

Content Marketing Custom Publishing

A white paper by the ADMA Relationship Marketing
& Customer Management Council

May 2011



Executive Summary

In a world where advertising infringes on all aspects of our lives, consumers are becoming increasingly elusive and starting to switch off from “hard sell” advertising techniques.

In traditional advertising, we're use to seeing product offerings positioned around editorial features. However in custom media, your product offering is the feature because your product offering is presented as the editorial content.

Content marketing, custom media, custom publishing – no matter what you call it, it's all about using editorial content to achieve your marketing goals.

Custom publishing is not a new channel; more than three-quarters of the UK's most trusted brands are publishing editorial as part of their marketing communications strategy¹.

From British Airways to Tesco, they are publishing custom magazines that appeal to their existing customers and potential customers by offering compelling editorial content in the form of in-house magazines.

Whatever the medium, whether it's print, email or web, by providing consumers with editorial content that engages them, you can develop a natural conversation that inspires, educates and gives your brand a competitive advantage over competitors.

You don't have to be an editorial expert to be successful with custom publishing. This white paper is full of examples, case studies and practical advice you can use in your business.

1. Reader's Digest Survey

About the Authors



Georgina Armour is editorial director of Edge Custom Media, a boutique agency specialising in customer publishing and content marketing. Georgina's passion is combining business strategy and creative flair to achieve companies' brand and marketing objectives. Since 2001, she's worked within the publishing industry in both the UK and Australia, Georgina has launched magazines for brands such as Best Western, St.George Bank, Australia Post and Jetset Travelworld. Georgina is a member of the ADMA Relationship Marketing and Customer Management Council.



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The Business Case

Consumers are more time-poor, yet better informed than ever before. Marketers have to find more sophisticated ways to interact with the consumer. The soft-sell, content-driven method used in custom publishing is designed to develop a long-lasting dialogue with an audience that leads to the development of a positive customer experience.

“Customer publishing has been one of the pioneering areas of marketing for some years now because its content is bespoke, written specifically for a purpose. So instead of companies or brands having to leapfrog other people's brands, it's a very direct way of communicating with customers. And that has to be the blueprint to the way all media is moving.”
Jonathan Durden, Miles Calcraft Briginshaw Duffy.

The key to profitable conversations is giving consumers something back in return for their time. Whether in a magazine or a digital environment, branded content is tailored to develop a mutually beneficial, interactive dialogue between the marketer and the consumer.

Custom media or custom publishing is about forging deep relationships that encourage readers to develop a brand affinity that stands the test of time and can weather fluctuations in the economy. It creates a trusted and valued brand representation.

Proven Results

Industry-wide research proves that custom publishing can;

- Alter brand perception
- Increase customer loyalty
- Significantly impact consumer purchasing decisions.

One of the most compelling pieces of research is from the UK's Association of Publishing Agencies (APA), the APA found well-targeted editorial content gives brands the opportunity to spend more time with their customers.

The APA recorded the time each customer spent reading a custom publication was 25 minutes. During this time the customer was actively engaged with the magazine². When compared to traditional television advertising, this is worth the equivalent in time of 50 x 30-second TV spots.

Customers are choosing to pick up the material in their own time, and keeping the magazines as a point of reference, which extends its shelf life. It's the perfect example of permission-based

marketing and proves that it is a trusted source of information.

The UK's APA Advantage Study conducted research into the effects of customer publications on consumer behaviour, the study found:

- 57% of recipients read at least half the publication – for the top-performing publication, this rose to 78%
- More than one in four people surveyed picked up the publication three times or more, while 54% did this with the top-performing magazine
- Two-thirds of readers kept the publication for a week or more
- Three in five people see the content in customer publications as 'very' or 'quite' relevant to them
- The more marketers can get their customers to read their customer magazine[s], the more they will spend buying the brand's product or service.

The North American Custom Publishing Council (CPC) Roper Reports that “70% of people surveyed like customer publications because the publications provide articles and information targeted towards the reader's specific interests”³. The research shows that custom media enables brands of all sizes to compete effectively against their rivals, regardless of the size of their marketing and advertising spend.

Causing consumers to behave differently

When it comes to creating a positive brand experience and increasing future purchase intentions, engagement is the main driver. When editorial is subtle and well-targeted, custom publishing has the capacity to shift consumers' behavior.

APA Advantage Study figures show that 44% of all recipients of customer publications are inspired to take some form of positive action as a result of reading a publication. The response may include an in store visit, using vouchers, trying recipes and ultimately buying the product.

2. UK's Association of Publishing Agencies (APA) Advantage Study

3. The North American Custom Publishing Council (CPC) Roper Report

“En Route Australasia magazine is a critical way in which we build a positive brand image in our customers’ minds and increase repeat stay intentions.”

