

The context of being content

 By [Travis Bussiahn](#)

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"Content". There's that word again. Next to "big data", "innovative" and "digital strategist" it should vie for the most used and misunderstood buzz term of the year. (video)

We use it all the time in our meetings, offering reassuring nods to one another to show we're pretty sure we understand *just* how important it is to our own business and our clients. *Content, hmm yes, content.*

Truth be told, there are a lot of developers, agencies and yes, even "digital strategists" who are wrestling with the subject of content on a daily basis with little success or joy.

A bumpy and unstable terrain

The new terrain is bumpy and somewhat unstable isn't it? The ability for all and sundry to *publish* has put a bit of a spanner in the works. So let's look back to look forward and see if we can't wiggle said spanner out of the cogs:

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away brands rarely succeeded in marketing without using traditional platforms (as they are traditionally labeled by some) like radio or television. Why? Because a brand needed (and still needs) an audience to succeed and these traditional platforms offered this audience by the thousands. This meant that a brand's access to the audience was controlled by these platforms and ultimately by money.

Enter digital and its strategists, and now the brand could have a direct conversation with the audience. Traditional tactics were deployed to noisy effect in the form of banner advertising and direct email marketing but from beneath it all a new way of thinking began to manifest. These brands were now, like the millions of social citizens around them, real-life publishers of content and that's when things got confusing.

Authentic access to an interested audience could no longer be bought - it now had to be earned. Creativity and knowledge became key assets and "Purpose" joined "Price", "Place", "Product" and "Promotion" as the fifth "P" of marketing - *the knowledge economy had arrived.*

Content excellence

In the UK according to the CMA, [the content marketing industry will be worth 1 billion pounds this year](#) while in other trends, skilled people previously only employed by major traditional publishers are moving to work directly for brands - editors, artists, directors, scriptwriters - formerly employed by newspapers, radio & TV stations, now working for companies that

used to rely solely on agencies and production houses for this sort of thing.

Red Bull is a media company that just happens to sell energy drinks and Coca Cola have committed 20% of its enormous global budget to pursue "content excellence" in place of "creative excellence".

I spent most of my twenties on commercial radio where I cut my teeth in the crazy world of breakfast show production and so I know what it means to produce and publish mountains of multi-platform content for an audience of millions on a daily basis - it becomes second nature after a while but it simply can't be done properly in only an hour or two a day.

Slow down, take stock, breathe

Today I note with interest that brands and agencies (who previously only had to focus on generic adverts for various platforms) now wrestle with the task of being outright publishers. Digital strategists are being forced to generate often thin and watery content to just post *something, anything* as if adding to the noise was enough. As content strategist of note, Sam Wilson says, "Be humble, you know nothing, learn fast." So true.

To my mind, if you're interested in learning more, there is an answer to the madness, a calm in the storm. First thing: slow down, take stock, breathe. Second thing: There are two clear paths that have begun to develop my young [Padawan](#) learner (sorry, I've been working through the Star Wars trilogies with the young 'un):

1. The path of the content strategist (which is like a refined offshoot of the digital strategist role - also known as a "content practitioner") and
2. The path of the content marketer

These two roles are the new painters on the digital block - specialist artists with varying toolsets.

Useful and usable content

Content strategy relies on a spectrum of colours designed to ensure all your content is audited, governed, curated, modeled, amplified and ultimately: useful and useable!

On the other hand the content marketer paints with the shades that swing between "hard" and "soft" skills and "push" and "pull" (or stock and flow) content but you can't *really* attack this second path without the first firmly in place.

The trends cannot be ignored. A higher excellence in the digital space is being asked for and those of us that take the time

to learn the science and dream the art will be well positioned as the companies around us and their respective outlooks on digital begin to mature.

In my humble opinion, it will still be a while before more than only the most forward thinking businesses in South Africa grab hold of the benefits that come with taking *content* from an afterthought or also-ran to a mission-critical asset. It will still be a while before we see local CCO's (chief content officers) in boardrooms dictating or at least having a major role to play in executive strategy. It will still be a while before true native advertising looks to see platform and advertiser working together harmoniously to *enhance* the user experience. But I watch with glee as the deeper things become more important because, well, I've always been better at substance than I have been at making a big noise.

ABOUT TRAVIS BUSSIAHN

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