

Stop marketing your brand!

 By Helen McIntee 5 May 2015

The concept of content marketing is not original, but when you put the word "online" in front of it, it becomes a whole new animal. Online differs from traditional content marketing in that it uses a range of connectivity media to drive a campaign.

Obviously blogging, social media and videos dominate, but in all cases what must be motivated is buy-in to the content of a message, and then for viewers to share it with others so that what is established, without too much effort - and money for that matter - is a loyal audience.

There's a lot of online noise given the overwhelming engagement of competitive marketing strategists in the rush to get messages out on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Standing out requires a shift in narrative. This means telling a story not just in as few words as possible, but very differently from the traditional positioning statements that are usually associated with a brand.

Basically, we need to engage customers on an emotional level and focus instead on what is happening right now, in real time. Online content marketing has to feed into this pipeline and attempt to gain credibility almost by not marketing a brand product, but rather promoting the business of the brand, such as its ethos, tenets or activities.



Developing a content narrative means digging deep into the building blocks of a brand or business. Consumers are beginning to ignore obvious brand messaging, instead wanting to know more about the business behind it: sustainability, social responsibility and causes, sponsorships, performance and quality. The story being told must be compelling and address the issues customers are most interested in, yet still link to the product's image. In some cases this requires a business to talk about its customers rather than to them. Make no mistake, the minute you blast an audience with an "in-your-face" campaign they are going to switch off.

Red Bull provides a great example of this strategy. We've almost forgotten that it is a soft drink company because its major online (and offline) content narrative is about what it, as a company, is doing to engage its customers. Red Bull's targeted demographic, 18-34 year-olds, are young, dynamic and active, which is why the company focuses on extreme sports and daring feats. It feeds the demand for entertainment, with the product a very clever after-thought.

Total video footage from the Red Bull Felix Baumgartner's "freefall from space" equates to some 36-million views, what kind of budget would it need to reach that many people with a static product advertisement. The point is that Red Bull now has some 40-million Facebook fans, all because it engages with athletes on a personal level, helping them to achieve their goals. Its target audience likes this so much that it has bought unconsciously into the Red Bull tagline as the brand "that gives you wings".

What Red Bull has proven is that while traditional marketing rules still apply, the application is so much broader. Putting a word in front of any rule is a game-changer; students that are qualifying in Marketing Management, or those doing top-up courses, are learning to think about the context of branding in life and lifestyles. And that really does give them wings.

ABOUT HELEN MCINTEE

Helen McIntee, well-known and respected African marketing personality, is qualified with BA, MBA and CFM degrees, is a published author - including academic textbooks and publications - and a lecturer and keynote speaker. She is also the President of the African Marketing Confederation (AMC) and a director of the Institute of Marketing Management. View my profile and articles...

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