MEDIACOM

Q and A: Playbuzz on the growth of content marketing and the challenges ahead

OPINION

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Content marketing is becoming an important part of every brand's arsenal. But what are the challenges of producing good content? And what's the best way of measuring its success? Daniel Fisher, Managing Director of Europe at Disney-backed storytelling platform Playbuzz, chats with Nick Palmer, Head of Content Strategy at MediaCom Beyond Advertising EMEA.

Nick Palmer: Marketers are increasingly wise to the benefits of content marketing and we expect spend in this sector to more than double in the next three years. But, in your opinion,

what are the barriers to creating great content and how can we guarantee success?

Daniel Fisher: It should come as no surprise that content marketing [is estimated to grow](#) from around $195bn today to $413bn by 2021. The attractiveness of branded content to a CMO makes sense: it's a bigger opportunity to build brand awareness, increase conversion rates, shift perceptions and to speak directly to a new generation that distrusts advertising and are ad-blocker native.

Given the growing importance of this medium, it's essential we address some key challenges in making branded content campaigns successful. The main issue is that, as an industry, we must stop attempting to apply traditional digital marketing models and metrics to what is essentially a content-driven, not advertising-driven, model.

In the absence of limitless organic traffic, there is a wastage issue in terms of losing consumers on the journey between native promotion units and the content itself. What's more, if a consumer even reaches your beautifully constructed content, how do you know whether they have truly engaged with it?

The first thing is understanding if the consumer *really* engaged. The trouble is, when the industry incentivises media owners to drive impressions (CPMs) to branded content, it creates a market dynamic that encourages 'click-bait' tactics and a lack of focus on the conversion of the content. We must eliminate this problem.

NP: Consumer journeys are changing all the time. The advancement of 'social commerce', which encourages consumers to make purchases straight from their social feeds, is just one example of this. How can we ensure great branded content doesn't get lost in this mix?

DF: The growth of digital branded content has introduced an additional step in the chain of the user journey to an advertising message. Unlike a Mid Page Unit (MPU), Direct Response (DR) or video ad, where the brand message and advert are shown almost simultaneously, branded content typically lives in a native (and often editorialised) environment.

A consumer, therefore, needs to be taken on a journey to discover that content. The most common routes to discovery are homepage promotions on publishers' sites, social promotion and the usage of 'native ad units', which take many different forms – from content recommendation to units that mimic editorial promotion units.

While these units perform an important task – to supplement organic traffic – they typically have very low (sub 0.5%) conversion rates (like other MPU units). Low conversion is due to a number of reasons but often comes down to a mismatch between user expectations and what they receive when they land on the content – commonly known as clickbait.

NP: Clickbait is an offensive word in our business. But there's an even bigger problem; most brands don't even know how to share their content correctly. Our research shows 52% of ads on Facebook contain no discernible brand cues while a quarter (24%) are not understandable without sound. That's a shame because Millward Brown research shows that correctly matching creative to platform increases ROI by 57%. Which brands do you think *are* tailoring their branded content correctly – either on social or in other environments?

DF: There are many media owners who do branded content very well and know how to deeply engage their users to drive results. Examples include this [Plantation to Prison](#) item by *The New York Times* & Netflix, as well as Refinery 29's [sponsored item](#) in partnership with NARS. The key threads in both are engagement, interactivity, personalisation (putting the user at the centre) and value exchange.

Another example is the campaign Playbuzz created with MediaCom for Sky Q. To drive awareness of the brand's new home entertainment features for two distinct target audiences, we executed a two-phase approach which centred on interactive, targeted and personalised branded content. The first – via an interactive assessment tool – [asked users](#) what was important when it came to home entertainment set-up, with the second phase using those preference data insights [to communicate](#) the relevant benefits of Sky Q and its new features in a much more personal manner.

This campaign is a prime example of how, through engagement-based campaigns, you can target two completely different audiences, identify behavioural preferences in each, and deliver a specific and more personalised solution based on your findings. Built on a Cost Per Engagement (CPE) model, the campaign garnered an 88.2% brand lift, as reported by Nielsen.

NP: As an industry, we are under increasing pressure to make Cost Per Engagement as low as possible. The trouble is, definitions of 'engagements' are changeable. How do you define CPE at Playbuzz and why do you think this is an important metric?

DF: Generally speaking, CPE means that marketers only pay for intentional interactions – when a consumer actually engages with the content – rather than a passive impression. This model enables you to know whether or not whoever is running your campaign is driving value and reducing media wastage.

CPE also means that rather than paying for one click without an understanding of what the consumer did next, an advertiser pays once for multiple interactions with an engaged user.

Additional benefits of this model include GDPR compliant data collection about user intent and behaviour as the user is interacting with content, providing a much deeper insight into the user's preferences. This can impact the effectiveness of your call to action choice to a point of purchase.

NP: In terms of distribution, we can now target multiple audience sub-segments with the media we buy. We can also understand 'signals' (buying signals or contextual ones) in real time. This is powerful stuff. Recently, for one of our global clients, for example, we matched dynamic creative to the segments we were buying programmatically to increase media performance by 20-48% and sales revenue by 45%. As the distribution of branded content becomes increasingly complex, how will measurement continue to evolve?

DF: With today's digitally savvy consumers, it's not enough to launch a piece of content and pray it performs. Branded content needs to be measured like any other piece of

advertising, but with technology and metrics adapted to its unique nature. KPIs can no longer be clicks and views standalone but must also incorporate engagements in-item, scroll depth, dwell time and more. If the format of your campaign is evolving to align with consumers' consumption habits, shouldn't your metrics of success evolve as well?

Next time you launch a branded content campaign, I urge you to not just consider the content in abstract and the number of impressions guaranteed, but rather the journey the consumer makes to the content and how to ensure when they get there that they are engaging with it. My belief is that the future lies in streamlining this user journey so that the content is discovered and engaged within the same interaction.

Above: Nick Palmer, Head of Content Strategy, MediaCom Beyond Advertising EMEA (left); Daniel Fisher, Managing Director of Europe, Playbuzz (right)

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