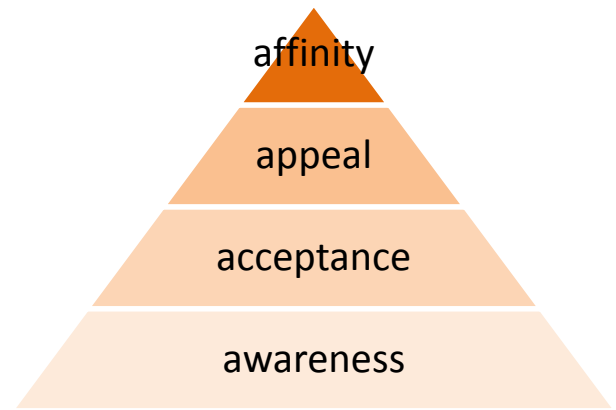
Angela Smith, Marketing Manager, Best Western Australasia



Building brand loyalty

In a study exploring consumers' relationships with customer publications, the Custom Publishing Council found that customer magazines strengthen consumers' relationships with the sponsoring brand. Approximately 78% of those surveyed felt customer publications show that brands are interested in building good relationships with consumers, and “respondents feel better about the brand when they are reading a publication the company has provided”³.

The APA Advantage Study uses a Brand Equity Pyramid to evaluate the depth of the relationship between a consumer and a brand. The pyramid is broken down into four levels (stages): awareness, acceptance, appeal and affinity. Once the consumer progresses to the affinity stage, they are seen to have the strongest relationship with the brand and are likely to be brand advocates.



The APA Advantage “Brand Equity Pyramid”.

By comparing the results for consumers who'd received copies of the magazine with a control group of those who hadn't, the 'customer magazine effect' could be calculated. The results clearly show that exposure to a customer magazine positively affects the brand's performance in readers' minds, from stimulating awareness to encouraging a connection with the brand.

Consumers who received customer magazines from a particular company demonstrated a 32% greater loyalty and commitment towards that brand, with 28% feeling that the brand offered something more than its competitors and therefore appeared a more attractive proposition.

Starting a dialogue

Research conducted by The Leading Edge Research Group in July 2009 found that “One in two Australians were keen to engage in a dialogue with brands” – with the proviso that these brands “... have something interesting to say”.

The research shows that consumers are changing their behaviour and attitudes towards brands in response to an increasing fragmented media environment.

Consumers no longer want brands to communicate with them in ways they have done in the past. Australian consumers want brands to listen as well as talk.

3. The North American Custom Publishing Council (CPC) Roper Report

The Leading Edge's Report found a significant positive correlation between the likelihood of consumers wanting to get into a conversation with a brand, and the perception of that brand, concluding that 'If people think of a brand as being friendly and approachable, they're more likely to want to get involved in a conversation with the brand'.

If a brand is perceived as 'aloof' or as having nothing in common with its target consumers, they will actively switch off and avoid all conversations with that brand.

The Leading Edge Research Report further demonstrates that there are opportunities for brands to open active dialogues with consumers. If a brand provides engaging content that meshes the benefits of that brand with the lifestyle of its target consumers, it can initiate a platform on which the brand and consumers can communicate who they are and what they want.

Profitable Conversations

Future purchasing decisions can be viewed as key indicators of consumers' loyalty to a brand. The APA Advantage Study calculated a customer loyalty score that helps predict a consumer's future behaviour in any industry category. The study found that as a direct response to reading a customer publication, customer loyalty is significantly higher; and that readers are likely to spend, on average, 8% more of their expenditure in that category.

This is increasingly important in the retail sector, where brand loyalty rises to 21% once a potential customer has read a particular brand's magazine.

By the time the customer is ready to make a major purchase, they are already armed with the information they need. Creating regular communication with a brand's audience can gradually build up a bond with the consumer; increasing their trust in the brand and making the brand's product or service their first choice.

The medium gives the brand the opportunity to educate and change opinions before a consumer even realises that they are in need of a particular product or service. The results of the CPC Roper Report shows 68% of respondents were more inclined to buy after reading a customer publication; and that 63% had already purchased something that they'd seen advertised or discussed in a publication.

Content marketing, though proven to generate profitable returns in the short-term, is most successful when considered in terms of long-term

engagement. Positive communications lead to even more profitable conversations in the future.

Who's doing it?

In the UK and US, content marketing is now deeply ingrained in marketers' approach to promoting their brands. In the UK, 120 brands invested in content-marketing initiatives from Jan to June 2010 – that's the equivalent of one launch per working day.

In the US, a study of 1,100 B2B marketers conducted; found that 9 out of 10 are using content marketing to achieve multiple business goals, primarily brand awareness (78%), customer retention/loyalty (69%) and lead generation (63%).

These marketers allocate approximately 26% of their total budgets to content-marketing initiatives and 51 % say they plan to spend more money on content marketing in 2011.

The most popular tactics employed are social media, excluding blogs (79%); articles (78%); in-person events (62%) and eNewsletters (61%). On average, each marketer uses eight content-marketing tactics to achieve his or her marketing goals⁴.

4. B2B Content Marketing: 2010 Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends by MarketingProfs and Junta42

Rules of engagement

As mentioned previously, to effectively engage consumers, a brand must provide some value to reward them for their time. It is important to provide consumers with enticing editorial that encapsulates the essence of the brand and delivers information in a useful, relevant way – whether it is entertaining, challenging, emotive or thought-provoking. It is vital that the offering builds long-term rapport with consumers and develops their trust and respect. When consumers make purchases, this helps them to feel that their decisions are considered and be confident in their purchase.

