. It also reported that 85 percent of consumers regularly or occasionally seek out trusted expert content – credible, third-party articles and reviews (earned media).

On the other hand, Contently recently conducted a study and figured out that native advertising has a trust problem.³⁴ Below are a few takeaways:

- ✚ Two-thirds of readers have felt deceived upon realizing that an article or video was sponsored by a brand.
- ✚ 54 percent of readers don't trust sponsored content.
- ✚ 59 percent of readers believe a news site loses credibility if it runs articles sponsored by a brand.
- ✚ As education level increases, so does mistrust of sponsored content.

In other words, the opinions of third-party experts (earned media) are the most trustworthy content a prospective customer can consume (more details to come in Chapter 18).

Even though native advertising ranks substantially lower in trust than both earned and owned media, it still vastly outperforms traditional search and banner ads. According to Solve Media, you're more likely to survive a plane crash than click a banner ad.

Just because earned media is the most trustworthy doesn't mean brands should abandon paid and owned media. They should do the opposite to maximize audience reach and converge of all three channels while investing resources accordingly.

the opinions of third-party experts (earned media) are the most trustworthy content

TWEET THIS!



OVERCOMING THE SEVEN GREATEST CONTENT MARKETING CHALLENGES OF TODAY

12

Curata, a content curation software company, recently published its *2014 Content Marketing Tactics Planner* using survey data gathered from more than 500 marketers.¹² Although the ebook itself is chalk full of good advice and insights, the stack ranking of the perceived challenges of marketers is really an attention grabber. Specifically, content promotion was dead last on the list.



2014 Content Marketing Tactics Planner
Creation, Curation & Syndication

curataSM



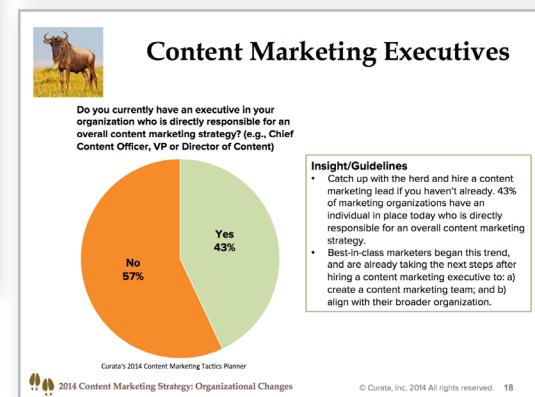
The Content Marketing Jungle

Welcome to the content marketing jungle. Although marketers have been practicing content marketing for decades, digital marketing coupled with a new, buyer 2.0 environment, has created a whole new set of opportunities and challenges in the content marketing realm; and many organizations are still trying to find their right path for success. For example:

- Many companies still struggle with identifying "What is content marketing?"
- Over 1/2 of marketing organizations have no executive or lead in place for content marketing
- With significant staff and program spend increases, few companies have developed a formalized process, with supporting technology, for their content supply chain.

There are many paths to content marketing success; however, what will we have to do to ensure we're on that right path?

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Content Marketing Executives

Do you currently have an executive in your organization who is directly responsible for an overall content marketing strategy? (e.g., Chief Content Officer, VP or Director of Content)

Response	Percentage
No	57%
Yes	43%

Insight/Guidelines

- Catch up with the herd and hire a content marketing lead if you haven't already. 43% of marketing organizations have an individual in place today who is directly responsible for an overall content marketing strategy.
- Best-in-class marketers began this trend, and are already taking the next steps after hiring a content marketing executive to: a) create a content marketing team, and b) align with their broader organization.

Curata's 2014 Content Marketing Tactics Planner

2014 Content Marketing Strategy: Organizational Changes

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It could only be dead last for one of two reasons – either many marketers have mastered content promotion already or most marketers don't yet know they should converge their owned media efforts with paid and earned media for promotion. It's likely the latter.

THE GREATEST CONTENT MARKETING CHALLENGES OF TODAY

1. Limited staff
2. Limited budget
3. Creating enough content on a regular basis
4. Finding the best sources to create amazing content
5. Organizational culture
6. Measuring the impact of content
7. Promoting content

Why would it be the latter? Because the majority of marketers feel their content is not effective. Furthermore, since only 38 percent of brands even have a content marketing strategy, it's likely the rest are doing little to no promotion. Promotion tactics combined with owned media development and measurement equate to a content marketing strategy.

HOW MOST CAN OVERCOME CHALLENGE ONE, TWO, THREE, AND FOUR

As mentioned in Chapter 4, Forrester's Ryan Skinner determined that marketers can actually step down content production and step up promotion to get better results. In addition, it improves content's quality because the feedback cycle is accelerated. With that reminder let's explore the first four challenges.

1. LIMITED STAFF – In content marketing the quality vs. quantity debate still rages, and finding the perfect mix is like finding snow in the desert – it's not going to happen. Improving quality or increasing quantity takes time and can be challenging to insource with limited staff.

Marketers who do earned and paid content promotion (number seven) can cut down on production and increase content quality faster, according to Forrester's study.

2. LIMITED BUDGET – Just like number one, limited staff, marketers are looking to build efficiencies. This can be done through outsourcing and/or adopting content marketing technology that can take a toll on a budget. Financial limitations can also impact a brand's ability to do paid promotion. However, earning media from trusted industry websites and influencers doesn't have to impact the budget directly.

Marketers who build real relationships with industry media outlets and influencers can earn coverage (content promotion) for their content without directly impacting the budget. It can also partially free up some of their reliance on outsourcing and technology – freeing up additional budget.

3. CREATING ENOUGH CONTENT ON A REGULAR BASIS – This is very much related to both challenge number one and two. With a limited budget, outsourcing becomes much more difficult. With limited staff resources, insourcing content development is harder to do, too.

However, marketers who do earned and paid content promotion (number seven) can cut down on production and see better results, according to Forrester's study. This will free up some of the limitations in time and budget.

4. FINDING THE BEST SOURCES TO CREATE AMAZING CONTENT – The Internet is teeming with information and Big Data on the ideal audience, media, and influencers to pitch and topics that resonate. Tools such as Cision, BuzzSumo, inPowered, SEMRush, Hitwise and many others serve up information and data that marketers can use to overcome this challenge.

The bottom line here is to do good research before creating content, pitching the media, or launching a paid promotion campaign. Many of the tools mentioned above are free to use or can be added to a content marketing budget.

THE SOURCE OF THE FIRST THREE CHALLENGES

The first thing to do to get started is to assess honestly how much time and resources are dedicated to content promotion... and this is not referring to social media broadcasting from the company's accounts. If the answer is little to none, and likely is, then the source of the first three challenges has just been identified.

HOW MOST CAN OVERCOME CHALLENGES FIVE AND SIX

Whereas content promotion and good research can help solve challenges one through four, it doesn't address challenges associated with organization culture and measurement.

5. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE – This can prove to be challenging whether it's content marketing, cloud computing adoption, or something else. Companies both large and small struggle to adapt to change quickly. Silos exist and department heads want to protect their budgets.

The best way to influence organizational culture and positively impact content marketing efforts is to build a case using data, have a thorough plan, and to sell it to everyone you can get to listen. Make sure to include how it will benefit the people you're selling to internally.

6. MEASUREMENT – It's surprising even to see this on the list, but no matter. It's certainly challenging for some because before marketers can measure anything they have to have a clear goal and a strategy. Obviously, if only 38 percent of brands have a content marketing strategy, it's unlikely they'll have anything other than tactics to measure.

First, establish a goal. Does marketing need to drive leads or sales conversions? If leads, then what type – subscribers, inquiries, marketing qualified, sales qualified? We've established a strategy above already – converging owned, paid, and earned media content promotion. Now it's time to deploy a CRM, with marketing automation and demand generation software. For those on tight budgets Google Analytics and an Email Service Provider will work with some customization.

HOW MOST CAN OVERCOME CHALLENGE SEVEN

7. PROMOTING CONTENT – Based on the studies cited in this and previous chapters, it's likely that most marketers won't even know what true content promotion and distribution looks like, let alone understand its benefits. Having content featured on established media outlets and industry websites can drive thousands of visitors, leads, and conversions in a short period of time.

Start with getting educated on the promotion tactics, both paid and earned. Reading this book is a great start. Next, appropriately allocate resources to content promotion and start experimenting.

The above represents huge marketing hurdles to overcome for some. However, many can overcome five of the seven challenges through content promotion backed by appropriate research.



INTRODUCING THE TACTICS OF CONTENT PROMOTION

13

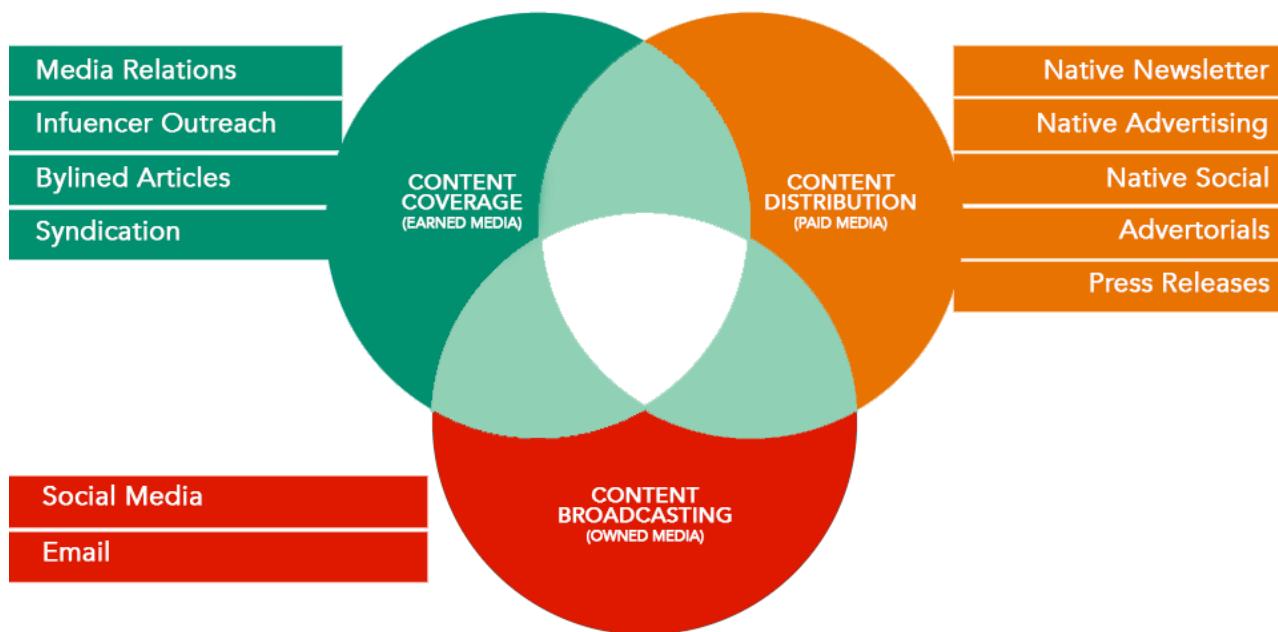
Some people think content promotion isn't complicated. It's just making sure content is optimized for the search engines, sent to an appropriate email list, and then broadcast socially, right? If only it were that simple.

