

How brands achieve reach and relevance



By Louise Marsland

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"The opening up of media has destroyed the established rules that brands were expected to follow."

The evolution of content marketing is leading to a key shift in brand behaviour, as brands become content creators. It is both a challenge to traditional media and traditional advertising.

The timely publication of a report by digital communications agency, Cerebra, into content marketing is another indicator of the 'hot topic' that content marketing is currently. The report, titled '[The Content Marketing Sacrifice: How brands can achieve both reach and relevance](#)', was published in June and is only the second comprehensive look at the subject in South Africa. The other was a content marketing conference hosted by New Media two years ago.

This is the key point that the Cerebra report makes: "Instead of working exclusively with the dominant media houses that produced for television, radio and print, brands are now able to work with anyone and everyone, and even become publishers themselves. The opening up of the media has destroyed the established rules that brands were expected to follow, rules designed to support the business models of the established media."



One of the biggest drivers of this change has been the move from traditional media to social media, Cerebra reports, because control over content production shifted to anyone and everyone, plus consumers can control what they read, when where and how much, with all the various tools and apps at their disposal - helped along of course by algorithms from the likes of Google and Facebook which further push content influenced by commercial interests to consumers.

This of course applies to brands as well as to media houses trying to reach consumers.

Ultimately it boils down to whether consumers want to be interrupted by brands through advertising - and many don't - but they do want great content and they do want to be entertained. So by becoming what the content consumers want, brands have another key channel to reach consumers in this cluttered communications environment.

Cerebra highlights what media houses have always traded on: editorial content is more valuable than advertising: "Someone who chooses to consume your content is a thousand times more valuable than someone who is forced to consume it. Do not underestimate the value of this choice.

"As the media continues to evolve, and as consumers continue to fine-tune their control over what content reaches them, so the value of advertising will decline."

The warning to brands from Cerebra is: "We are nearing a point where you will only be able to reach people if they allow it."

This is why brands are putting increased emphasis on producing content that appeals to the consumer, is written by expert journalists and editors, and are learning to relinquish some of that control to the consumer for the price of engagement, loyalty and reach.

Relevance

Of course, content marketing is not just a brand showcase or an opportunity to get consumers to share your content and make it go viral around the world. Brand loyalty is a huge by-product of great content marketing, but it also has to generate leads in order to sell products or services.

Cerebra urges brands to sacrifice some control over their brand in order to allow audience participation in the creation of content that is both relevant, real and reaches a wider audience.

"In order for your content to reach broader audiences, you have to let go a little on brand relevance to allow the content to become more audience relevant. If you don't sacrifice enough, you won't reach a broad or new audience. If you sacrifice too much, you'll have great reach but not enough brand awareness or association."

Cerebra advises that successful content marketing doesn't just mean achieving massive reach - like cat pictures which go viral.

"Reach is only the start; successful content marketing requires converting as much of that audience as possible into customers."

These are Cerebra's key points for brands to be relevant with content marketing:

- 1. Go for reach:** Your content strategy should be structured as a journey. Start by winning as much reach as is reasonable by sacrificing brand relevance and creating content that is exactly what the target audience wants. This establishes your potential customer pool, because if they care about the content then there's a chance they'll care about your product.
- 2. Deploy tactics:** Inject brand relevance through your content marketing tactics. You will see a drop off in reach, but that's fine; not everyone is going to buy your products. First, cast the net as wide as possible, then, start pulling it in.
- 3. Bring them in:** While you start by going as wide as possible, you always want to direct as many people as you can back to content on platforms that you own. It's where the content will call home, and this is where you have the greatest control over converting audience to customers.

4. Convert to customers: By now, you have narrowed down the initially large audience into an audience of potential customers. These are the people who are now quite happy to receive brand relevant content, because they're close to making a purchasing decision. While this is the place most brand content starts, it's actually the place where it ends.

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