The brand has to give consumers enough perceived value so that they develop an affinity with that brand and will actively seek out its products and services ahead of all others. The CPC Roper Report showed that 68% of respondents felt customer publications provided information to help readers make better purchasing decisions. The APA Advantage Study reported that brand empathy and quality perceptions are consistently higher among those receiving customer magazines.

Valued, subtly branded content that appeals to the lifestyle of consumers, as opposed to blatant sales messages, builds trust and credibility. Consumers see value in this content and the brand is developed in the minds of consumers and drive sales for the brand.

Research by the APA shows that independent content can significantly enhance brand image by an average of 9%.

Though many people are aware that customer publications are a brand-based marketing tool, people are generally happy to read about topics that interest them, as long as the quality of the content is high.

The CPC Roper Report shows that if a brand is providing content that interests them, 78% of readers don't mind that the brand is clearly using the publication as a vehicle by which to sell its products and services. In fact, customer publications are their preferred source of information: 74% of those surveyed felt that getting information from a company via an interesting collection of articles was more appealing than receiving it through an advertorial.



St.George Banks winter issue of their customer publication titled, [George](#).

Giving a personal touch

According to a UK report published by Mintel, mail remains the main method of distribution for customer magazines, the second preferred method being in-store pick up.

The Association of Publishing Agencies (APA) in the UK, shows that mailed magazines command an average of eight minutes more attention than their picked-up in store magazines.

Mailed magazines are also retained for longer. A quarter of readers keep a mailed magazine for more than a month, versus just 16% keep a picked-up in store magazine for the same length of time. A study by Quadrangle⁵ found that people appreciate receiving mailed publications that are well executed, and will give these their undivided attention. The more time consumers spend with a publication, the longer they have to engage with its content and the deeper the understanding of the brand they will have as a result.

Distribution by mail enables brands to talk to their customer a personalised way. Knowing the demographics of its target audience means a brand's content can be tailored to the lifestyles and needs of that audience. Even if the publication is not segmented, receiving the publication directly increases the perceived value and increases consumers' reading time significantly.

5. What gets mail noticed, Quadrangle, February 2009

Creating brand advocates

In today's fragmented media landscape, word of mouth is one of the most credible forms of advertising. With each recommendation, the advocate's reputation is put on the line, and the original customer has nothing to gain but the appreciation of the listener.

Satisfied customers have the capacity to become a brand's best sales weapons.

By providing compelling editorial that promotes a positive shift in consumer behaviour, brands have the opportunity to influence consumers far beyond the initial reach of the publication.

In a recent report commissioned by the CPC, "companies that provide customer publications are rated positively and recommended to others". This approach is reinforced by the APA Advantage Study. In the retail sector, 21% recommended a store to a friend as a result of having received and read its customer magazine; in the automotive sector, 23% had discussed the content of a branded car magazine with a friend or colleague.



The award-winning Lexus Magazine held a reader survey in 2007 that showed:

- 60% of readers logged on to the Lexus website
- 86% felt informed about Lexus
- 95% felt the quality of writing was good or excellent

- 79% agreed the magazine reflects their Image of the Lexus brand
- 55% felt the magazine helped them choose their next Lexus
- 91 % thought the magazine presented Lexus as an innovative company.

“Being an active brand means that each day, you interact with your consumers based on how they interact with you and each other.”⁶

6. Fluent, Razorfish, 2009

Case Studies

See the case studies below to discover how Sony, Flora Pro-Activ, Sportingbet and Medibank have used customer publications in their marketing mix.

Case Study 1: SONY

Goal: Change perception

Sony is world-renowned as a consumer electronics brand but there is less awareness of its other core area: producing content for entertainment including films, music and games. Sony wanted an editorial solution that united these distinct areas and positioned Sony as an overall entertainment brand rather than just an electronics supplier. This had to be achieved without weakening the technology product pillar that provides the foundation for the brand's success.

The agency's solution was to produce a high-quality entertainment magazine that juxtaposes Sony with A-list cover stars and unites all the Sony businesses. One of the key challenges was not to lose sight of its role as an electronics provider, so the agency wove product messages and calls to action throughout the content.

Results show that the publication has been successful at addressing the fundamental marketing challenge: consumers' perception of the brand.

SONY

Hall and Partners research found that following issue one, 65% of those who received the magazine spent more than 30 minutes reading it. There was a 33% uplift in direct online sales in the two weeks after issue one was mailed and, by issue two, Sony had an opt-in database of more than 30,000. After only two issues, 48% of respondents thought that Sony participated in all forms of entertainment, while 30% had changed their opinion of Sony for the better.

Case Study 2: FLORA PRO-ACTIV

Goal: Stand out in a competitive marketplace

Flora was created after a plea from the medical profession for companies to create a healthy substitute to butter and hard margarine. Since the launch of Flora Pro-Activ, the 'healthy eating' market has become saturated with alternative products that also claim to lower cholesterol and improve heart health. Flora Pro-Activ needed to forge relationships with customers in a way that differentiated it from its competitors while keeping its core values central to the proposition. The editorial propositions had to re-engage the dormant Flora Pro-Activ base, retain customers and increase frequency of purchase.

