

# MARKETING IS CONTENT

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WHITE PAPER

## CONTENT IS CHANGING THE NATURE OF MARKETING – FOREVER

### **Be the content, Luke!**

More than ever before – and even more so every day – marketing *is* content. And content *is* marketing.

Simply stated, the interaction between marketers, who are increasing their investments in high-quality content, and consumers, who are engaging with – and sometimes creating – content around brands they are passionate about, is changing the nature both of content and of marketing in ways that are profound.

Marketers are investing more aggressively in content in myriad forms, all in the interest of driving engagement with new customers, enhancing brand loyalty and share of wallet among existing customers, and creating both buzz and substantive value exchange across social, online, search, mobile, viral and traditional channels.

Research bears this out. Two recent studies of senior marketing executives reveal significant increases in spending for content.

In one study, average content spending among respondents doubled in 2009 over 2008, to 30% of the total marketing budget<sup>1</sup>; the other was a first-time study that showed marketers spending an average of 26% of their budget on content.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the bigger news is that in the rising “Age of Engagement” marketers are heralding, customers are dictating the terms of that engagement.

Interviews with nearly a dozen leading marketers reveal a consensus that high-quality content represents the critical intellectual or entertainment value (or both) that attracts and retains customers.

- > When asked how they decide what content to produce, the marketers say they ask their customers or listen in on how customers define their information needs in online forums.

- > When asked what content formats they use and where they distribute, their consensus is “many,” because each customer has a unique digital content consumption “fingerprint,” including formats and forums.
- > When asked how they decide exactly where to distribute their content, they say wherever their research finds that their particular customers are congregating in the increasingly fragmented media landscape.

In fact, a tenet emerging from the interviews is that compelling content – “storytelling with a purpose” in the words of one interviewee – combined with intelligently targeted distribution is becoming the “glue” that re-integrates brand marketers’ audiences regardless of the number of forms, formats or forums into which those audiences have splintered.

#### **CLIMBING CONTENT USE TRANSFORMS MARKETING**

The big news emerging from the interviews of leading marketers is the sheer number of transformations in the art and science of marketing that they attribute to the increasing use of – and audience interaction with – substantive content and targeted distribution.

As a result, explains Lou Casale, VP, Corporate Communications at TheLadders, the leading recruitment solution for professional talent, the content his marketing organization produces “can take on a life of its own.”

Casale describes how consumers nowadays do much more than just engage with high-quality content – they actively engage it with others. “If it’s useful enough, they will blog about it, link to it, spread the news via Twitter and email it to their friends,” Casale explains. “So we are always looking for ways to take a message and share it with consumers in a useful enough way so they will share it amongst themselves,” he says.

Interviewees cited many ways in which the rise of high-quality content is leading to profound changes in marketing, including:

- > Mass marketing and mass media becoming less the point (and less viable) in the Age of Engagement – freeing (or forcing) marketers to develop content-centric, micro-marketing approaches for both their content and its distribution
- > Marketers’ “campaign” mindset is being replaced by the notion of ongoing, consistent delivery of high-value information, entertainment, or both

- > Interruptive messaging is being replaced by “engagement” – defined as content-rich, two-way communication between brands and their customers
- > Top-down message and content development is being replaced by bottom-up development – starting with customer input and driven by their voice
- > Marketing departments are developing in-house editorial teams – akin to teams at media companies. Some marketers interviewed go so far as to say marketing departments must morph into publishing departments
- > Information must “seek” the right audiences – and enable the right audience to “find” it as well. This means that content distribution, or syndication across all channels – social, online, video sharing, blogs, communities, search, mobile, etc. – and SEO, SMO (social media optimization) are key
- > Corporate or brand “speak” is being replaced by authenticity and human voice
- > Advertising, marketing and public relations disciplines are converging in order to meet the content demands of customer engagement, particularly in social media

Taken together, these changes are making content the cornerstone of modern marketing.

Yet several interviewees state that they have used content for many years in many different capacities. “What’s changed now, though – and this is what’s really important – is that when we think about marketing strategy, we think about content not as contextual to that strategy, we think of it as core to that strategy,” says Tom Stein, President and Chief Creative officer at agency Stein Rogan + Partners.

Eileen Zicchino, Chief Marketing Officer of JP Morgan Chase’s Treasury Services business, cuts to the chase: “When I think about content marketing and the JP Morgan brand, I don’t think that content is everything – I think it’s the only thing. It’s our intellectual capital. That’s what we really sell: content,” she says.

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IS YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE READING PRINT? DOWNLOADING VIDEO? LISTENING TO PODCASTS? THEN YOU HAVE TO **USE THOSE AS PART OF YOUR TACTICS** TO REACH THOSE PEOPLE.

