Content Enjoy a Glorious Reign

Why stocking your website with exclusive content is worth the effort

SUSAN SOLOMON
susan.solomon@stjoe.org

Content has forever been king for marketing professionals, yet recently, discussions have intensified about the importance of content generation in building a digital reputation. "Content marketing" and "brand journalism" are widely talked about.

First, some definitions: Content marketing is the process of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire and engage a target audience. It can leverage a variety of channels (print, mobile, social, etc.), but unlike pure advertising, it relies on storytelling rather than bravado. Or, to put it simply, if you want to tell the world that you're a rock star, advertise. If you want to show why you're one, have great content.

Brand journalism follows the same philosophy but contains a dash of controversy, especially for journalists. It employs digital publishing and social media to spread content and speak directly to consumers. Marketing professionals disintermediate news professionals by writing and distributing their own stories.

Journalists' concerns aside, why have content marketing and brand journalism become such hot topics?

One reason is that the platforms for content dissemination have exploded in recent years. Whereas there were formerly just Facebook and Twitter, there now are so many new options. It's enough to make marketing professionals' heads spin. (For example, are you familiar with Vine?)

Also, with Google's Penguin product, the rules of search have changed and great content is key to winning the game. Traditional chest thumping and flaccid text that fails to engage readers are not going to get anyone anywhere because a bad user experience is synonymous with low Google rankings. And low rankings are death to marketing professionals.

The Cleveland Clinic's Health Hub is one of the leaders of the content marketing pack. The site is filled with content generated by experts within the organization. Users are encouraged to share as much of the stories on as many platforms as they choose. Mayo Clinic offers a similar site.

So how does one get started with content marketing? First, eschew any preconceptions that content is purely the
If you want to tell the world that you’re a **ROCK STAR**, advertise. If you want to show why you’re one, **HAVE GREAT CONTENT**.

written word. Social media platforms are driving a visual revolution. Think about the unique and, admittedly, addictive visual platform of Pinterest, and if seeking an example of how it’s done right, go to *The Wall Street Journal’s* Pinterest site, where the editors have created a fascinating blend of words and images. Also, don’t forget Instagram, the fun photo-sharing network. Not only can users post photos, but also they can edit them with sophisticated tools to make their visual postings truly intriguing.

Even the traditionally text-focused platforms have gone visual. Google+ offers lots of white space and larger photo options, and it’s no secret that Facebook content with attractive visuals gets noticed more in a news feed.

It’s not all about pretty pictures, though. There has to be a great story to tell, which usually doesn’t worry most marketing professionals. But if you’re one of those rare marketing professionals who isn’t writing the next great American novel in your after-hours, here are some ideas for search-engine-loving content:

- **Polls and surveys**: Display results visually and publish them on your site. Then reach out to media outlets to discuss your findings.
- **React to news**: Journalists do it all the time: Find a local angle to a story that everyone is talking about. This technique helps the content provider to be viewed as relevant and as an expert.
- **User-generated content**: Ask readers to comment on or review a recent health seminar. Yes, there’s a risk, but positive comments from unbiased readers are well worth it.

Of course, have a social media policy clearly visible that protects you from any potential HIPAA issues.

Once the stories are lined up, establish a reliable editorial calendar. Track your material’s placement and production, and plot its repurposing and promotion. For example, content placed on Facebook one day can easily become Web copy, an Instagram upload and a Pinterest post the next.

**Content is the new king? Not exactly.** For marketing professionals leveraging the new platforms, it’s more like a diamond jubilee celebration. Now go join the party. **mhs**

---

**Susan Solomon** is vice president of marketing and communications for St. Joseph Health, a 14-hospital health system in California, Texas and New Mexico.