The publishing agency worked with the client to ensure it fully understood the health-food market, and then executed a large-scale online and offline campaign, with the major driver being a quarterly magazine mailed to 450,000 consumers.

To enhance the appeal of Flora Pro-Activ, the magazine had a bright and breezy tone, a clean, fresh design and health-aware but accessible content, featuring a wide range of lifestyle features and interviews with well-known personalities.



The response from readers was strong. After the first issue was mailed, the publisher received more than 2,000 positive responses via email – a huge step forward in generating awareness and brand presence. Research by the client has also shown that the editorial campaign has far exceeded its performance goals.

Case Study 3: SPORTINGBET

Goal: Increase customer spend and new customer acquisition

In May 2010, Sportingbet published a World Cup Guide. Their aim was to increase customer interaction and drive Sportingbet account sign-ups by providing special offers and information on how to bet.

As part of the distribution strategy, the guide was distributed as an insert to *ALPHA* and *FourFourTwo* magazines, with a combined circulation of 150,000+. The guide was also mailed with a cover letter to 13,000 people the day prior to the FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

On the day the World Cup kicked off, 12,000 guides were handed out in Sydney's CBD by promotional staff wearing Sportingbet-branded T-shirts and caps.

Sportingbet tracked sign-ups using the promotional code 'CUP' with the objective to gain 100 new member sign-ups. Results exceeded expectation when Sportingbet received more than 400.

Notably, a significant spike of 60 member sign-ups occurred on June 11, coinciding with the World Cup Guide handout in Sydney. Achieving four times the number of sign-ups overall, has resulted in a sizeable contribution to the organisation's profit.



Sportingbet's World Cup Guide.

Case Study 4: MEDIBANK PRIVATE

Goal: To create a national custom-published member magazine, that reflects quality with high production values, and is a compelling read. Must appeal to the general public with subtle Medibank friendly information and advertorial albeit; the tone, style and design, so it remains relevant and appealing to a wider audience.

Launched nationally in 2007, the *feelbetter* magazine is skewed to two segments:

1. Singles/couples and
2. Families with kids

The magazine is principally owned and controlled by Medibank and the aim was to create a member magazine that:

- Is a leading resource for health and wellbeing information
- integrates fundamental areas associated with Medibank's current loyalty framework
- leverages health related sponsorship properties e.g. Wiggle into Health, Medibank Int, and Medibank Ice House
- fosters strong relations with current and future *feelbetter* rewards partners by providing a provision for additional advertising benefits including articles endorsed by reputable authoritative brands
- publishes information that is engaging, credible and relevant but also subtly champions Medibank Private whilst establishing a magazine that contains inherent brand value.

The magazine is distributed through 100+ national stores with no cover charge; it is also mailed to members each trimester. Medibank will continue to produce the publication and have also invested in an online flip book format.

An integrated approach

Marketers know that success comes through integration across all channels to provide consumers with what they demand: accessibility, choice and convenience.

Integration of media is necessary if brands are to evolve a consistent message and elicit the responses that will help them drive greater business returns. An integrated media approach sees targeted communications via different media channels developed concurrently so they create a much stronger brand proposition.

As the online environment can be updated on a daily basis, it can be used as a platform that informs consumers of the latest product information and special offers.

It is increasingly recognised that content is key. Furthermore, the channels through which it is delivered are less important than the content reaching the target audience; via the medium that they will best respond.

Marketers can translate successful returns and high levels of consumer engagement that customer publishing affords offline into digital channels.

“While there are significant benefits to optimising across digital channels, the big win comes through making on-line and off-line channels work together.”

Mike Nutley, Marketing Week Interactive

Due to the complex nature of consumer behaviour, different media reach consumers in different ways in relation to specific objectives. Despite this, the overall end goal needs to be consistent if a brand is to increase its profitability.

This was highlighted in a study commissioned by the Royal Mail entitled 'Direct mail and digital as natural partners: why consumers expect both'. The report showed that the online environment, through the use of e-zines, emails and newsletters, is better at communicating brief messages (82%) and sending reminders to customers about the latest products and offers (43%).

While printed publications created a better impression of the company (53%) and made individuals feel more valued as consumers (43%). Interestingly, people are more likely to spend time reading a brand's printed publication (46%) and

to appreciate receiving it if they are not already a customer of the brand (41%)⁷.

The study goes on to demonstrate that by using the two types of media simultaneously, you can achieve a result that is 'greater than the sum of its parts', resulting in clearer, and more effective communications.

Consumers are more likely to remember something if it is communicated both in print and online, and they are more likely to click on an online publication if they have already received something from that company or brand in the post.

The key is to understand consumers so that communications can be delivered to them in an appropriate format, at a time when they are best placed to absorb the content. Different audiences will have differing preferences with regard to how they like to receive a brand's material.

So by offering consumers more than one channel, a brand can relay its messages in ways that will engage them, whatever their preferences and interests, thus generating better returns for the brand.

Each medium has a role to play with the right audience at the right time, but the most effective way to generate a positive return is to use them together. These multi-platform offerings enable a continuous open dialogue to be created between the brand and consumers.