Search algorithms aren't as reliant on on-page factors for determining relevance anymore, organic social reach is declining, and not every brand has a huge opt-in email database at their disposal. As a result, brands that wish to rely on these tactics must have patience -- or double down on promotional efforts.

The amount of patience required is dependent on the level of content marketing adoption within any given industry. For example, a bee keeper just getting started with content marketing might see results faster than a new marketing agency, since marketing as an industry is highly saturated with content. Unfortunately, most enterprises aren't patient enough to wait 18 or more months for the return they need to justify their budgets -- they generally get one quarter to prove a program's worth.

So if you're a late content marketing adopter in a competitive industry and you want to grow fast, you need to get creative with how you promote your content. The graphic and explanations below detail some of the best paid and earned media tactics for promoting content. Many of these tactics can empower newer content marketing adopters to see results quicker, help agencies reduce churn by driving client results faster, and allow enterprise marketers to show a return within a quarter.

THE TACTICS OF CONTENT PROMOTION

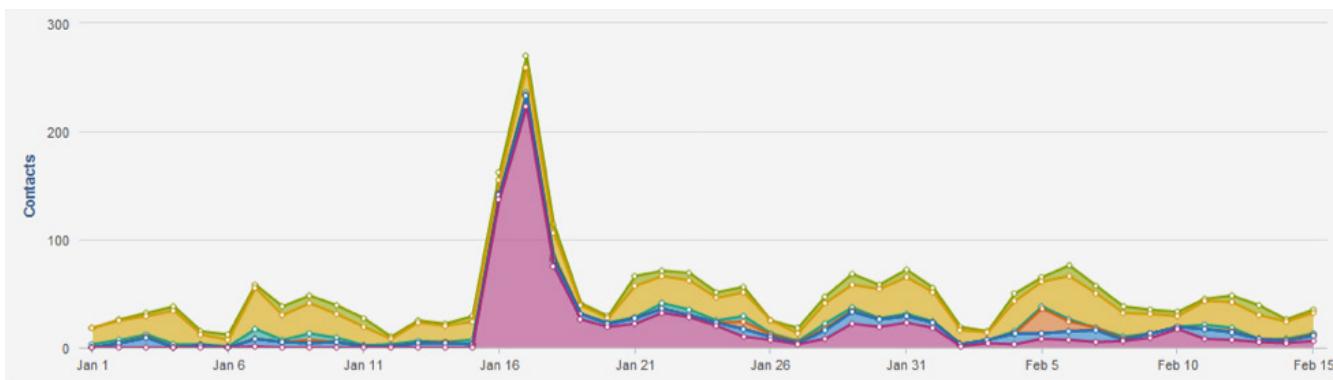


CONTENT COVERAGE

This is perhaps the most powerful of the three content promotion channels. Earning attention for a brand's content can drive brand awareness, traffic, and conversions. Here are a few ways you can get more content coverage.

MEDIA RELATIONS

This is a tried-and-true stalwart of public relations, but it doesn't have to be all about pitching brand, product, and service stories to journalists and editors. Marketers and PR professionals alike can pitch a brand's ebook, guide, study, etc. if it's prudent to the audience of the publication. Below shows the growth in leads (in purple) from one link to an ebook featured in a story on Inc.com.



In total, this one link drove over 800 incremental leads in just a few weeks. The day after it was published, 20% of the total website visitors downloaded the ebook.

INFLUENCER OUTREACH

Also known as influencer marketing or influencer advocacy, influencer outreach is quite similar to media relations, though, typically, the people targeted are influential in their industry and aren't necessarily journalists or editors. Influencers can be bloggers or people that amass large social followings around their industry expertise.

The result of outreach can lead to something as simple as a social share, a direct or indirect endorsement on a blog, or full-on collaboration with a project or campaign. One social share from Rand Fishkin helped drive nearly 5,000 unique website visitors to an article I wrote and over 500 Google +1s in just two weeks.

BYLINED ARTICLES

These result when media outlets invite company executives with a very specific expertise to write for them. Some are one-and-done, and others are a series of articles or even a weekly column. Bylines cost nothing, but it takes time to research the media and pitch them why a brand's executive should write for them. Once a byline is earned, citing ebooks, guides, studies, and blog posts can drive copious amounts of traffic and conversions.

SYNDICATION

This tactic was a cornerstone of the newspaper business for many years and turned some journalists into cult celebrities. While not a cornerstone of the internet, having content syndicated to other websites serves the same purpose -- getting content in front of many more eyeballs. Any calls to action or citations leading back to landing pages in the original content can drive massive amounts of conversions over time. Just be sure that you're covering all of your SEO-bases when having your content syndicated.

Relevance.com has several syndication relationships. Each one credits the original source of the content. If you're ever getting your content syndicated, make sure that the syndicated post links back to the original with the appropriate canonical.

CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

Ryan Skinner of Forrester juxtaposes traditional online ad networks and the quickly growing ecosystem of paid content distribution channels in his report mentioned in Chapter Four.

When it comes to content marketing it's really important to make a distinction between the traditional and today's native channels. Native distribution is more conducive to content marketers than banner ads and lacks the pervasiveness of banner blindness. Below are a few ways you can use this type of promotion for your content.

NATIVE ADVERTISING (CONTENT DISCOVERY NETWORKS)

Networks like Taboola, AdBlade, and Outbrain are quickly growing. With more than 90% of companies admitting to content marketing adoption, it's not surprising -- with so much content out there, people are looking for any edge to get noticed.

These networks allow marketers to get their content in front of very large audiences while simultaneously helping traditional media outlets grow revenue -- something many of them haven't been able to do for more than a decade.

media buying for sponsored content is still in its infancy

ADVERTORIALS (SPONSORED CONTENT)

This is another way for brands to tap into another website's audience. Brands using this tactic pay to publish articles on other websites or media outlets. The pieces usually look and feel much like the unsponsored content on the media site, but is denoted with a "sponsored" tag or sticker. Popularized by Forbes, online advertorials are beginning to crop up all over the Internet. However, media buying for sponsored content is still in its infancy. Pricing varies widely across the media -- from six figures to a couple hundred dollars.

NATIVE SOCIAL

Native advertising helped both Facebook and LinkedIn experience stock price spikes when these programs were announced. Both networks have successfully given brands the option to move advertisements from the doldrums of banner ad space into users' newsfeeds where these sponsored posts look very similar to typical updates.

Marketers who choose to use social networks for native advertising should experiment. Some are more conducive to blog content and visuals while others are best suited for landing pages with offers like ebooks and guides. Cost per click can vary between \$0.25 to over \$20 on networks like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

NATIVE NEWSLETTERS

These have been around for quite some time. Most marketers can likely find several examples in their inboxes now. Some companies that have amassed large email databases will allow marketers to pay to include their branded content or offers in their newsletter.

If you pay for native newsletter distribution, your rate can be a part of a broader sponsorship package, cost per click, cost per action, or cost per lead. Paying for placement in a newsletter is another way for marketers to distribute their content in a native manner.

CONTENT BROADCASTING

Unfortunately, broadcasting is exclusively what most marketers use for content promotion today. For some it can be highly effective, but for others it can feel like no one is listening. It's exceptionally difficult to get needle-moving results for companies just getting started with content marketing in an industry that's embraced it already. For content broadcasting to have a big impact, a brand needs an existing audience.

SOCIAL MEDIA

This is a tried-and-true broadcasting channel for brands. Unfortunately, Facebook is slowly, but surely, limiting the organic reach of brands -- and it's possible that other social networks might follow suit. So if you're going to beef up your social media broadcasting, know that you're at the mercy of the social networks and that algorithm changes could affect your future successes. I'm not saying don't be on social media, just be aware that you have to play by the social networks' rules to be successful.

EMAIL

Email can be a highly effective channel for content promotion, too. Valuable content can be delivered to subscribers, leads, customers, and partners. Whether it's a one-off campaign, a regular subscription, triggered automation, or nurturing, email works. Unfortunately though, without a significant email database to tap into, brands don't have anyone to broadcast to. Over time, though, you can build this large, opt-in database and then regularly broadcast your content to them.

As marketers, we're used to telling our customers to be patient with content marketing -- that it takes time. But it only takes time if broadcasting is the only content promotion channel used. By leveraging the content promotion landscape and the tools of the content promotion ecosystem, marketers can get faster and better results.

broadcasting is
**exclusively what most
marketers use for
content promotion today**

TWEET THIS!



by leveraging the content
promotion landscape and
the tools of the content
promotion ecosystem,
**marketers can get faster
and better results**

TWEET THIS!



THE RISE OF CONTENT PROMOTION

14

Content marketing has seen a huge growth in adoption by brands during the last four years. So much so, in fact, that CMI reports a 90 percent adoption rate by B2C brands and a 93 percent rate for B2B brands. The same studies report more than 70 percent of these brands have increased the amount of content they create during the last 12 months and are planning on expanding more.

It's these revelations that are encouraging both marketers and PR professionals to look to paid and earned media channels for content promotion and distribution. The number of eyeballs available to read owned media content is finite — limited to those who know to look for it directly on specific channels.

But with more than 90 percent of brands creating, publishing, and sharing owned media — not to mention the countless other flavors of content being published by individuals and media outlets — it has become much more difficult to attract and keep audiences today. As a result, content promotion is more attractive to marketers than ever.

Outbrain reports a six percent click-through rate across its 100,000-plus publisher network

Outbrain, a paid content amplification network, reports a six percent click-through rate across its 100,000-plus publisher network. The Nielsen study in Chapter 18 shows that third-party citations from credible media outlets are a 38 percent more effective source of information for impacting the consumer at the top of the funnel versus owned media. In other words, pitching the media to cover a brand's owned content has more consumer impact than owned media alone, and paid native advertising can drive significant traffic.



TWEET THIS!

PAID VS. EARNED CONTENT PROMOTION, AND THEIR PERCEIVED VALUE

Deciding which channels to use and what the proper mix should look like is a juxtaposition of two major benefits: control and influence. Brands have to decide which is most important to their marketing. Paid media channels offer brands more control of the two channels.

