

Why brands must act like publishers



By [Athar Naser](#)

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It's a fact, most companies don't like change. The uncertainty unnerves shareholders, the instability threatens structures, and the unknown doesn't fill next year's balance sheets. So, naturally the idea of moving from a brand company to a publishing company is not one that sits very comfortably.

But, why have the world's largest organisations gone ahead and actually done this? Coca Cola, Unilever, P&G, American Express, to name but a few, have dedicated huge resource and efforts into becoming publishers.

Well, because they have to. In today's society, according to Yankelovich Research, the average city dweller is exposed to 3000 marketing messages a day. Work it out, that's nearly one every 20 seconds assuming eight hours of sleep (oh the luxury!).

So unless you have Barcelona Football Club's wage bill to throw at a marketing push (\$217million in 2011-2012 according to a SportingIntelligence survey), you have to focus on becoming more relevant to your consumers in order to reach them - a better option even if you did have the cash war chest in place.

What does it mean to 'act like publishers'?

William Shakespeare famously said "All the world's a stage", and then proceeded to stipulate the seven ages of man. I'm certain however, that what he meant to say was, "All the world's a stage, and every brand has to play their part on that stage".

Intrinsic to every brand identity, is its unique story. What the brand is about and why consumers should align with and subscribe to it. 'Who', is a very important draw for people when thinking about a brand.

Very simply then, for a brand to become a publisher it needs to start considering and creating content as a regular activity. Not any old content but relevant, quality, wholesome, data driven stuff that consumers are going to love to consume! The most important asset you own as a brand is the relationship with your consumers, not the product you ship. As a publisher, you harness that relationship.

Why is it important, what's the value?

The internet and social media have empowered consumers. They now have a voice. They can express anger and frustration if you treat them badly - if you undersell them or if you act unethically. Very few Facebook pages are clear of

consumer anger. But this also gives brands an opportunity.

Used correctly, content provides brands with a tool to create meaningful, emotional and long term connections with consumers. The internet is the only medium of true engagement, but advertisers have yet to harness this power - instead most are opting to merely 'digitise' traditional media.

What's the process?

The idea is that as a publisher, you create content on a regular basis that is relevant to your audience and reflects your brand values and 'public persona'. In this way, you add genuine value to your consumers and engage in conversations with them.

Create content, publish it, track it (after all, everything digital has 100% measurability), respond and engage, see what resonates best, and then publish again with a greater focus.

Turn consumers into a community that sees you as a valuable resource, who in turn become advocates of your brand and spread your good word (and a healthy endorsement) for you - sounds like earned media to me!

What's the next step?

There are two routes you can take. First, is building out content teams internally and getting everyone to think about the publishing efforts. Every organisation is sitting on treasure troves of quality content that's simply waiting to be unlocked. You may need some help in doing this, so you may want to think about bringing in some expertise for guidance.

Secondly, rely on an already built up and experienced content agency to work with on these efforts. This saves enormous costs up front. Look for someone local, who can produce content and content strategy and will be there for the long haul.

Finally, make sure they're someone you can work with - this kind of work needs an extremely close relationship between brand and agency.

Next week we'll outline a case study of a brand turned publisher in spectacular fashion!

ABOUT ATHAR NASER

I specialise in content marketing and native advertising - two areas that I have been involved in strategically and on a ground level for many years. My media career has spanned a variety of senior roles that have lead me to start my own content agency with my personal vision - one of high quality service, products and innovation. My clients now benefit from and are part of this vision.

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