Not only can the brand use the different formats to showcase its proposition; it can also open a line of communication that generates a constant stream of feedback, which can then be used to improve the brand and continue to keep customers central to the proposition.

7. Royal Mail: Direct mail and digital as natural partners: Why consumers expect both

The digital landscape

In 2007, Forrester research showed that 90% of purchasing decisions begin online, before any form of personal contact, such as visits to shops. Never before have we had the opportunity to reach out to so many potential consumers – people who are actively searching for solutions to problems and/or information about products and services.

Since 2000, internet use in Australia has grown by 158.1%, with 80.1% of Australians now actively online.⁸

As is the case with traditional marketing, the digital landscape is changing. Consumers are becoming more selective in their viewing habits and, as a result, are starting to reject standard advertising formats in favour of content – whether it be branded or user-generated (UGC). A recent study found that 46% of internet users in the US ignore banner ads and only 1% found them helpful in the decision-making process⁹.

As a direct response to the way consumers are connecting with the web, brand owners are looking for more detailed website analytics to give insights into the success of a brand's online presence. No longer are click-throughs, page impressions and time spent online metrics enough.

More meaningful metrics such as sales uplift, cross-media acquisition and retention, and customer life-time value are being analysed to give indications of the levels of engagement sustained. Audiences are complex and therefore need to be fully understood; otherwise, the web can have a negative effect on a brand's reputation.

A brand's online proposition has to take into account how consumers use the online space to gather the information they need to make purchasing decisions and act as influencers of other consumers. Online communications need to draw consumers into the foundations of the brand and provide easy-to-find solutions that will impact their lifestyles and needs.

Engaging with digital content

The Internet Activity Index (IAI) was developed by the Online Publishers Association (OPA) to help people explore and monitor consumer engagement online.

The report, which is published monthly, divides internet usage into five distinct activities: content, communications, commerce, community and

search. Sites that contain content – those designed primarily to provide news, information and entertainment – consistently command a significantly higher share of readers' time (37%) than do any of the other online areas: community (25.6%); communications (20.9%); commerce (11.1%) and search (4.5%)¹⁰.

As the findings from the Internet Activity Index (IAI) clearly demonstrate, content is a key component needed to engage with consumers online as well as in the printed space. Online offerings need to give consumers something that demonstrates that their needs are central to the proposition and enables them to develop emotional connections based on experience.

Essentially, a brand's target audience remains the same regardless of the media used to engage with it; however, the way people absorb information online differs greatly from the way they read material offline. Consumers tend to skim sites until they find what they are looking for, then 'settle'. They want content they can access quickly and easily.

As a result, online content cannot just be copied from one medium to the other; it needs to be developed specifically to suit the online environment. Online content needs to contain plain, visible, easily accessible information that consumers can use to find the details they seek.

Hard-to-use, complicated sites will result in consumers simply clicking off and resuming their searches elsewhere.

Though the delivery needs to be straightforward and transparent, the content should create opportunities that mesh the brand with the target audience's lifestyle.

Online content strategies should shift the emphasis from direct, hard-sell messages to 'conversations' that help consumers engage with and develop relationships with the brand. Instead of bombarding consumers with advertising messages, says David Pugh-Jones, rich media strategist for MSN, a brand should build an online experience based on relevancy – understanding customers; interactivity – creating a unique experience that enables them to experience the product; and relationships – which are most effective if they're fun and educational. Keeping these three components in mind, rich, targeted editorial can be created that engages the audience and delivers the desired results for the brand.

8. www.internetworldstats.com

9. Harris Interactive

10. OPA and Nielsen Online, August 2010

In a report published by Junta42, 'How to attract and retain customers with content now', Motorola was used as a case study. Motorola found that 80% of technology buyers use the web as their primary purchasing-decision tool; therefore, it was vital that online informational tools were central to its marketing strategy.

The result was a fully interactive website that included micro sites, videos, case studies and online communities that demonstrate to consumers the technology that would best help them get their jobs done. It is through this variety of content-laden components that Motorola looks to engage and convert information-seekers into active purchasers.

Search is more than just a box in Google

Organic search – listings on search-engine result pages that appear because of their relevance to the search terms, as opposed to paid search – is vital if a brand is to develop and maintain its online presence. People trust organic search results much more than they do sponsored results and consequently, natural search listings are much more likely to yield a greater click-through rate and maximise the amount of traffic to a website.

Consumers have come to expect brands to appear in listings when they use specific keywords to search for a product or service. If a brand does not appear, this can change the brand's perception in the mind of consumers: they may start to question the brand's position and its ability to provide valued solutions.

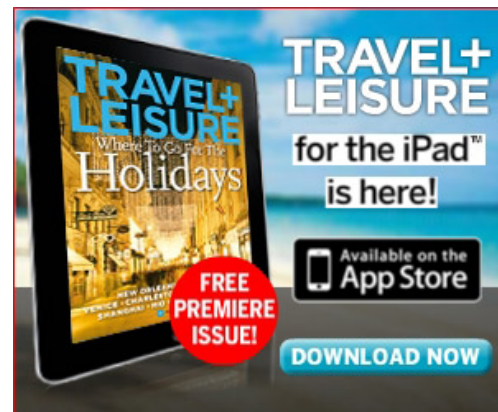
In order for a website to be picked up by a search engine and feature highly on a search listing, it is essential that the site contains high-quality content. Moreover, this content must be strategically optimised so that it contains key words and phrases related to and associated with the search terms typically used when consumers research a particular product or service.