On the other hand, earned media offers little control, (brands don't control journalists or editorial decisions, but they can sway them with the pitch) but maximum influence on consumers, according to the Nielsen report. Tactical key performance indicators (KPIs) to consider could include visibility, click-through rate, organic search, and shareability.

Below is a chart containing the total overall perceived value of each channel based on the likelihood of impacting each KPI mentioned above.

PAID CONTENT DISTRIBUTION



*All Final Totals are Perceived Values.

EARNED CONTENT PROMOTION

Perceived Value Score 1-4



NEWS COVERAGE Objective reporting on a brand's content by an established media outlet.	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	■■■■	19
BYLINES & EDITORIAL COVERAGE Independent reporting on brand's content by media outlet.	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●●●	●●●●●●	●●●●	18
GUEST POSTING Unsponsored guest content posted to a media outlet by a brand.	●●●	●●●●	●●●●●●	●●●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	17
CONTENT SYNDICATION A brand's content reposted by another website on a regular basis.	●●●	●●●●	●●●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	17
INFLUENCER OUTREACH A brand's content promoted by an industry influencer on a social media channel.	●●●	●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	13
CONTENT CURRATION A brand's content reposted or promoted by another website on a one-off basis.	●●●	●●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●●●	■■■■	11
COMMENT CITATION Citation of a brand's content within a comment on a forum or blog.	●●●	●●●	●●●●	●●●●	■■■■	■■■■	4

*All Final Totals are Perceived Values.

If brand awareness measurement is your top KPI, then channels that offer the maximum visibility should be considered. If driving inquiries to nurture is most essential for your marketing strategy, then channels with high click-through rates should be leveraged. SEO and social metrics have other KPIs some marketers strive to achieve — both of which can be impacted by several of the content promotion channels.

Since media coverage is the most trusted channel, a good rule of thumb is to use paid channels to distribute and promote earned media coverage of your owned media content. In other words,

if your brand's study, guide, or ebook is worthy of being covered by the media or a well-known influencer, it's ideal to support it with paid content promotion.

Third-party endorsements of a brand's owned media suggests to consumers that its quality and helpfulness are high. The one-two punch of using paid channels to promote earned media sees to it that all of the KPIs listed above are strengthened.

Other considerations when choosing the right channel mix include demographics and personas. Companies that service tight niche markets may find paid social promotion the easiest channel to leverage due to its robust targeting. Proper research on the media outlets targeted with paid or earned media goes a long way in aligning personas and target demographics.

WHAT TYPE OF CONTENT SHOULD BE PROMOTED?

The answer to this question depends largely on the channel. Paid media channels will let brands promote most types of content without much of a quality threshold — blog posts, studies, guides, and ebooks included. Content, such as slide decks, videos, and audio, have very specialized networks (for example, YouTube) that can be leveraged for paid promotion.

On the other hand, earned media channels are generally much more finicky — the content must be judged worthy of coverage by its stakeholders and decision-makers. This generally requires the content to be extremely helpful, informative, and/or entertaining to the particular audience it serves. Studies, guides, and ebooks are generally the easiest content formats to pitch to media outlets and influencers — as long as they solve a very important problem in the marketplace.

In order to accomplish this, consider these four earned media rules of thumb:

- 1.** Content promotion strategy should be planned out before content creation begins.
- 2.** Good promotion plans start with audience and media research.
- 3.** The more valuable the content will be to its intended audience, the more successful the promotion will likely be.
- 4.** Only promote high-impact, high-quality content.

Brands that have embraced content promotion are already breaking through the online noise, driving increases in their audience, and meeting or exceeding KPIs. However, always remember that quality content is not defined by us. It's defined by the editors, journalists, and influencers we pitch and their audience. It doesn't matter how good we think our content is. If it doesn't pass their sniff test, it's not quality content for their audience.

INTRODUCING THE CONTENT PROMOTION ECOSYSTEM

15

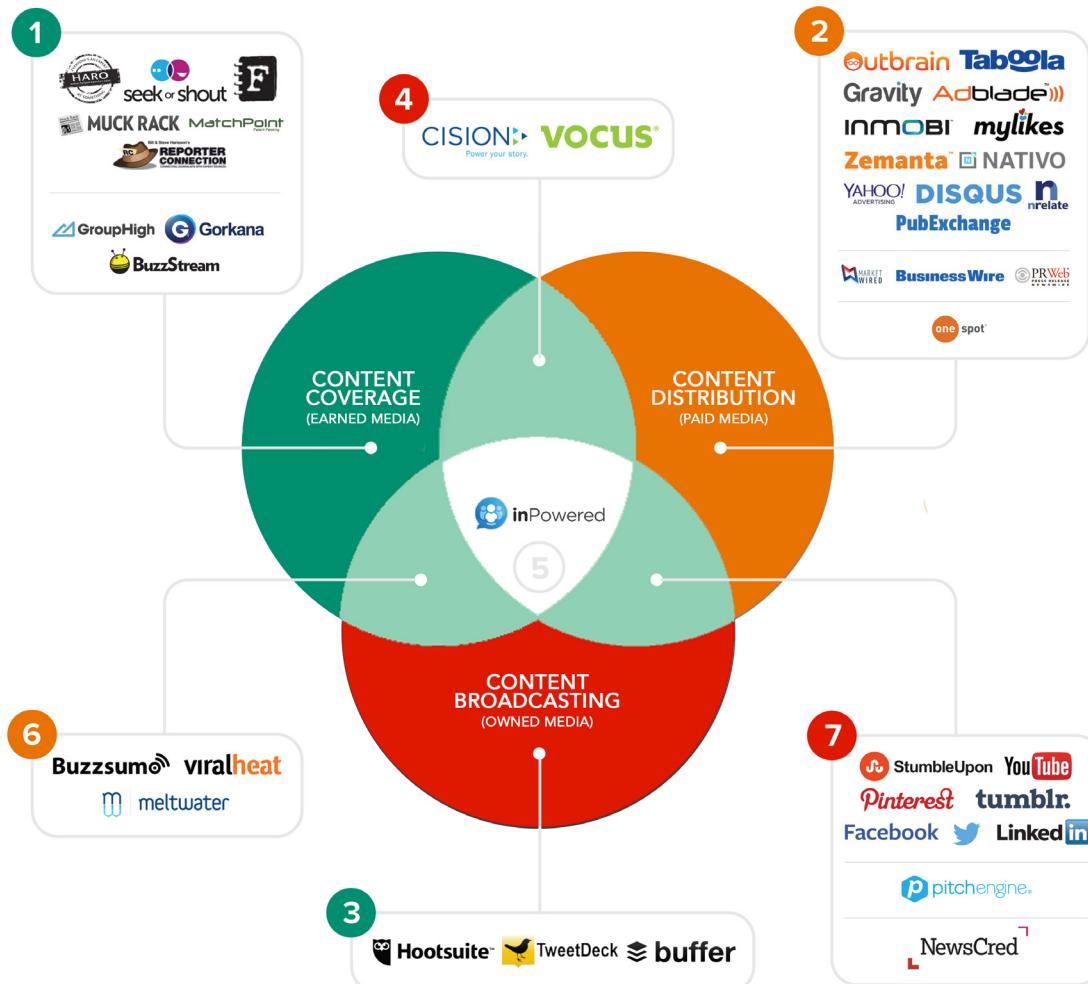
The content promotion industry is starting to grow up. It's now being regularly written about by marketers and communications professionals of all stripes. We've even created an entire publication dedicated to the topic (Relevance.com). With the buzz buzzing and the posts popping, one thing is clear – there's still a lot of confusion about content promotion channels and the tools used to tap into them effectively.

In an effort to eliminate this confusion, the Venn diagram below defines where each tool resides in the content promotion ecosystem and which channel(s) it impacts. Many tools can impact multiple channels – all of which are defined below.

Note: Email service providers and tools built mostly to create, manage and measure owned media were intentionally not included in the ecosystem, but could be.

An argument for including content curation engines can be made, too, but getting other people to curate or syndicate a brand's content is done using the media relations tools below and establishing real relationships.

THE CONTENT PROMOTION MANIFESTO



As shown above, there are a lot of different tools that make up the content promotion ecosystem. Many of them are very different from each other. However, what binds them all is their ability to help promote a brand's content on owned, paid, or earned media channels. Many of the tools can influence two or more channels. Let's take a deeper look at the channels and the tools that impact them.

1. CONTENT COVERAGE

This part of the Venn diagram is composed of two similar – but different – sets of tools that empower brands to earn media coverage. The first set includes:

- + HARO
- + Seek or Shout
- + FlackList
- + Muck Rack
- + MatchPoint
- + Reporter Connection

These tools can be best described as classified ads for the media. Journalists can upload requests to interview subject matter experts on almost any topic. Requests that require experts from a brand's industry can lead to an interview.

An interview is great, but if the interviewee has a blog post, whitepaper, guide, ebook, or study that addresses the reporter's questions, it should be shared, too. If it's good enough, the brand's content could be cited in the article. Citations of this nature can drive thousands of click-throughs and online conversions in a short amount of time.

The second set of content coverage tools is similar in that they help brands earn media, but how they go about it is slightly different. For example, Gorkana has a large media database that empowers its users to organize and target journalists to pitch. It also includes social media monitoring and analytics reporting.

On the other hand, BuzzStream is a great tool for discovering industry influencers to pitch. This could include journalists, but also will include popular social media people and bloggers. In addition, it features a tool that assists SEO professionals in link building.

GroupHigh is a tool that empowers marketers and PR folks to be successful at blogger outreach. Specifically, it helps to identify influential blogs, automate research, and measure engagement to make outreach marketing more successful.

2. CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

The set of tools identified for content distribution below is most commonly associated with native advertising or content discovery. Generally, these tools empower publishers with the ability to "recommend" related articles – onsite or offsite – to their readers, and they do so in a nonintrusive way. Content recommendation solutions have the ability to get branded content in front of millions of eyes in a short amount of time.

- + Taboola
- + Outbrain
- + Gravity
- + Adblade
- + InMobi
- + MyLikes
- + Zemanta
- + Nativo
- + Yahoo Stream Ads
- + Disqus
- + Nrelate
- + PubExchange

Additionally, tools such as Marketwired, Business Wire, and PRWeb are generally known as online press release distribution tools. Whereas these tools distribute content differently from the native tools described above, the two groups both represent paid media solutions.

Years ago press releases would have been placed in area four of the Venn diagram above. However, today, most brands only earn coverage from press releases if they're large and established (i.e. Apple, Amazon, P&G, Boeing). For most brands it's simply a content distribution platform today.

The last tool presented in this section is OneSpot, an enterprise content distribution solution that taps into multiple ad networks at once. It leverages the power of the Facebook Exchange, Microsoft Advertising, DoubleClick Ad Exchange, and AppNexus.

