

Living content tells your brand's story in compelling ways

 By [Diane Charton](#)

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Many great brands have used rich, relevant content to reach out to and build relationships with their customers for years, but content marketing is now more powerful than ever before.

Consider, for example, that Tesco magazine produced by the UK supermarket chain Tesco last year eclipsed the Sun as the most read print publication in the UK. Closer to home, there are many consumer magazines who would love to reach as many people as do the likes of Woolworths and Edgars with their brand publications.

Moving online

There are many reasons for this shift in the market. One of them is that independent publishers are battling to monetise their content as the world moves online. Marketers have stepped into the gap, seeing it as an opportunity to forge better relationships with their customers and to influence consumers.

Changing consumer behaviour is another factor. Customers want more direct engagement with brands they love and companies they trust, hence they're open to interacting with brand content if it is useful and entertaining.

With the resources to create high-production value content at their disposal, big brands are often happy to oblige.

But brands that want to ensure that their content is valuable to customers, need to think like publishers and not just like marketers. In fact, they should perhaps replace the buzz phrase "content marketing" in their strategies with the term "content thinking".

Content for the customer

This implies a few things. The first point is that marketers should be thinking about their content from the point of view of their customers and not just from the perspective of their in-house goals and KPIs. Any attempt to hawk some goods sitting in a warehouse through a naked sales pitch will destroy consumer trust in the brand's content, for example.

That means marketers should use their content to build a narrative that spans the customer's needs and how the brand answers to them. Content marketing is about telling a story, not concluding a transaction. It should be about creating a brand experience that is meaningful in the customer's life - it must be relevant to the brand and to the customer to ring true to customers.

Content must also be timely and high quality. It should evolve over time to keep customers coming back. In print, there should be continual building of fresh content on established themes; online, it should be constantly added to and refreshed to keep consumers coming back.

The brand experience

Though consumers won't expect it to be independent and unbiased, they will expect it to be transparent, honest and free of brand hyperbole. The brand's own content should ideally be complemented with curated content from other sources and perhaps content produced by independent writers. It's about weaving a brand experience, not simply doing a hard sell.

Red Bull, with its many publishing ventures and marketing events, all integrated with its brand image and advertising, is one example of a brand that gets content marketing right. When it launches a campaign like Red Bull Stratos, we believe in it because it is perfectly aligned with the brand.

In South Africa, some of our food brands do a great job, including Woolworths with Taste Magazine and Knorr with the online and offline elements of What's for Dinner? Robertsons is another example - it gets great leverage from its Masterchef sponsorship, blog, recipes, and TV ads (infomercials as much as advertising) by speaking directly to the needs of its customers.

And customers, in the end, are what successful content thinking is all about. Marketers need to understand the people they are talking to and then create the content that speaks to their requirements and desires. If content is done really well, it becomes part of a brand experience that sets one brand apart from another when their products and services are very similar.

ABOUT DIANE CHARTON

As managing director of Red & Yellow, Diane Charton steers the strategic direction of the business. She strives to empower and educate the SA marketing communications industry through a myriad of traditional and digital educational platforms. With a unique combination of marketing, leadership and engineering experience, Charton brings a multifaceted approach to using marketing trends and insights to innovate and empower the industry as a whole. Follow @DICharton on Twitter.

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