Joe Pulizzi, Founder,  
The Content Marketing Institute

Continues Stein: “When our teams sit down to think about a challenge that a client has put in front of us, we start by thinking about content. We don’t think about content as a secondary thought or a tertiary thought; content is absolutely core to the programs we put on the table for our clients. For all agencies and for all marketers, that is increasingly the case. And if it isn’t the case today, it had better be in the future, because that’s the way of the world.”

### **MEDIA FRAGMENTATION: THE MOTHER OF INVENTION**

“Fragmentation is both a blessing and a curse at the same time,” says JP Morgan’s Zicchino. “It’s great that we have all of these different channels to contend with because our clients go to all different types of channels, and not every client goes to every single channel.”

“The curse part of it is, someone has to manage all that content, someone has to figure out what it is, and what goes where,” Zicchino says.

“Fragmentation is making marketers’ jobs tougher than ever before,” adds Joe Pulizzi, founder of the Content Marketing Institute. “Is your target audience reading print? Downloading video? Listening to podcasts? Then you have to use those as part of your tactics to reach those people.”

Further, Pulizzi says, “Ninety percent of your customers are getting information from their channels before they even contact you. They are reading blogs and watching videos. So as a marketer, you have to provide expert, valuable content in the channels they are already at.” That, many interviewees agreed, is the critical distribution challenge that media fragmentation has created.

Sharman Wilson, Manager of Enterprise Marketing for TheLadders, is implementing just such a content marketing strategy in order to cut through the noise and competition of fragmented media channels.

“With a more fragmented market, and with so many sources of information, consumers are better educated and they are savvier. If you can’t get them high-quality information, or if you are not in the channels where they are getting their information, you are going to get passed right by,” she notes.

Ninan Chacko, CEO of PR Newswire, best expressed the core distribution challenge shared by all the interviewees: “The biggest challenge for

marketers is to gain expertise across this staggering array of all the options through which content can be communicated. And then, like a conductor of an orchestra, make sure these channels work in harmony to tell the right story and to drive the right level of engagement.”

“That requires more than just a level of knowledge, individually, about these channels; it also requires a holistic, cross-media understanding of how to leverage all these varying channels to really make them work together, cohesively,” Chacko adds.

### CONSISTENCY SPOKEN HERE

If the Holy Grail of engagement is a “content-rich, two-way communication between brands and their customers,” it requires marketers to keep up their end of the conversation with a consistent stream of high-quality content. That means the end of marketers’ “campaign” mindset and the demise of interruptive messaging.

“This is where most brands still fall down,” says Pulizzi. “They invest time and money in creating content that demonstrates their expertise, but they do it around some campaign – and then they stop.

“So what they really have said to their customer is, ‘we don’t really care about you. If we cared about you we would send this information on a consistent basis because we want your lives to be better and your careers to be more successful,’” states Pulizzi.

“We’re increasingly seeing that if you’re not creating content on a regular basis, your brand is not being heard,” adds Steve Rubel, SVP and Director of Insights for Edelman Digital, a division of Edelman PR.

Pulizzi concludes: “It’s the creation of consistent information, where you get a customer or prospect to really start to rely on your expertise, that is the real prerequisite for engagement.”

### THE AGE OF ENGAGEMENT DAWNS

“Engagement is everything – and content is the currency,” says Marcie Avram, Associate Publisher/Marketing & Content Strategy, Rodale Custom Content & Marketing.

“This requires speaking to the target audience in a way that resonates – about things that matter – developed for the specific platform,” says Avram.

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“If the content is not truly relevant, the engagement opportunity is lost.”

Further, “engagement describes a two-way relationship,” says PR Newswire’s Chacko. “It reflects the fact that the relationship has a duration that’s more than just for a particular transaction; it extends beyond that, there’s a lifecycle to it. And it also reflects the fact that the customer has a voice, and they want to contribute to that relationship and actually grow it, improve it, customize it.”

TheLadders’ Casale points out that, “in order to be a part of the conversation, you have to have something to say.” Casale’s favorite “conversation starter” content for engaging customers is what he calls “news you can use.”

“Consumers are gravitating toward news they can find useful in their daily lives. During this recession, we found that many consumers were looking for information about the job market. So the content that we put out, predominantly via press releases, were tips and tricks and advice for consumers. We knew that once that news landed, beyond just the journalists who possibly might write about it, it also would live online, and it was just the kind of news that would have a life of its own.”

Several interviewees said engagement marketing requires authentic human voices.

“Engagement implies some type of emotional connection,” says Pulizzi.

“We want to be emotionally connected to our customers and prospects. Marketers are going to have to act more like human beings if they want to get engagement. We engage with human beings, not with brands. Engagement is a human thing.”