3. CONTENT BROADCASTING

This is the least represented section of the three major areas of content promotion. It's also the least effective for most brands that don't already have a large or significant owned audience. In addition, Facebook is slowly turning off the spigot for organic brand reach.¹³ Other social platforms are likely not far behind. Because of this, brands should be wary of relying solely on content broadcasting.

- + Hootsuite
- + TweetDeck
- + Buffer

Email service providers *would* reside in this section, but – as previously mentioned – have been intentionally left out of the ecosystem because adoption is mature.

4. CONTENT COVERAGE & DISTRIBUTION

Cision and Vocus are fairly similar tools. Both dove head-first into the content marketing and social media space and are now useful to both marketers and PR professionals. Gorkana, described under content coverage above, has many of the same features, but lacks connection to existing native ad networks.

Whereas these tools might be best known in the media relations space, they have both made strides to provide massive value to marketing and communications professionals of all kinds, and in many different ways.

5. CONTENT COVERAGE, DISTRIBUTION, AND BROADCASTING

Only one tool in the content promotion ecosystem lays claim to impacting all three major channels – owned, paid, and earned media. inPowered acts as a search engine to find trusted earned media coverage of brands, products, and services. Its algorithm can also identify the top subject matter experts within a query without relying on the gameable follower metrics so prevalent today.

Users of this tool can then choose to broadcast the earned media coverage socially and to distribute it across multiple paid networks in a turnkey fashion. It also measures the impact the content has on consumers in real time using a simple popup.

6. CONTENT COVERAGE AND BROADCASTING

Viralheat, Meltwater, and BuzzSumo users are empowered to identify influential people and content around prudent topics at scale. All three solutions allow users to broadcast the influential content produced by others and can assist with media relations. Both Viralheat and Meltwater offer enterprise solutions for online listening, intelligence, and reporting.

7. CONTENT DISTRIBUTION AND BROADCASTING

Generally speaking, any social media platform that offers some type of paid native promotion falls into this category. Brands can broadcast their content on these channels and extend their reach using paid distribution.

PitchEngine is a marriage between the press release and social media. It's kind of like its own social network that integrates with more well-known social networks. It also maintains its press release circulation network for easy distribution of content.

NewsCred is a fairly robust tool that allows marketers to plan, execute, manage, and measure content marketing. Built directly into the tool is the ability both to socially broadcast and distribute content on native paid channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Taboola, Outbrain, and Google.

Hopefully, this chapter will help clear up some of the confusion that still exists in the burgeoning field of content promotion. Adoption of content broadcasting – including email and social media – is well established and has been for quite some time. However, native distribution and content coverage through media relations is just beginning to catch up. Since the majority of brands feel their content marketing is ineffective, let's hope the other channels catch up soon before companies begin to question its efficacy.

ONLY TWO WAYS TO GUARANTEE SHORT-TERM DIGITAL MARKETING RETURNS

16

If you stacked all of the digital marketing strategies and tactics on top of each other they would stretch from here to the moon, and back again, twice. Actually that's just made up, but the point is there's a whole bunch of ways to use the Internet for marketing, and companies of all shapes and sizes are throwing lots of tactics, strategies, and money against the wall to see what sticks.

MARKETING BUDGETS ARE IN DISEQUILIBRIUM

The motivating force behind these efforts is simple – to maximize return on investment. However, a company's willingness to invest in the long-term is often undermined by the short-term demands of stakeholders (quarterly earnings reports). Companies without short-term pressure to deliver immediate returns are often the ones more willing to invest in a longer-term strategy such as inbound and content marketing.

This dynamic has created a ballooned population of *late majority* and *laggard* brands in the content marketing maturity model. Earned and owned online media channels are 62 percent more cost-effective than ad networks, but they still consume more than 88 percent of today's digital marketing budgets.^{14, 15} This means that digital marketing budgets are in disequilibrium.

a company's willingness to invest in the long-term is often undermined by the short-term demands of stakeholders

LONG-TERM RETURNS

DIGITAL OWNED MEDIA – is a long-term strategy that can take 18 months or more to start delivering meaningful returns, if ever. This is a problem for those companies in the quarterly earnings race. It's likely that many of them expect to move the needle in the same quarter they invest. They forgo the long-term gains content marketing can provide and settle for the short-term high of media buying and online advertising.

The long-term benefits of digital owned media are derived through their propensity to *earn* media over time. Whether it's a link or mention on a popular blog, number one on Google or 500 Facebook shares, the point of online owned media is to earn media over time.

SHORT-TERM RETURNS

DIGITAL PAID MEDIA – when executed properly can provide returns almost immediately. This is where the vast majority of enterprise-type companies spend most of their digital marketing budgets. Compared to earned and owned digital media, the returns are generally glacial, at best.

This investment comes with a possible intangible cost for brands in the future. The public's ever-growing loathing of interruption-based advertising will likely start to impact brand perceptions negatively over time.

That's why native advertising such as in-feed social, advertorials, and content recommendation engines are cropping up. It's less intrusive and much more desirable to consumers than traditional digital ad networks.

Both native advertising and traditional ad networks such as display advertising are paid media. However, native is the only paid channel considered prudent for content promotion. Although less trustworthy than earned or owned media, native advertising is still much more trustworthy than traditional digital ad networks.^{34,35}

People are getting much better at obfuscating and ignoring annoying online display ads altogether – there impact is diminishing. Traditional online paid media is also in strife with click fraud.¹⁶

DIGITAL EARNED MEDIA – in its entirety, represents the smallest budget allocation in marketing today. Lots of different tactics fall under this category and can include search engine optimization, viral campaigns, media relations, influencer outreach, and word of mouth. Most of these tactics still don't provide short-term returns confidently.

However, the digital media relations piece of earned media most certainly can provide the short-term returns so valued by the enterprise today. It gives brands the chance to be *part of the story* and not sit in the webpage media doldrums where banner blindness is so pervasive.¹⁷

The advantage of deploying this strategy is that it completely eliminates the potential for future brand-drag caused by traditional online ad networks and moves click fraud out of the realm of possibility. In addition, when deployed properly, the return on investment can be multiples greater.

PUTTING MARKETING BUDGETS BACK IN EQUILIBRIUM

The late majority and laggard brands have essentially created a massive advertising bubble that's bound to burst

TWEET THIS!



The late majority and laggard brands have essentially created a massive advertising bubble that's bound to burst. Laggard brands will soon start to see their share of voice drastically decline as more and more late majority brands embrace earned, owned, and native paid strategies.

It's not too late for those brands that chase quarterly earnings reports to fix their budgets. Embracing earned media and native paid channels to promote content can displace online ad networks altogether and still satisfy their need to show short-term results.

BUDGETING FOR EFFECTIVE CONTENT PROMOTION

17

As 2014 continued to move forward, more and more brands started to plan and deploy promotion and distribution strategies to maximize their content marketing effectiveness. The revelations from Ryan Skinner's Forrester report started to resonate with some marketers.

It's also become painfully clear to many that owned media alone might not drive impactful returns in an acceptable amount of time. In addition, based on the data below, proper budgeting and channel mix selection for promotion impacted the likelihood of effectiveness.

NATIVE SOCIAL PROMOTION AND SPONSORED ARTICLES (ADVERTORIALS)

On average, marketers spent 8.5 percent of their content marketing budget (or 2.1 percent of their total marketing budget) on sponsored (native) social promotion in 2013. In addition, they spent on average 6.7 percent of their content marketing budget (or 1.7 percent of their total marketing budget) on sponsored content (advertisorials).

Many data points from four different sources were used to determine averages. The sources used include CMI, Custom Content Council, eMarketer, and Advertising Age.^{22, 23, 24, 25}

on average, marketers
spent at least 15.2
percent of their content
marketing budget on
promotion in 2013

TWEET THIS!

This means that, on average, marketers spent at least 15.2 percent of their content marketing budget on promotion in 2013. However, the fact remains, on average, only 37 percent of brands thought their content efforts were effective, which indicates that the budgets and channel mix featured above is likely a recipe for ineffectiveness.

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER CHANNELS?

Both paid and earned media represent multiple content promotion and distribution channels and tactics. Broadcasting content from branded social media accounts (some categorize this as shared media) is not earning coverage or distribution in this context because it generally doesn't tap into a new and large enough audience – just the audience already earned.

These channels were outlined in Chapter 11, but let's revisit them for easy reference.

PAID CHANNELS

- + Sponsored Articles (advertorials)
- + Sponsored Social Promotion (featured in-feed)
- + Sponsored Recommendations (native advertising)
- + Sponsored Newsletter (native content in third-party email)

EARNED CHANNELS

- + Media Coverage
- + Bylined Article/Column
- + Syndication
- + Influencer Advocacy

Earning news and editorial coverage, contributing to an online magazine or journal, and syndication typically fall under the media relations umbrella. Guest blogging and influencer outreach can be considered media relations, but they tend to be bucketed separately. The major difference is that marketers tend to do guest blogging and influencer outreach, whereas public relations folks tend to focus more on the aforementioned media channels.

Sponsored social promotion and advertorials are the only channels out of the ten above with enough reliable data to come to any logical conclusions regarding channel mix and budget. However, as more data become available and this content promotion industry matures, budgeting and channel mix selection will become even easier. But for now, let's take a peek at the budget and channel mix of Relevance clients.

MEDIA RELATIONS, INFLUENCER OUTREACH, AND SPONSORED RECOMMENDATIONS

After performing a budget analysis of the Relevance client portfolio, it's been determined that the average enterprise engagement invests between 25 and 30 percent of its content marketing budget on pitching content for editorial and influencer coverage. In addition, another five to 15 percent of budgets were spent on native advertising on networks such as Outbrain or Taboola and/or native social promotion.

This channel mix and budget allocation has proven to be effective. The resulting campaigns have led to millions of media impressions. Lisa Arthur, CMO of Teradata Marketing Applications, commented on its effectiveness by saying, "[It] was one of the most successful B2B lead gen campaigns in our history."

In fact, this channel-mix and budget allocation helped earn an eight-digit revenue bump for Teradata. The return on investment for the company was a whopping 36 times the outlay for the campaign. Teradata was so successful it won the TechPoint *Tech Sales and Marketing Award* for the best tech marketing campaign in the State of Indiana for 2013.²⁶

Whichever channel mix you decide to use, in total, it should consume between 40 and 60 percent of total content marketing resources. This will ensure that content promotion will have an optimized impact on owned media.

With content marketing adoption reaching all-time highs year-over-year and average budget allocations increasing day by day, can brands afford to be ineffective? Maybe in the short-term, but eventually they'll be forced to figure out the right mix of content promotion channels and the proper amount of resources to allocate to them. If not, content marketing adoption rates may start to decline in the very near future.