If a brand fails to optimise its website, a consumer may simply overlook its offerings and purchase from its competitors.

Increasingly sophisticated algorithms behind search engines such as Google mean that search-term-rich content can no longer be faked. Therefore, a brand's search-engine optimisation (SEO) strategy needs to be developed seamlessly with the website's content strategy so as to actualise a high search ranking. Compelling content produces a 'win-win' result by engaging the browser and achieving the search rankings required to attract new visitors.

'Online' is more than a website

With an increasingly saturated digital world and the annoyances associated with spam, marketers must ensure that their content contains a perceived value. One way this can be achieved is through creative editorial solutions – solutions with which the consumer engages rather than clicks away from or presses delete before reading.



American Express has launched an iPad version of their customer magazine, *Travel + Leisure* in November 2010. The new iPad application provides readers with video links and buying links where they can purchase instantly.

These solutions are often interactive and provide a platform on which consumers can express their opinions and start a conversation. According to a report by The Leading Edge Research Group, digital is the favoured medium when it comes to communication between consumers and a brand.

Content, not just the written word

The web is constantly evolving and marketers must adapt continually to new techniques so as to engage consumers. With the development of online video streams, podcasts, vodcasts and other forms of 'rich media', content is no longer restricted to the written word; however, the foundations for persuasive branded content remain the same regardless of the media format through which it is delivered. The key is keeping consumers central to the proposition and developing content that focuses on their needs rather than forcing the brand upon them.

"This is no longer just about the latest offers or competitions – Australians want to express their opinions, and are looking to brands to provide a platform on which to do this."

Karen Phillips, MD, The Leading Edge Research Group

A good example is the series of online videos Land Rover commissioned its publishing agency to create. These videos, which appeared on the brand's web-based 'Go Beyond' channel, aimed to reflect the modern face of the Land Rover brand. The videos were a success: subsequent web trafficking confirmed that they were the most-viewed part of the site.

The people's voice

Each day, through blogs, social networks, message boards, wikis and other social-media sites, millions of people are sharing ideas, having conversations and forming opinions online. According to NeilsenWire, social networks and blog sites are visited by three-quarters of the consumers online.

These statistics (updated April 2010) show that 22% of all time spent online (or one in every four-and-a-half minutes) is spent on social-media sites. On average, Australian web users spend the most time on social networking globally, followed by users in the US and Italy. Brands, as a result, are finding themselves the subjects of discussion groups, consumer-rating guides and testimonials, which in turn act as great influencers. Brands are no longer in sole control of their outwardly facing communications and, in many ways, consumers are shaping brands as much as brand are shaping themselves.

Harris Interactive Research has shown that "online reviews are second only to personal advice from a friend as the driver of purchase decisions". In a study published by the Society for New Communications in 2008, 74% of consumers agree – and 14% strongly agree – "that they choose companies and brands based on what others say online about their customer service experiences".

Accordingly, 49% of consumers have actively purchased a product as direct result of a recommendation on a social media site.¹¹

Never before has it been so vital for brands to provide honest, trustworthy information and to provoke positive discussions from which consumers can make choices that satisfy their needs.

"A brand cannot control conversations online. Instead, the brand must provide a reason for people to want to share their experience with others."¹²

Therefore, a brand has to provide consumers with authentic messages that excite and inspire conversations but truly reflect the product, service and fundamental culture of a brand.

On the other side of the coin, there are brands that have embraced the online medium and developed social-network campaigns that interact with consumers in an honest and transparent way.

One of these companies is online fashion retailer, ASOS. In its first couple of months of operation, from April to December 2008, ASOS attracted a loyal fan base of 55,000 with an estimated reach of up to eight million Facebook users. By November 2008, 15.2% of all ASOS's traffic came from social media networks.

11. Web users and web community, Rubicon Consulting, Inc. October 2008

12. Razorfish, October 2008

Integration in practice – Case Study UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY

Goal: Change perception, grow brand awareness

The launch of an integrated print-and-digital-content strategy to revolutionise the perception of UTS Business (the business school of the University of Technology Sydney) demonstrated the power of content to engage and drive brand awareness and affinity.

This content strategy is encapsulated in a sub-brand – *Business21C* (B21C) – and includes its own publication, events, website, podcasts, radio broadcast and eNewsletters, plus social networking through Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Ning. The diagram below illustrates the touch-points and channels of the platform.



As this is a brand engagement strategy, measurement is through page views, time spent on each page, conversions to magazine subscriptions, comments on blogs, article submissions, the desire for interviews and event participation. A summary of the results is as follows:

- Ten days after the launch at Sydney Opera House, subscribers numbered just under 550. One week prior to the launch of issue two of *Business21C* magazine, this number had grown to 3,655.
- *Business21C* video content has been broadcast several times on the ABC's *Big Ideas* program.
- In August 2010, website results showed that 372 pages were viewed a total of 7,234 times.
- Throughout August 2010, 4,042 visits came from 72 countries/territories.
- Year on year, the estimated growth from 2011 is between 10 and 12%.