#### TOP DOWN TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

“The first thing we have to realize is that these people we want to engage with have become more influential than us,” says noted blogger Brian Solis, principal of new media marketing agency FutureWorks.

“They have been creating content and connecting with people for years, and we’re just starting to figure this out. The first thing we, being businesses, do as we try out these new mediums is bring our old approaches – top down, one-to-many. So it’s not what we say but what they say that counts,” Solis says.

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The leading marketers interviewed for this paper agree. They listen in on their customers and prospects in online channels such as social media to help them decide what content to focus on and in what channels it should be distributed. They also ask customers directly.

“The funny thing is, when you actually ask a client to tell you what’s on their mind, they’ll tell you,” says Zicchino. “So you can get great ideas for content directly from clients and prospects.”

### **CEO AS CHIEF EDITORIAL OFFICER**

In part two of his “The Future of Marketing Starts With Publishing” article series, Solis writes that, “The new CEO is for all intents and purposes a Chief Editorial Officer.” Solis also suggests the creation of “a new role or at least the introduction of new insight and responsibilities within existing roles that resemble the role of Editor-in-Chiefs within today’s traditional media hierarchies.”

TheLadders’ Casale is among those who are leading this particular charge. “Content is so very vital to TheLadders that we’ve actually created an entire editorial function to develop content for our members,” says Casale.

That editorial team has played a critical role in establishing TheLadders as an expert information source in the eyes of its intended customer base. “We focus on the \$100,000-plus market, and before TheLadders, there was no one catering to that demographic. They rely heavily on the information we deliver to them, because they feel that it is coming from a credible source. And we built that reputation for credibility up over the years, primarily from the editorial advice and other content we deliver to them,” Casale explains.

Pulizzi similarly believes that brands must become experts in their chosen domains in order to achieve “this elusive thing called engagement” – in fact, it’s his number one mantra. And, he says, it means marketing departments will ultimately morph into editorial departments.

“We have to present ourselves as the thought leader, the expert, the solutions provider for our customer,” says Pulizzi. “So the requisite is we have to create lots of targeted, relevant, valuable information. That my friend is publishing, and publishing is something most marketers are not good at.”

“Given all this, our idea of the marketing department is in evolution right now,” Pulizzi continues. “We are transforming ourselves into publishing departments. When marketers make hires they are asking themselves can this person blog, do they understand social media? We need journalists on staff to figure out our story and how to relate it to customers.”

### **DISTRIBUTION: EVERYWHERE YOUR CONTENT WANTS TO BE**

Overcoming media fragmentation lies in creating content worth sharing, learning where your audience fragments are congregating in order to determine your distribution plan, and then exploiting technology to imbue your content with characteristics that enable it to “find the right audience,” as PR Newswire’s Chacko says.

All our interviewees agreed on that first step – create high-quality expert content tuned to the concerns of your particular customers. “Then you have to connect the dots between what it is you’re saying and who it is that can help you scale that story, that mission, that purpose,” says Solis.

Solis explains that while corporations still believe in hosting content themselves, their customers’ “attention dashboard is now a tweetdeck, or their Facebook wall, or their inbox, any of which allows them to see what is happening in the social web. You have to make sure your content is published in places that are going to reach that attention dashboard,” Solis says.

Chacko believes technology has a vital role to play. “The diversity and array of media through which you can distribute content continues to explode and evolve. Just when we thought there was the Internet and then smartphone devices, along come tablets and e-readers that have created an entirely new dimension of ways in which consumers, or audiences, can digest information.”

“So it’s becoming incumbent upon the information to find the right audience. Which means we have to find better ways of identifying it, tagging it, perhaps creating metadata from it – all ways in which to sift through the dizzying array of information, and find the stuff that has meaning for a particular audience,” says Chacko.

Distribution, therefore, plays a critical role. “Pushing out your content to as many contextually appropriate places as possible on the web allows you to create a higher probability that either the customer can find the information,

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or the information is at least in some of the places where the customer already is and the information can find the customer,” Chacko explains.

### **MARKETING, PR & ADVERTISING CONVERGE**

To clear the many hurdles of consistent, high-quality content production and to find the right media channels – particularly in social media – to engage their audiences, leading marketers are drawing on cross-discipline collaboration. Several believe such collaboration leads inexorably to the convergence of advertising, marketing and public relations disciplines.

“When you think about creating and distributing content for the social channel, which is very important to all of us today, PR has a role, agencies have a role, our clients’ marketing organizations have a role,” says Stein. “And PR, in fact, is taking a significant and leadership role in providing content and utilizing content to engage with consumers and engage with other key constituents; bloggers for example, and other influencers, via the social channel in particular. So I see this coming together of the disciplines, significantly driven by social media and the social channel.”