RECONCILING TWO COMPETING CONTENT MARKETING STUDIES

18

Two contrasting content marketing studies were published in the first quarter of 2014: one by WP Engine/Taylor Nelson Sofres and the other by inPowered/ Nielsen.^{27,28} The WP Engine study suggested that 62 percent of Americans want original content directly from brands (owned media) and only 22 percent wanted third-party articles (earned media).

The Nielsen study showed that, on average, earned media (content written about a product or service from a reputable third-party) lifts brand familiarity 88 percent more than branded content alone.

Nielsen also concluded that 85 percent of consumers regularly or occasionally seek out trusted third-party content when considering a purchase.

So, which is it? Do consumers prefer to be exposed to earned media or owned media? Let's look at how each study was conducted.

85 percent of consumers regularly or occasionally seek out trusted third-party content when considering a purchase

TWEET THIS! 

TAYLOR NELSON SOFRES STUDY

According to the American Marketing Association, the study by TNS was conducted using a survey that polled 1,000 American adults.²⁹ This would lead most people to believe that consumers were faced with a series of questions to be answered by multiple choice, or as they saw fit.

Some of the conclusions include:

- + 62 percent want to see content directly from their favorite brands
- + 60 percent want to see content directly from brands
- + 27 percent want to see branded articles on important issues
- + 16 percent want industry research from brands
- + 12 percent want funny stories from brands
- + 52 percent prefer to go directly to a company website for content about the brand
- + 25 percent prefer social media for branded content
- + 22 percent prefer third-party articles about brands

NIELSEN STUDY

Their conclusions were gathered using an in-lab, multi-month study that exposed 900 consumers to three different types of content – branded, user-generated, and credible third-party. This study actually made consumers read examples of the different types of content prior to answering questions. It also measured the results at three stages of the buyers' journey.

Some of the conclusions included:

- + On average, earned media lifted brand familiarity 88 percent more than branded content and 50 percent more than user reviews

When measured against branded content earned media is:

- + 80 percent more effective at the bottom-of-the-funnel or purchase consideration stage
- + 80 percent more effective at the middle-of-the-funnel or affinity stage
- + 38 percent more effective at the top-of-the-funnel or familiarity stage

Other findings from the research suggest the unbiased nature and credibility of the third-party content was critical for consumers.

- + 85 percent of consumers regularly or occasionally seek out creditable, third-party articles and reviews when considering a purchase
- + 69 percent of consumers like to read product reviews written by trusted experts before making a purchase
- + 67 percent of consumers agree that an endorsement from an unbiased expert makes them more likely to consider purchasing

WHAT CONSUMERS DID VS. WHAT THEY SAID THEY'D DO

It's clear that the two studies were conducted very differently, and their methodologies weren't exactly the same. Since we don't know the exact questions that were asked of the participants, it's truly hard to reconcile the two conclusions. It's not even clear that the two studies are using the same definition of "third-party content." Even if they were, this might just be a case of what consumers said they would prefer versus what they *actually* preferred.

The best conclusion to take away from these two competing studies is that both earned and owned media are valuable. Co-founder and president of inPowered, Pirouz Nilforoush, said it best: "When it comes to determining which content to utilize to best educate consumers, it is not an either/or proposition."

When owned, paid, and earned media are converged and deployed together, a true content marketing strategy begins to emerge and synergy across channels is realized. This happens in the latter stages of the content marketing maturity model and should be a major goal for every brand that adopts content marketing, no matter which study is believed.

DISTRIBUTING CONTENT AT SCALE WITH NATIVE ADVERTISING

19

At Relevance we scraped up a little budget and experimented with several native content distribution channels. The experiment focused on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Outbrain.

The primary goal was to drive new subscribers for the site, but the secondary goal was to drive top of the funnel leads for the premiere sponsor, Relevance, to nurture. To accomplish this we chose to drive qualified traffic to several individual articles on Relevance.

With \$4,500 we felt confident that we could drive subscribers, leads and boost the overall awareness of the site. Ultimately, we'd hope to prove the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of each individual channel and double-down on what worked.

It ran for six weeks and the results were surprising. Let's look at each individual channel to see what happened.

Native Channel Analysis					
Traffic Source	Total Budget	Total Spend (\$)	Clicks	Spend/Click	Unique Visitors
Facebook	\$600	\$613.04	1103	\$0.56	645
LinkedIn	\$1,550	\$1,457.90	249	\$5.90	212
Twitter	\$1,600	\$1,582.00	1508	\$1.11	108
Outbrain	\$750	\$449.95	728	\$0.62	704

Traffic Source	Spend/Unique	#Subscribers	Spend/Subscriber	#Leads	Spend/Lead
Facebook	\$1.10	1	\$613.04	3	\$204.35
LinkedIn	\$7.94	0	NA	1	\$1,457.90
Twitter	\$16.28	0	NA	0	NA
Outbrain	\$0.64	1	\$449.95	8	\$56.24

**if your primary goal
is to drive awareness
and traffic to articles,
Facebook is a good
network to distribute
content on**

TWEET THIS!



FACEBOOK NEWSFEED

Confidence in Facebook as a content distribution channel was high. Its custom audiences feature allows marketers to upload a current email list. Afterwards, Facebook finds those individuals and looks at the attributes they have in common in order to target folks across its network with similar attributes. This type of algorithmically-powered targeting has many advantages over other types of targeting.

Over the course of the experiment we spent \$613.04, driving 645 unique visitors to Relevance, one subscriber and three leads. Even though we had 645 unique visitors, we paid for 1103 clicks. Advertisers don't really pay per click. They pay per engagement for things like comments, clicks, shares and likes. This explains the difference between the number of clicks

and unique visitors. On average, the channel cost \$0.56 per engagement, \$1.10 per unique visitor, \$613.04 per subscriber and \$204.35 per lead.

VERDICT

If your primary goal is to drive awareness and traffic to articles, Facebook is a good network to distribute content on. It's relatively cheap compared to the others. However, if your primary goal is leads or subscribers, promoting individual owned media articles is not recommended. The campaign would be better served if the promoted post sent people directly to a landing page for conversion.

LINKEDIN NEWSFEED

We've experienced success promoting offers in the past using LinkedIn, but this time was different. This was the first time we exclusively promoted individual articles for content distribution. One of the targeting advantages it has is the ability to focus campaigns on Groups. LinkedIn has robust communities full of people with similar interests that congregate around certain Groups that would find Relevance content useful. We chose to promote three separate articles and A/B test one of them.

DigitalRelevance™ Here's a great visual to describe the ever-evolving (and often confusing) content promotion ecosystem. Find out how each tool fits in: <http://hub.am/TF5Ffn>

Introducing the Content Promotion Ecosystem - Relevance

hub.am • In effort to clear confusion about content promotion channels and the tools used to tap into them, I present to you The Content Promotion Ecosystem.

Organic ?
Targeted to: All Followers

2,360 impressions	18 clicks	3 interactions	0.89% engagement
+ 31,428 impressions	+ 169 clicks	+ 19 interactions	+ 18 followers acquired
+ 0.66% engagement			

Gained from Sponsoring
▶ 3 campaigns

+ 31,428 impressions	+ 169 clicks	+ 19 interactions	+ 18 followers acquired	+ 0.66% engagement
Manage				

Like (15) • Comment (1) • 1 month ago

[Tony Compoefelice, Gail Wilson +13](#)

[Delia Peruyera](#) Nice to have met you !
1 month ago

[Ashley Zeh](#) Nice visual!
1 month ago

[Add a comment...](#)

In total, \$1,457.90 was spent on LinkedIn. It drove 249 click-throughs, 212 unique visitors, no subscribers and one lead. That equates to \$5.90 per click, \$7.94 per unique visitor and \$1,457.90 per lead.

VERDICT

At almost eight dollars a unique visitor, LinkedIn is an expensive network to natively promote owned articles at scale. While the targeting of roles and interests are valuable, the cost makes it difficult to scale article distribution in a meaningful way. LinkedIn is best suited for promoting offers like ebooks, guides, studies and webinars.

TWITTER ADVERTISING

This was the wildcard channel of the bunch. We knew about Twitter's power to distribute content organically. What we didn't know was how effective it would be with paid distribution. On this channel we started off targeting specific lists filled with my target audience. Later, we shifted the targeting and focused on keywords. After shifting the targeting we noticed an improvement in engagement.

By the end of the campaign we spent \$1,582.00 and drove 1508 engagements, only 108 unique visitors, no subscribers and no leads. Per engagement we spent \$1.11, but each unique visitor cost \$16.80.

VERDICT

One of the disadvantages of using Twitter for content distribution at scale is that instead of paying per click, marketers actually have to pay per engagement. That means retweets, replies, favorites, profile views and clicks on hashtags and links are all considered engagement. In this case, we were trying to drive users away from Twitter and back to Relevance. Unfortunately, that was only one of six engagement opportunities users were faced with.

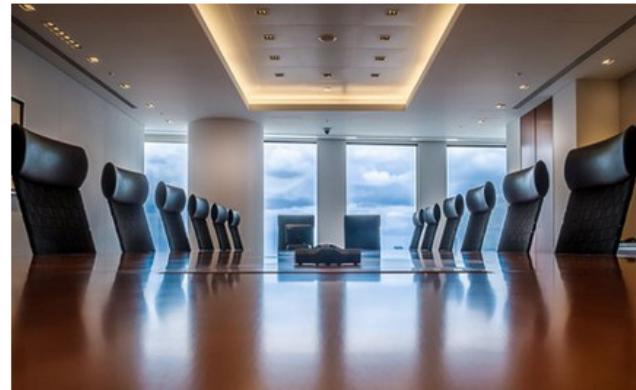
As a result, we were unable to get a single subscriber or lead from Twitter and spent the largest portion of my budget for mostly channel engagement. The cost associated with Twitter advertising makes it the least ideal channel for distributing content at scale. Advertising as a means of driving traffic to, and conversions on, another website is not recommended because it's not cost effective. This could change in the future only if they can develop a cost per lead or cost per action model.

We also noticed that there's a large and loud community of Twitter advertising trolls that harassed all of the promoted tweets. It was annoying at best and bordered on threatening at worst. This is something Twitter is going to have to work on if they want to significantly grow its ad revenue.



Without the right content promotion strategy, even the best content may go unseen, unused and unvalued. -
@MartyAMuse hub.am/1rEibrB

[Reply](#) [Delete](#) [Favorited](#) [Buffer](#) [Share](#) [More](#)



What Marketing Executives Need to Know about Content Promotion

By Marty A. Muse @MartyAMuse

Without a content promotion strategy, even the best content may go unseen, unused and unvalued. Marketing execs need to embrace it now or get left behind.