The Finer Details

There are a number of factors to consider when launching or reviewing your content-marketing initiatives, how to fund your publication, distribute it and measure your success.

Funding your initiative

A key benefit of custom publishing is that it creates an environment that is perfect for third-party advertising. Third-party advertising enables increased ROI and allows companies to build strong partnerships with their advertisers.

There are a few successful advertising models in which generated advertising revenue exceed the publications outgoing costs. Some custom magazines manage to do this, but these cases are rare and typically, they are limited to airlines and supplier-funded retail models.



Similarly, costs can be offset by charging for magazines. Consumers are used to paying for high-quality magazines. There is even an opportunity for subscription or even retail sales if the value of the custom magazine is strong enough.

The Real Estate magazine published by McGrath Estate Agents is a good example. With a subscription price of \$5.50 per issue, it's mailed every Friday to subscribers who purchase the magazine through Isubscribe.com.au and magcentral.com.au

Measuring that all-important ROI

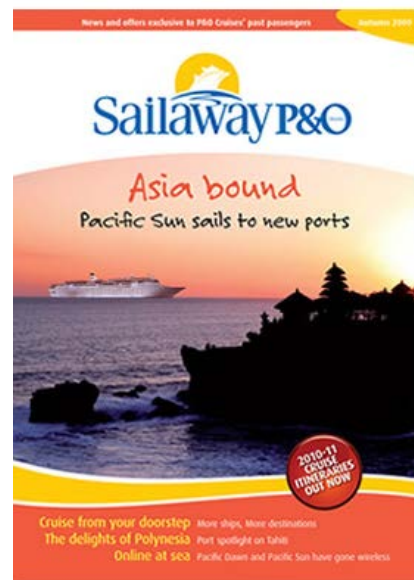
Brands are increasingly redirecting above the line advertising budgets to the more accountable practice of direct marketing, specifically custom publishing.

To measure the effectiveness of custom publishing, marketers rely on a number of criteria, including web traffic, direct sales, sales lead quality and qualitative customer feedback as well as sales lead quantity, search engine optimisation ranking, increased customer loyalty, lift in company awareness, inbound links and cross-selling. A few of these, including examples of how Australian brands have measured their initiatives' success, are discussed below:

Increased sales

Sales messages can be easily incorporated into interesting articles that will build customer engagement and drive sales.

Companies such as Asos, Sainsbury's, Harrods, Tesco and Waitrose all validate that their magazines drive spikes in sales. This is measured by inserting unique product codes, offers or phone numbers to prove that the channel is working. In an Australian example, 35% of respondents to a recent survey said they booked a P&O Cruise as a result of reading the *Sail Away* P&O magazine shown below.



Digital and driving traffic online

Increasingly, content is used to drive audiences online, where they may be able to research further and/or transact. Combining measurement of online conversations (volume, sentiment, spread of message, influence and value) with changes in sales revenue will demonstrate the effectiveness of your communication strategy.

Social Media

Andy Gent of Australian monitoring business BuzzNumbers says "regardless of whether you engage in social media or not, all external communication your business has with the outside world will end up with some online comments in much the same way as it has generated conversation in the pub or around the water cooler for decades. The power of online monitoring is that you can now get real-time consumer insights, since these conversations moved online."

Social media has created transparency. How well did your message spread? What did your audience think of the message? Does your service delivery back up your promises? Are you getting ROI from your efforts? If no-one is spreading your message, is it time to change it?

For example, 60% of respondents to a recent P&O Cruises survey visited the P&O Cruises website after reading the summer issue of Sail Away magazine. Similarly, a recent issue (September 2010) of UTS business school magazine *Business21C* resulted in a 400% increase in social-media activity on its Facebook page.

Loyalty

Typically, loyalty is measured by testing audiences' affinity to a brand using controlled groups of customers who either receive the magazine or don't.

Research from the UK shows that loyalty increases by 32% when customers receive a customer publication.

Distribution channels

Options for distribution are limited only by creativity (and budget): personalised mail; in-store pick-up; promotional handouts; door drops to particular areas; newsstand sales; cover mounts on existing newsstand publications; subscriptions; distribution to airline lounges, cafés and hairdressing salons; the list goes on.

Overcoming the barriers to success

Often, the biggest hurdle to getting a content-marketing initiative off the ground is convincing business leaders of the business case for content. While it's no easy barrier to overcome, demonstrating the power of content with proven examples will go a long way – and benchmark

case studies from relevant brands will be particularly useful in this regard.

Ensure you outline the business case clearly, clarifying objectives, measurement and metrics. Position the initiative from the perspective of the returns the initiative will deliver, and the initial investment should look small when compared to the ROI. Get business leaders excited about the initiative to secure buy-in.

Why use a specialist?

By having a core understanding of what motivates consumers and developing a customer-centric approach to the content, the publishing agency can produce solutions that creatively leverage your brand and engage consumers with content that appeals directly to their needs.

