



BRANDED CONTENT:

WHITE PAPER:

THE NEW CURRENCY OF A
HIGH-TECH INFORMATION AGE.

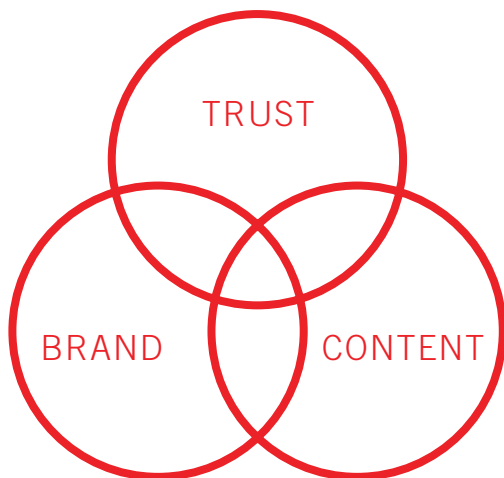
Why branded content should be at the
core of your marketing strategy.

By Stephen Dupont, APR



BRANDED CONTENT SHOULD BE AT THE CORE OF YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY.

If you haven't noticed, print ads, banner ads, search ads, and TV commercials are making room for a new form of communication. We call it branded content, and we believe it should be central to your organization's public relations and marketing strategy.



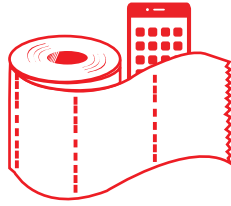
BRANDED CONTENT CAN BEST BE DESCRIBED AS EDITORIAL THAT DOESN'T SO MUCH PERSUADE AS IT INFORMS, ALWAYS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE BRAND, WHICH IS POSITIONED AS THE EXPERT SOURCE OF THAT CONTENT.

This is content that doesn't talk down or coddle - it's rich in its facts, figures and opinions and it's presented at the level of quality that you would expect from a respected newspaper, magazine or TV news program. When it's done well, media outlets will incorporate your content into their content, and customers, employees, vendors and others will share it amongst themselves.

Branded content can take on many shapes and forms. It can be articles, white papers, blogposts, webinars, how-to videos, tips, survey results, infographics, slideshows, podcasts, e-books, e-newsletters, branded magazines, etc.

The reason it's so effective is that it's created with the intent of engaging a customer at a deeper level. It's considered more believable than traditional or online advertising. Even *Inc.* Magazine, in its January 2013 issue, recognized branded content as a game-changing trend in its article "How & Where to Make Money in 2013 and Beyond."

Another reason that branded content is so effective is that it offers so much flexibility. Branded content not only can keep a website fresh, it can be leveraged to establish an expertise in a specific industry or area, raise awareness of your brand, and generate valuable new business leads. It can even be used to keep employees informed and to train them how to better sell your company's products and services.



CUSTOMERS ARE ALWAYS CONNECTED: 75% OF AMERICANS USE THEIR MOBILE PHONES WHILE IN THE BATHROOM.

Marketers and public relations professionals have always created content. And for years, public relations professionals would tout the credibility of editorial coverage over traditional advertising. But things are changing dramatically for both advertising and public relations, which are both seeking new approaches to authentically engaging customers and potential customers. Some major dynamics that are reshaping the world of communications include:

ONE.

People are tuning out mediocre Internet advertising just like they did with traditional print, TV and radio advertising. More people are spending more time on the Internet. They're looking at or for something, but it's not banner ads.

TWO.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube, and Twitter make it so much easier for people to share information they think is valuable with their networks of friends, coworkers, and prospective customers. People become known for the quality of the information they share.

THREE.

People multitask their media. According to a survey by Accenture, 77% of consumers regularly use their computer, tablet, or smartphone while watching TV.

FOUR.

Your customers are always connected and they're always seeking information or entertainment. According to a 2012 survey by 11 Mark, 75% of Americans use their mobile phones while in the bathroom.

FIVE.

Marketing analytics allow the pinpointing of messages to specific groups of people based not just on their demographics, but on their previous online searches.

SIX.

People trust companies more than they trust the media. According to a 2009 Edelman study as reported by Floyd Norris for the *New York Times*, Americans trust business (38%) more than they trust the media (25%). So, all things being equal, customers can and do trust branded content coming directly from an organization they trust as much as they would trust that same content coming from a third-party media outlet.

When you combine these factors, what becomes amazingly clear is that organizations, utilizing today's technology, including social media platforms, can continue to have their information and messages filtered by the media, and/or they can go directly to their customers.