[View on relevance.com](#)

RETWEETS	FAVORITES
25	20



Twitter advertising is best suited for driving brand awareness, social engagement and share of voice on its platform. Grabbing hashtag space for events and trends is also an effective way to use the paid side of the network. However, for the goals stated above, this proved to be a big disappointment.

OUTBRAIN

Content discovery networks are really picking up in popularity. As a result, we decided to throw Outbrain in the mix with the native social campaigns. For targeting, we chose audiences in the U.S., Canada and the UK. In total, 15 articles were promoted on this network over the course of six weeks.

Our total campaign expenditure on Outbrain was \$449.95 and it delivered 728 click-throughs, 704 unique visitors, one subscriber and eight leads at an average cost of \$0.62 per click, \$0.64 per unique visitor, \$449.95 per subscriber and \$56.24 per lead.

VERDICT

content discovery platforms like Outbrain were built to distribute content at scale to very large audiences

TWEET THIS!

Content discovery platforms like Outbrain were built to distribute content at scale to very large audiences. It's no surprise that it was the most effective of any channel at delivering cost effective traffic and leads. This channel is particularly suited for brands that produce blog content on a regular basis and wish to get it seen and read by more people.

FINAL VERDICT

Overall, the campaign turned out to be a disappointment by only delivering 3,588 clicks, 1,669 unique visitors, two subscribers and 12 leads to nurture. This breaks down to \$1.14 per click, \$2.46 per unique visitor, \$2,051.45 per subscriber and \$341.91 per lead.

Using and scaling paid social distribution for owned articles is not recommended on LinkedIn or Twitter. LinkedIn is just too expensive and Twitter isn't necessarily built for distribution at scale. On

Twitter advertising is best suited for driving brand awareness, social engagement and share of voice

TWEET THIS!



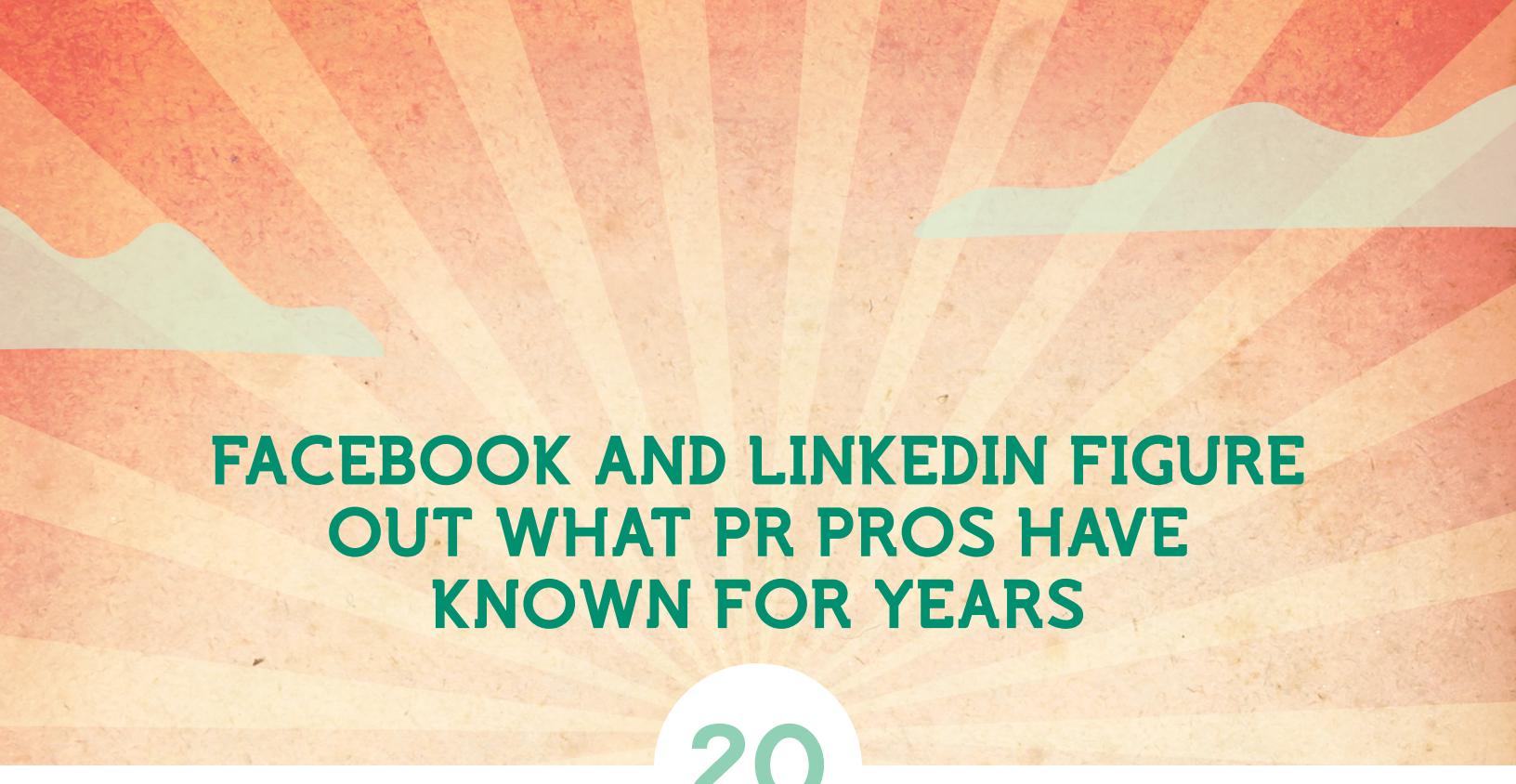
the other hand, Facebook, if properly targeted and optimized, can be a cost effective channel for content distribution at scale. Just don't expect it to produce conversions at the same rate an organic channel would.

However, content discovery networks are the most cost effective solution for scaling distribution. In hindsight, collecting subscribers from all channels could have been much more effective if we would have deployed a subscribe pop-up call to action on Relevance.

Since this test, we've already implemented another one on new channels. Early results are showing \$0.065 per visitor and each visitor's bounce rate is no greater than normal organic traffic. They're subscribing and converting, too. This might just be the most cost effective and scalable content distribution solution available for the web today. We hope to have the results available soon, so stay tuned.

**content discovery
networks are the most
cost effective solution
for scaling distribution**

TWEET THIS! 



FACEBOOK AND LINKEDIN FIGURE OUT WHAT PR PROS HAVE KNOWN FOR YEARS

20

LinkedIn's stock price doubled in 2013 and Facebook's grew by 42 percent.^{18, 19} Both companies are surging because they've outperformed expectations by growing revenue. They've also recently added a new way to advertise, natively – sponsored updates for LinkedIn and, most recently, mobile newsfeed ads for Facebook. While LinkedIn has multiple revenue streams, Facebook's is primarily driven by paid media buys. Both of these social media sites rely on selling advertising to drive some portion of their revenue.

WHERE'S THE BEEF? IT'S IN THE NEWSFEED!

LinkedIn's decision to offer native ad placements in its newsfeed and Facebook's decision to go newsfeed-mobile have made their advertising solutions far more effective at driving traffic. Eye tracking studies have long shown that most people don't focus as much on areas where ads are likely to be. This is true across Facebook, LinkedIn, Google, and pretty much every site on the web. It's commonly referred to as banner blindness.

"It has been found that the less an advertisement looks like an advertisement and the more it looks like an editorial, the more readers stop, look and read." – David Ogilvy, The "father of advertising"

VISUAL ATTENTION LEVEL



WHAT'S THE USER'S INTENT?

Not many people visit Facebook and LinkedIn with the intent to consume advertising. Their intent and focus is primarily on those areas that deliver perceived value, areas they frequent and trust – like a newsfeed. Marketers understand this and are paying to have their messages there.

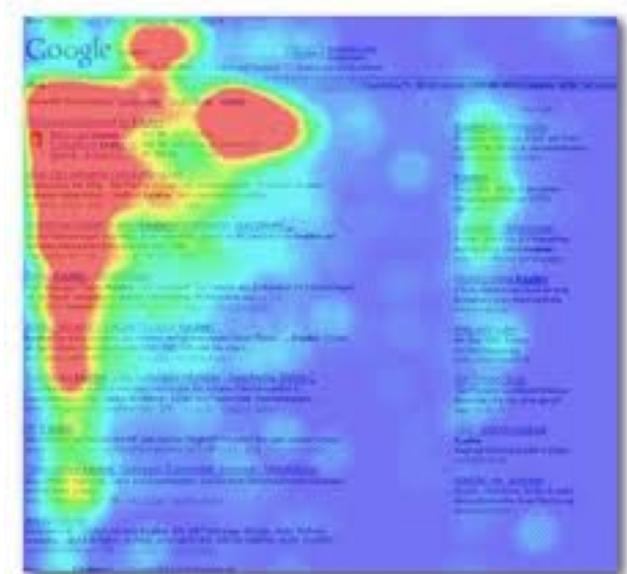
Google and the other search engines are no different. Their perceived value resides in the organic search engine results. The whole SEO industry was spawned by this fact. Brands wanted to show up in the *valuable* area of the search engines, and agencies quickly formed and delivered.