They also bring industry connections with them, and are tapped directly into the wider media network, meaning they have far greater access to quality writers, photographers and interviewees.



The Ikea Family Live Magazine plays a key role in the companies loyalty programme. The Magazine's brief is to increase home-furnishing interest and loyalty amongst its international customers.

Beyond time, experience and connections, there's also cost-effectiveness to consider. Initially, getting your publication produced by professionals may seem an unnecessary expense, but to produce communications of the quality you require, it would cost significantly more if you hired a bespoke in-house team.

Getting a content-marketing strategy right is complex and can be fraught with difficulties. But, you don't have to go it alone. Get your chosen agency involved early and let them help you devise a strategy.

When it comes to integrated strategies, publishing agencies are experts in creating branded editorial. They also have the capacity to transfer their skills across various media channels, from custom magazines, to websites or iPhone apps.

A good custom-publishing agency is able to deliver effective solutions that are cohesive with a brand's marketing objectives, selecting the most appropriate channels and the appropriate content to reach and engage the target audience.

“Publishers provide a much fuller and more trustworthy picture of the customer than any other marketing medium, as they set up a two-way conversation between you and your customers. They also provide a distinct tone, and an identity that you can have complete control over and use as the bedrock of any marketing campaign.”

Christian Cull, Former Director of Customer Communications, Sky.

Conclusion

Whatever your brand's marketing objectives; the key to successful custom publishing is to understand the key target market and provide interesting content that is tailored to that market.

As the media landscape becomes more cluttered, brands need to be more strategic in the ways in which they reach out to and target consumers. Brands need to develop solutions that evolve from a thorough understanding of consumers – who they are and what they want.

The vehicle for communication – whether printed or in the form of interactive media – is interchangeable, providing that the format is relevant for the target audience and is delivered in a way in which this audience is happy to engage.

It is important, that the publication's editorial positions the brand as more than just a vendor. The brand should be seen as providing answers to the tough problems consumers face.

Further Reading

www.apa.co.uk

www.johnbrownmedia.com

www.custompublishingcouncil.com

<http://contentmarketingtoday.com>

www.junta42.com

www.becontentwise.com/Resource.php

www.mediabiznet.com.au

www.fipp.com

www.auditbureau.org.au/news

<http://paidcontent.org>

www.imediaconnection.com

<http://admadigitalcouncil.posterous.com/>

About the Australian Direct Marketing Association

ADMA was formed in 1966 and is the peak industry body of the Australian direct marketing industry.

Our primary objective is to help companies achieve better marketing results through the enlightened use of direct marketing.

We achieve this through the three pillars of our activity; Advocacy, Knowledge and Community.

Advocacy

During its 45 years of operation ADMA has been involved in the formulation of law relevant to the direct marketing industry.

Predominantly our focus has been the Privacy Act 1988, the Spam Act 2003 and the Do Not Call Register Act 2006.

Knowledge - Education and Events

ADMA improves Australian marketer's knowledge by a number of different ways including education, councils and events.

ADMA runs a number of courses including the pre-eminent Certificate of Direct and Digital Marketing. A number of short courses are also offered.

ADMA Councils provide a meeting place for Australian marketers to develop discuss common problems and develop industry best practice. ADMA Councils run free events and issue white papers on leading areas of interest.

ADMA Events feature renowned international and national marketers. To find out more visit www.adma.com.au/events

Community

ADMA has over 500 member organisations including major financial institutions, telecommunications companies, energy providers, travel service companies, major charities, statutory corporations, educational institutions and specialist suppliers of direct marketing services.

ADMA events and councils offer the perfect way for marketers to meet and network.

About ADMA Councils

This paper is the work of the Relationship Marketing and Customer Management Council.

ADMA has seven different councils including:

- a) Agency
- b) Analytics and Data
- c) Contact Centre
- d) Digital
- e) Mail Marketing
- f) Multi-Channel Acquisition
- g) Relationship Marketing / Customer Management

The Digital, Multi-Channel Acquisition and Relationship Marketing /Customer Management Councils are Super-Councils because each has broad cross over of multiple facets of marketing disciplines.

The objectives of the ADMA Councils are to:

- a) provide forums for sharing information on matters of specific common interest aimed at increasing the industry sector body of knowledge
- a) assist in the development of a unified approach on public policy and regulatory matters
- b) develop, where appropriate, industry best practice guidelines that set ADMA members apart from others in the industry
- c) add value to ADMA membership

ADMA Councils allow marketers to network, discuss best practice and regulatory issues, discuss current challenges and make new contacts.

ADMA Councils are a free member benefit.

Joining an ADMA Council is easy and any employee of an ADMA Member can join by emailing councils@adma.com.au or calling **02 9277 5419**.

How to Become an ADMA Member

By becoming an ADMA member you join Australia's largest marketing industry association.

ADMA membership delivers Protection, Promotion and Education benefits to all employees in your company including:

- a) Access to free Regulatory guidance, updates and compliance webinars
- b) The ability to participate in member-only ADMA Councils
- c) 35% discount on ADMA events and education programs

Becoming an ADMA member is easy. ADMA Councils are a free member benefit. Simply complete the [online form](#) or call **02 9277 5400**.

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