Chris Perry, President, Digital Communications for PR agency Weber Shandwick, sees the same thing happening – even beyond social media. Perry offers the Pepsi Refresh Project as an example of a converged marketing effort – i.e., one that defies categorization.

“It started with a big idea around the notion of using money to support people that want to refresh the world, versus advertising that message exclusively through broadcast channels,” Perry explains. “When you look at the Pepsi Refresh Project, it is everything from a corporate responsibility program to an advertising program to a public relations program.”

“But really at its core it’s an engagement program,” Perry continues. “It’s making a commitment to a community and then seeing that community rally around the agenda of how do we refresh the world, how do we refresh our planet, how do we refresh our neighborhoods? And vie for those dollars to do so.”

Further, Pepsi then captured the stories that emerged from the Refresh Project and shared them back into the market. “This project really exemplifies how there aren’t any more hard boundaries, as defined by historical disciplines or in historical terms,” Perry concludes.

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Chris Perry  
President,  
Digital Communications,  
Weber Shandwick

Adds Chacko: “Leading marketers are understanding and appreciating the fact that PR as a means of outreach to the media, and increasingly to social media and consumers directly, has over time perfected a form of communication that allows content to be disseminated, and then added to, reacted to, responded to, repurposed, republished, engaged with. And they are starting to integrate that form of outreach into the marketing landscape.”

### CONTENT ENABLES RE-INTEGRATION OF AUDIENCES

The splintering of audiences that marketers were once able to access very easily and very efficiently through just a couple of media has made life extremely difficult for leading marketers. Comprehensive distribution is much harder to come by. Many interviewees believe the answer may lie in content.

Says agency CEO Stein, “If we can deploy content across channels, if we can deploy it in the formats that are most conducive to consumer consumption, if we can find ways to do that efficiently and to measure results, then we have the opportunity to turn channel fragmentation into an advantage for us.”

The enabling factor, he explains, is that, “Great stories – great content – are one of the best means of bringing audiences together; of engaging with audiences in ways that overcome fragmentation.”

Avram, of Rodale Custom Content & Marketing, agrees that content has the potential to become the “glue that binds” all marketing activities. “The right content can create a consistency of messaging across multiple platforms and, importantly, across agency initiatives and disciplines. We are finding there is increasing understanding of this concept in the market and increasing interest in it,” she says.

Such re-integration of audiences won’t be easy to achieve, however. It requires telling a comprehensive, coherent story about a brand in different ways across many media channels.

“Marketers have to be much more clever in terms of how they distribute to all of their consumer constituents across all of those channels and that proliferating media environment to find ways to make those audiences cohesive again,” says Stein.

It’s worth the effort, he says, “Because from that cohesion comes the opportunity to really engage with audiences more fully, to be dominant from

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a mindshare standpoint, and to be dominant from a loyalty standpoint. But without the cohesion, without the ability to bring those splintered audiences together, marketers really face huge challenges.”

#### CONCLUSION

Marketer after marketer interviewed for this paper described how rich, high-quality content, in multiple forms and formats and distributed intelligently to the right media channels, has emerged as the backbone of their marketing strategies. Their anecdotal evidence correlates with recent research, and with our own intuitive understanding of the breathtakingly fast evolution of digital media and marketing. Chacko, the PR Newswire CEO, describes content marketing as “storytelling with a purpose.” However, he goes on to say, “Increasingly, that relationship is becoming much simpler. Content is marketing. It’s a richer, more nuanced way of being able to communicate what a company is about, what it does, what its responsibilities are, what products and services it provides, what distinguishes it from other entities who are in the same business; what value it creates.”

Content, it turns out, really is marketing.

**ABOUT CNW**

CNW (Canada Newswire), connects organizations to relevant news and information consumers across the country and around the world. CNW is committed to providing integrated, intelligent communications and disclosure services that help clients work more efficiently and meet their objectives. In addition to newswire distribution, CNW offers webcast, video, photography, translation, regulatory filing services and MediaVantage, a web-based solution offering real-time media monitoring, communications workflow solutions and campaign measurement capability.

CNW is reinventing the newswire by giving clients the power to streamline their workload and combat a communications cycle that no longer has a clear beginning or end. With CNW's integrated communication services clients can create, collaborate, distribute, engage, monitor and analyze, allowing them to work more efficiently and meet their objectives.

*This white paper was developed by PR Newswire ([www.prnewswire.com](http://www.prnewswire.com)), CNW's parent company.*

**SOURCES**

- <sup>1</sup>. ContentWise and Custom Content Council Spending Study: A Look at How Corporate America Invests in Branded Content, December 2009.
- <sup>2</sup>. MarketingProfs and Junta42, B2B Content Marketing: 2010 Benchmarks, Budgets And Trends, September 2010