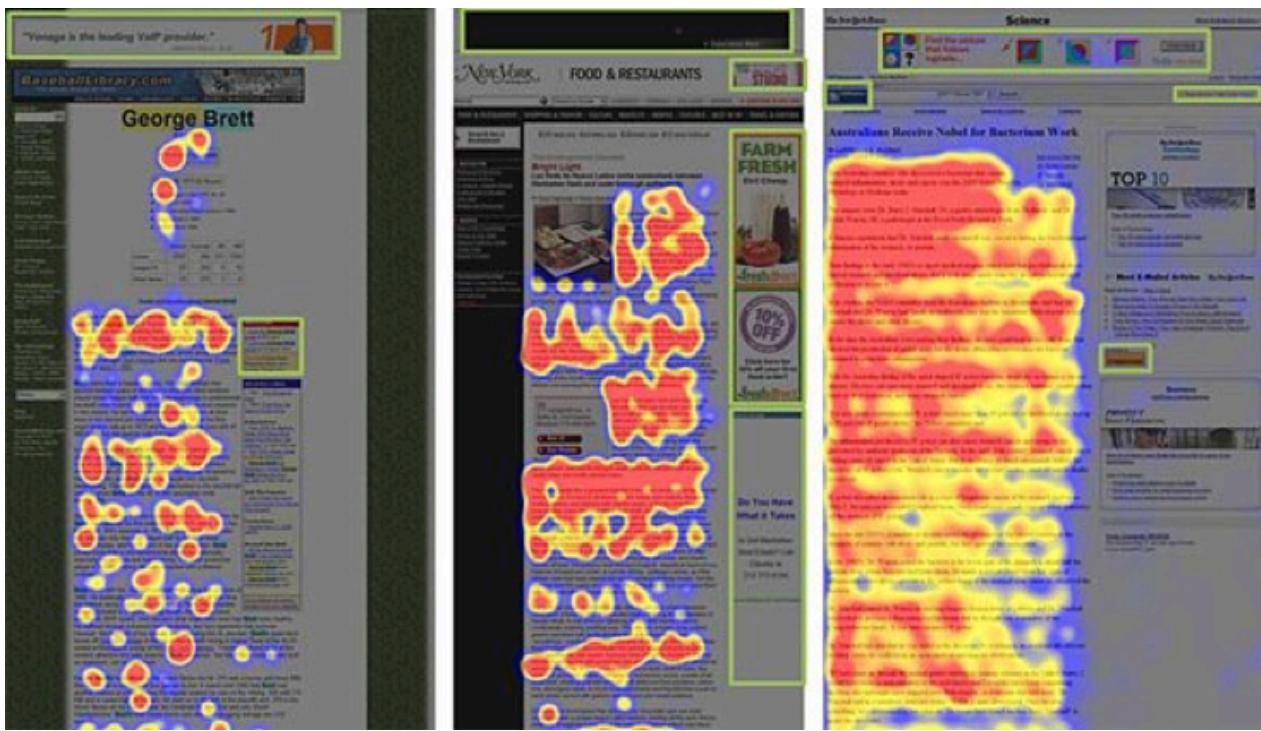
Where the perceived value lies on a website is where the eyeballs go, and it's where brands want to be.

Public relations professionals have understood this for decades. Long before the Internet was invented they were pitching stories to journalists that placed the brands they represented in the most valuable real estate on a newspaper or magazine – the story itself.

Savvy marketers and PR professionals are still earning media coverage today, but doing it online, too.

Not many people visit Facebook and LinkedIn with the intent to consume advertising





This type of earned media coverage gets way more attention than traditional paid media on those very same websites (see examples above). So much so, in fact, the company American Giant was forced to significantly grow its manufacturing capability by triple digits after Slate.com contributor Farhad Manjoo wrote, *This is the Greatest Hoodie Ever Made.*^{20,21} Could American Giant produce those same results with traditional paid media on Slate.com? Not likely, because the perceived value was in the article itself. If American Giant was not part of the story, far fewer eyeballs would have been exposed to the message.

The same motivation that spawned the search engine optimization industry and carved out the media relations niche is driving LinkedIn and Facebook's advertising innovations. Brand messages that reside on the areas of a website that provide the greatest perceived value have the best chance of influencing consumers to take action.

The same motivation that spawned the search engine optimization industry and carved out the media relations niche is driving LinkedIn and Facebook's advertising innovations



EARNED MEDIA IN ACTION

21

On January 22, 2013, Alexandra Bruell of AdAge.com declared, “But marketers are also seeing value in earned and owned media—and in some cases, using PR campaigns as a replacement or supplement for traditional advertising.”

On the surface this may not seem like a big deal. However, consider that AdAge built a thriving business around traditional advertising starting in the 1930s. Traditional advertising budgets still tend to be substantially larger than inbound marketing or PR budgets, but this admission is a sign that attitudes are changing – and rightfully so.

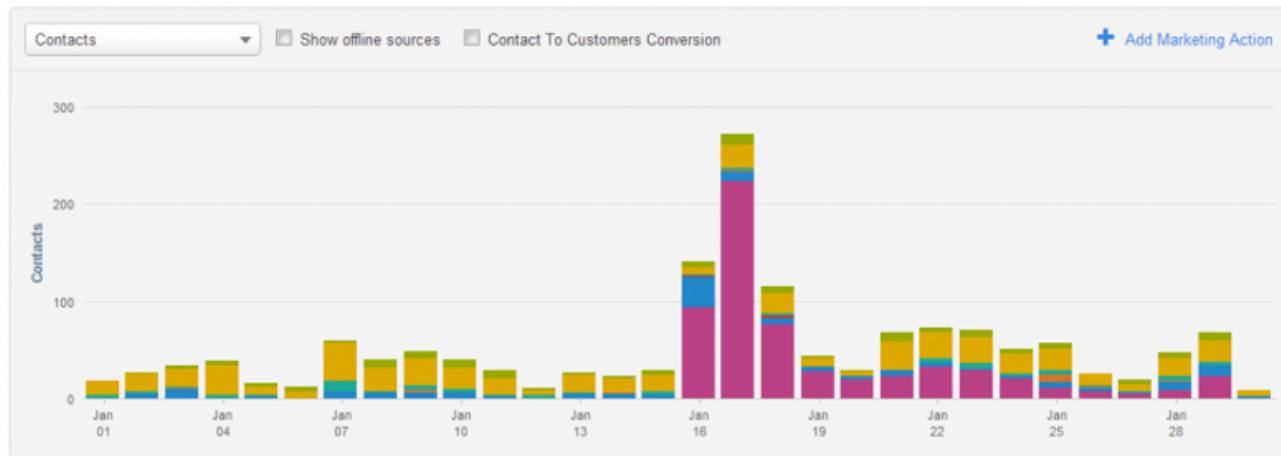
Earned media is analogous to product placement in a sitcom or television show. Sometimes product placement is purposeful, but other times it’s an accident. Seeing a Coke next to a judge on *American Idol* is purposeful placement and paid for – it’s also very obvious. However, seeing a Tornado foosball table on the set of *Friends* is not – it feels normal and natural.

Content is the product being pushed by brands online. Some brands create such amazing content that it’s featured, discussed or mentioned (product placement) on other blogs and online media networks – driving website traffic, conversions, Internet chatter and social buzz. It doesn’t feel contrived, paid for or abnormal. It’s true inbound marketing.

Good media relations professionals amass networks of online media outlets that crave amazing, problem-solving content from industry thought leaders and brands. By tapping into these networks’ brands can actively (and naturally) get their content featured on some of the most traveled websites in the world. Whereas this is purposeful, it certainly doesn’t appear so to the reader. This is earned media.

EARNED MEDIA'S IMPACT

On January 16th 2013, one of the founders of Slingshot SEO wrote a byline on a major media publication that cited an ebook on its website. The link had a significant impact on website traffic, but more importantly, it catapulted January's lead total 82 percent higher than the previous month. This large growth in leads is reflected below in red.



The effect was highly impactful to the site-wide conversion rate. Prior to the campaign launch the website was experiencing a 3.9 percent conversion rate. Post-launch it grew to 9.4 percent in two weeks and hit its highest one day total at 19.9 percent.



**the earned media
campaign drove 2,251
unique website visitors
and 859 conversions in
only the first 14 days**

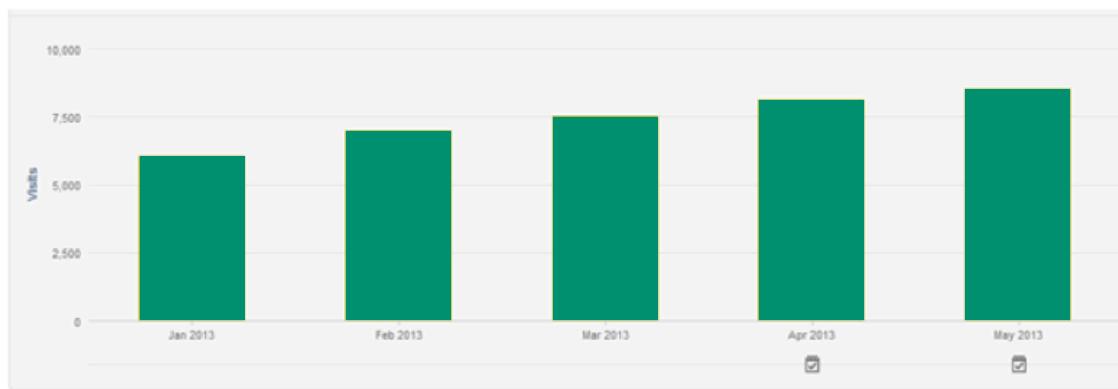
TWEET THIS!



In total, the earned media campaign drove 2,251 unique website visitors and 859 conversions in only the first 14 days of deployment. That's more than 800 reasons why earned media can supplement advertising. It's also very likely to continue to drive incremental traffic and leads for years to come.

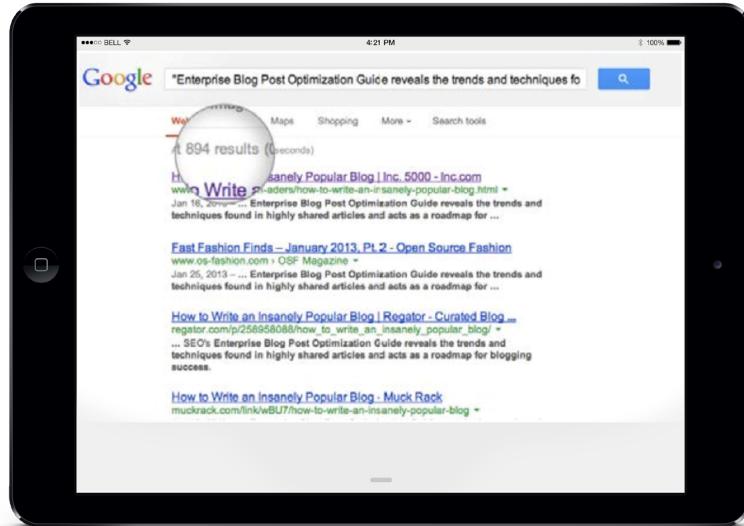
THE SEO IMPLICATIONS

The SEO benefits of an earned media campaign like this aren't felt immediately. But as the links, mentions, and social buzz build the impact becomes both measurable and significant. As Google and the other search engines evaluate these signals, a website's search relevance is secured for the long-term in a natural, penalty-free way. The graph below details the organic search traffic increase since the byline was published.



Because popular online media is often shared and cited, this can result in many online brand mentions, social shares, and syndication links. January's earned media campaign resulted in more than 1,000 social mentions and 894 syndicated mentions – most with valuable backlinks pointing to the Slingshot SEO landing page.

The search engines notice the inbound links, social buzz, and likely the brand mentions. The screenshot below includes Google search results for a query that includes the sentence containing the link anchor text.



Google has gotten much better at rewarding authentic online content with algorithm updates such as Panda and Penguin. Using earned media (in lieu of link building) protects brands from any negative consequences or risks associated with current or future algorithm updates. If properly executed, earned media can have a dramatic positive impact on a brand's organic search visibility.