NOT EVERY LOOSE CRUMB OF INFORMATION LYING AROUND YOUR OFFICE IS BRAND CONTENT READY.

Likewise, customers no longer need to go through third-party media. They don't need to wait for a magazine to arrive in their mailbox or wait to watch the 10p.m. news. They can get the information they want now - on demand - and they can go straight to the source for that information.

The reality is, in a fractured media world with hyper-specific websites and blogs appealing to every fraction of society, many people do both. When they have an idea, need or want like, "I want to buy a new pair of downhill skis," they go to Google, type in some words and phrases, and start reading articles and watching videos about downhill skis created by both - the marketers such as online retailer Skis.com or third-party media such as Skimag.com, the website of SKI magazine.

Over ten years ago, I forecasted the emergence of branded media channels like Skis.com in my presentation at the International PRSA conference, "Media Glut: Observations about the Growth, Convergence, Fragmentation and Segmentation of the Today's Media." I believed then, and still do today, that, building on the concepts of Marshall McLuhan, the Canadian media philosopher, (i.e., The medium is the message) brands would become tomorrow's TV channels, and rise to rival traditional media channels.

I don't think we're quite there yet, but it's not uncommon to see major brands broadcast their news and information with videos on their own YouTube channels. Along those lines, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as email platforms, allow a brand to deliver its branded content, unfiltered by the media, directly to thousands or millions of customers, potential customers and fans.

Like TV and cable networks or magazines and newspapers, people gravitate to sources they trust. If brands become media channels, then they must build trust with their audiences. To do that, branded content must not only inform, it must be credible and achieve the quality that's expected of the brand and its competitors.

What this means is that not every loose crumb of information lying around your office is branded content ready.

Far from it. Branded content is an extension of your brand, and of your brand's reputation. Therefore, the content you create must reflect the highest values of the brand experience. In fact, because your potential customers will likely encounter your branded content before they even lay eyes on the product or service, whether it's a pair of downhill skis or a law firm, your branded content had better make an exceptional first impression.



SKATE TO WHERE THE PUCK WILL BE. IN OTHER WORDS, ANTICIPATE THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF YOUR CUSTOMERS.



White papers engage law enforcement professionals about legal technology issues that are becoming front and center in the day-to-day practice of legal investigations.

Where branded content is truly effective is when it anticipates the information needs of the consumer. It's like the old Wayne Gretzky quote, "Skate to where the puck will be." Like your product or service, the design of the persuasive white paper or the relevant video is built on the framework of clearly understanding the person who will receive the communication and offering a path for that person to solve a problem or fulfill a need.

An example of this could be a white paper featuring the expert opinion of your company's chief engineer about a policy issue that is building momentum in Washington D.C. and may lead to legislation that could significantly impact your customers' business-operations.

Here's where the magic starts. When the ideas or expertise of your company are valued for their insight and usefulness, those ideas gain value, like currency. People share what they value and they go back to sources they value, and that leads to an enhanced reputation for your organization and its brands, and more revenue. That's the measure of quality branded content - how often it's shared. Because shared content implies trust.

Advertising helps brand awareness. Public relations help brand reputation. But branded content is the Third Way in marketing that offers a window into the way your brand thinks. It's about telling what you know, and knowledgeable people will listen and engage.



A LEAN, NIMBLE BRANDING POWERHOUSE.

ABOUT STEPHEN DUPONT



Stephen Dupont has more than 25 years experience in driving awareness and generating buzz for his clients, from pre-IPO start-ups, leading non-profits, and state government agencies, to well-known brands such as FindLaw, Thomson Reuters, FLW, GMAC, Ditech, Amana, American Standard, Volvo

Trucks, Mack Trucks, Rapala and Fisher-Rosemount. Stephen's work has been honored with 50+ awards recognizing the quality of his communications strategies and his creativity, including four Silver Anvils.

ABOUT POCKET HERCULES


Pocket Hercules (pockethercules.com) is an independent, full-service brand agency with equal parts advertising, interactive, public relations, branded content and product development. We're a lean, nimble branding powerhouse, and pride ourselves in creating innovative, tailor-made solutions to complex marketing problems that directly produce brand momentum and sales. Our working model is simple, transparent, and highly efficient: top-level talent works directly with clients which forges deeper partnerships, more potent work, and the ability to respond immediately to opportunities in today's ever-changing market landscape.

BRANDED CONTENT OFFERINGS

News Releases
Newsmaker Surveys
Bylined Articles
White Papers
Matte Releases
Infographics
How-to, Trends & Issues Videos
Advertorials
E-newsletters
Email Marketing
Books & Magazines
Blogposts/Social Media Content
Speeches
Slideshows/Presentations

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