HOW TO EXECUTE MEDIA CONVERGENCE FOR CONTENT PROMOTION

22

As highlighted in the previous chapter, brands that have their ebooks, guides, and other advanced content featured and linked to by prudent online media outlets see a quick, meaningful, and significant spike in conversions. It's one thing to tell you this, but it's another to show you how it's done. Below are the 11 steps for executing your first earned media campaign.

RESEARCH

In order to strike the marketplace with confidence, some basic research is required. However, more research will likely lead to greater confidence. Research helps eliminate guess work.

1. ASSESSING THE AUDIENCE – helps determine what an ideal conversion looks like – persona development. Demographics, traits and online behaviors should be noted.

2. ASSESSING THE CONTENT – is research conducted on other websites' content. Based on the most popular content, you'll be able to determine what's resonating with their audience. This allows marketers to determine what problems the other sites' audiences have. In other words, it shows what kinds of content would be perceived as highly valuable to a target audience.

This research can be juxtaposed with keyword research in order to identify content gaps in the marketplace. Topics that are highly popular on many media outlets and have high search volume do not represent a content gap. However, high search volume topics with little or no popular content written about them represent a content opportunity for you.

3. ASSESSING ONLINE MEDIA OUTLETS – is a critical step because it identifies which online media outlets and trade publications your ideal audience consumes. The websites identified during this research will be targeted for media outreach and pitching.

4. INFLUENCER IDENTIFICATION – will really assist in the promotion phase of execution.

Getting an influencer involved with the content development of the campaign in some way gives them a vested interest in its visibility. They'll likely evangelize the content they were involved with. By identifying influencers in the beginning, outreach can start early.

CREATIVE

After research is complete the creative steps to the process can be deployed. From design work to content development, great creativity goes a long way in helping a media pitch become successful.

5. ADVANCED CONTENT PRODUCTION – is the creation of a problem-solving asset that usually takes the form of an ebook, guide, whitepaper, report, study, widget, or app. With proper research, knowing exactly what problem to solve and content to create should be relatively easy.

6. LANDING PAGE CONTENT PRODUCTION – is all about the value proposition of the advanced content. It should be short, bold, and impactful.

7. PROMOTIONAL CONTENT PRODUCTION – is required only if a brand earns a byline opportunity for one of its executives or thought leaders. Not all media outlets will publish bylines. However, some do; so, be prepared with content to submit.

PROMOTION

With creative finished, pitching online media outlets becomes a little easier. If the resulting advanced content is unique, a contribution to the marketplace, and it solves problems for the audience of the media outlets, it's much harder for them to say no.

8. DEFINE THE PITCH ANGLES – so there's a clear plan when conducting outreach to the media. Understanding the value proposition of the advanced content and its significance to the outlet's audience should be the keystone of the plan.

9. EDITORIAL OUTREACH – is tough, but with time a media outreach person can develop a rich network of journalists and editors to contact. Ashley Sherman, Director of Digital Media Relations for Relevance, recommends a methodology she calls the pitchwitch.³⁰

10. INFLUENCER OUTREACH – can massively expose advanced content, too. Influencers have large followings and typically run a blog. One tweet or link from them can produce a prudent attraction of eyeballs.

11. PAID MEDIA – is a great way to accelerate and amplify the earned media coverage. Have a plan and budget ready to deploy native advertising and create the assets necessary for the channels chosen.

Create an Email Nurturing Workflow

12. EMAIL – uses your current database to inform concerned parties of the advanced content and the media coverage it earned.

CONVERSION

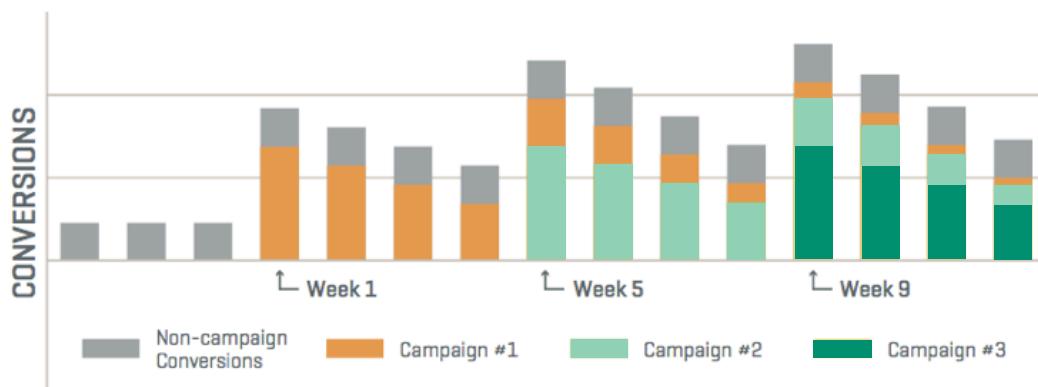
The conversion aspect of this list doesn't necessarily have to occur after promotion. Landing pages and testing programs can begin after the advanced content is created.

13. DESIGN, SLICE, AND INTEGRATE LANDING PAGE – This landing page will serve as the collection point for conversions driven by the earned media. Make sure to include appropriate form fields to assist in future nurturing, segmentation, scoring, and qualification. Also, use a unique landing page tracking URL for all media outlets covering the advanced content.

14. DEPLOY APPROPRIATE A/B VERSIONS OF LANDING PAGE – This step is optional. However, testing is highly advised. Testing different variations of the landing page can help increase conversion rates over time.

15. ESTABLISH RETARGETING ON THE LANDING PAGE – This step is optional, too, but it is likely that 50 percent or more of your landing page visitors won't convert. Retargeting ensures those visitors will have additional opportunities to convert.

16. CREATE AN EMAIL NURTURING WORKFLOW – Again, optional, but continuing to engage your new conversions with additional content and scoring this behavior can lead to new, incremental customers. It's highly recommended.



The above image shows the impact of earned media campaigns deployed every four weeks on conversions. Campaign *stacking* can quickly capture many more conversions than most company websites alone can gain.

The earned media techniques described above allow companies to promote their content online actively and prudently, as opposed to using the *Publish and Pray* strategy.

THE MEASURABLE BENEFITS OF EARNED MEDIA

23

If you've made it this far in the book you are well aware of the value of earned media. You're cognizant of the benefits of online media outlets linking to and writing about your content and brand. However, few marketers spend the purposeful time to construct and deploy an earned media strategy that optimizes potential coverage and placements.

For the ones who do, there are seven tangible benefits that can be realized and measured.

1. WEBSITE TRAFFIC AND CONVERSIONS

The incremental increase in traffic and conversions is proportionate to the size and scope of the publisher's online community interested in the problems your advanced content helps solve. For example, an op-ed written for the *New York Times* that links to a branded whitepaper about business success could drive more than 100,000 unique visitors and tens of thousands of conversions for years after publication.

However, if the op-ed was about bee keeping, linking to a bee keeper whitepaper, it likely wouldn't drive the kind of numbers mentioned above. There's probably not many bee keepers that read the *New York Times*.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA BUZZ

Content published by reputable online media outlets is often consumed, cited and shared by industry influencers and social media users in general. It's these folks who will help grow and multiply the brand's social graph.

3. SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Earned media links from trusted sources is the most powerful, Penguin-friendly, off-page SEO around. Couple that with the social graph buzz above, and earned media will certainly grab the attention of the search engines.

4. OPT-IN EMAIL LIST GROWTH

It's amazing how much of an effect earned media can have on email list growth. As mentioned in Chapter 21, in only two weeks one earned link citation increased site-wide conversion rates from 3.9 percent to 9.4 percent while driving more than 800 new conversions for Slingshot SEO.

5. RETARGETING ACCELERATION

Online ad retargeting is a popular nurturing tactic deployed today and usually starts with a visit to an owned web property. Once a new visitor arrives, a cookie is dropped on his or her browser and ads related to the content consumed are served up on other web properties – nurturing through relevance and context. Earned media click-throughs can drop hundreds of thousands of cookies on browsers over time.

6. ONLINE COMMUNITY BUILDING

Earned media, for many, represents a content consumer's first impression of a brand. It is also a gateway and/or introduction to the brand's online community. If a brand's content is good and prudent enough, the site can expect incremental community and audience growth over time.

7. BRAND AWARENESS

The third chapter in this book highlights the brand awareness impact of content promotion on three very different brands. From eight-figures of incremental revenue to an in person endorsement from the President of the United States, great content that's aptly promoted can have monumental impacts on consumers' awareness of your brand.

Earned media links from trusted sources is the most powerful, Penguin-friendly, off-page SEO around

TWEET THIS!



CONCLUSION

24

The days of *Publish and Pray* delivering impressive returns by itself without paid and earned promotion is nearing its end. For many industries, marketing in particular, it's long gone. The amount of noise online has reached monumental proportions. As marketers and communications professionals, we're competing for attention in a sea filled with millions of daily articles, apps, cat videos, and memes. The content deluge is constant and unrelenting. It's only getting more massive, too.

More and more, consumers are spending their time online at the websites they trust to avoid the deluge. Year over year growth of search volume for content discovery is on the decline, too.³³ This further speaks to the importance of promotion in an age of content shock.

Content marketers who don't see this writing on the wall are at risk of wasting a lot of money by creating copious amounts of content and publishing it to a nonexistent audience. The talking heads who preach content marketing and do so to a large audience are using their own experiences to justify their recommendations.

They built their audiences in a time of content deficits and not during the surpluses we find ourselves in today. This was good for them, but the reality is that most newer brands don't have large preexisting audiences and must build them from scratch. In these cases, owned media alone is unlikely to create, build, and grow an audience of significance quickly.

**The content deluge
is constant and
unrelenting**

For the majority of marketers who believe their content marketing is ineffective, it's wise to embrace content promotion before content creators get demoralized, budgets dry up, and content marketing gets a bad name. Now is the time.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Chad Pollitt, a decorated veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and former Army Commander, is VP of Audience and Co-founder of Relevance.com, an online publication solely dedicated to helping marketing and communications executives solve their online content visibility challenges.

A member of a Forbes Top 100 list, Chad also authored "51 Things Your Mother Taught You about Inbound Marketing." He has contributed to industry media outlets, including The Guardian, Huffington Post, Social Media Today, Business2Community, and LinkedIn.

Chad has been creating profitable online campaigns for more than 11 years for brands both large and small while delivering tens of millions of dollars of tracked return on SEO alone. Named a top five content marketing thought leader by Onalytica and a top 20 CMO influencer by Nice, he continues to innovate by leading the emerging industry of online content promotion and distribution.

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v. 1, September 2014

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