

**PR**News

THE BOOK OF  
**CONTENT  
MARKETING**  
STRATEGIES & TACTICS

# PRN

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## Foreword

Dear reader:

Content marketers are tasked with creating interesting, insightful content that delivers a branded message for their organization, brand or client. Creating great content has always been an open-ended and subjective challenge, but the task for content marketers doesn't stop at creation. Delivery is important as well, and choosing where an article or visual will be housed and shared from necessarily impacts how it's made. Therein lies the mission for content marketers—creating excellent content while begging the question of where it will eventually be consumed.

On top of these challenges is a question of definitions. In an industry where some make sport of throwing around undefined, sometimes made-up words, vocabulary relating to content marketing increasingly frustrates the lexicographer. No one can seem to pinpoint the difference between “sponsored content,” “branded content” and “native advertising” with precision. At the same time, it seems that everyone is either a “brand journalist” or “thought leader,” while descriptions of those titles remain opaque.

In this 1st edition of *PR News' Book of Content Marketing Strategies & Tactics*, these issues are met with over 45 articles on topics including:

- PR's role in content marketing
- Sponsored content and native advertising
- Live events, webinars and video
- Content marketing for social media
- And visual storytelling, among others

From agency practitioners and brand managers to leaders in technology and academics, our contributors bring insights from a variety of sectors and offer advice from their experience in producing and distributing content.

I want to thank these contributors who so eloquently shared their ideas, tips and best practices. I also want to thank you, our readers, for letting us help you as you learn new skills, hone existing ones and grow your businesses. The current content marketing environment rewards determination and creativity, and we hope this book will help inspire both.

Sincerely,

*B. Greene*

Brian Greene  
 Editor, PR News

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# Earned Media: The Nexus Between Public Relations and Content Marketing

By Sarah Skerik

The lines between content marketing and PR are blurring as brands embrace storytelling, engage with audiences and develop more owned media. The drivers behind these trends are clear—as traditional media struggles, brands have the opportunity to fill information vacuums with content they've developed. However, as content marketing has matured, it's become clear that organizations can't phone in the development of their messages.

Content has to be timely, interesting and of real utility for audiences. As organizations become more adept at developing and deploying high value content, the opportunity for them to earn media with their messages also presents itself. Media pick-up and earned mentions carry particular weight with buyers, and this relationship is at the nexus of the connection between public relations and content marketing.

PR pros have an outsize opportunity to deliver more than impressions. They can deliver potential buyers, and that also means impacting the top line and producing measurable business results. Together, PR and marketing can earn attention and media for brands.

## Earned Media and Buyer Influence

According to a recent study sponsored by InPowered and conducted by Nielsen, earned media—defined as content sourced from credible third party experts—consistently provides more benefit to brands than user

generated or branded content.

Google also recognizes the value of earned media mentions, codifying their value in their patent application for the Panda search algorithm, which described implied links as references to a Web site or Web page that do not include a physical link to that Web site or Web page, and goes on to detail the role of these implied links in the process of determining the search rank of a page.

More simply, implied links are relevant earned mentions, and they run the gamut from media pick up to references on blog posts to mentions in discussion groups.

“What does all this mean? It means that once a connection is made by someone typing in a brand name or other search query and then clicking on a site, it creates a connection in Google's eyes,” SEO expert Simon Penson explained in a [Moz.com](#) post about brand mentions. “The search engine can then store that info and use it in the context of unlinked mentions around the Web in order to help weight rankings of particular sites.”

The connection between earned media and brand sales cycles is undeniable, but harnessing the power of earned media and implied links for the benefit of the brand requires integration of PR and content marketing.

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**Delivering content in context with an additional layer of social credibility is crucial.**

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### Prospect, Influencer or Both?

Imagine that a potential customer is also a fervent industry blogger with a solid social media following amongst fellow professionals in the same space. Who owns that relationship, PR or marketing? The answer is both.

PR practitioners understand influence, how it accrues and from where it flows. Building relationships with key media, bloggers and analysts—the emerging practice of influencer relations—is the cornerstone of building visibility for a brand.

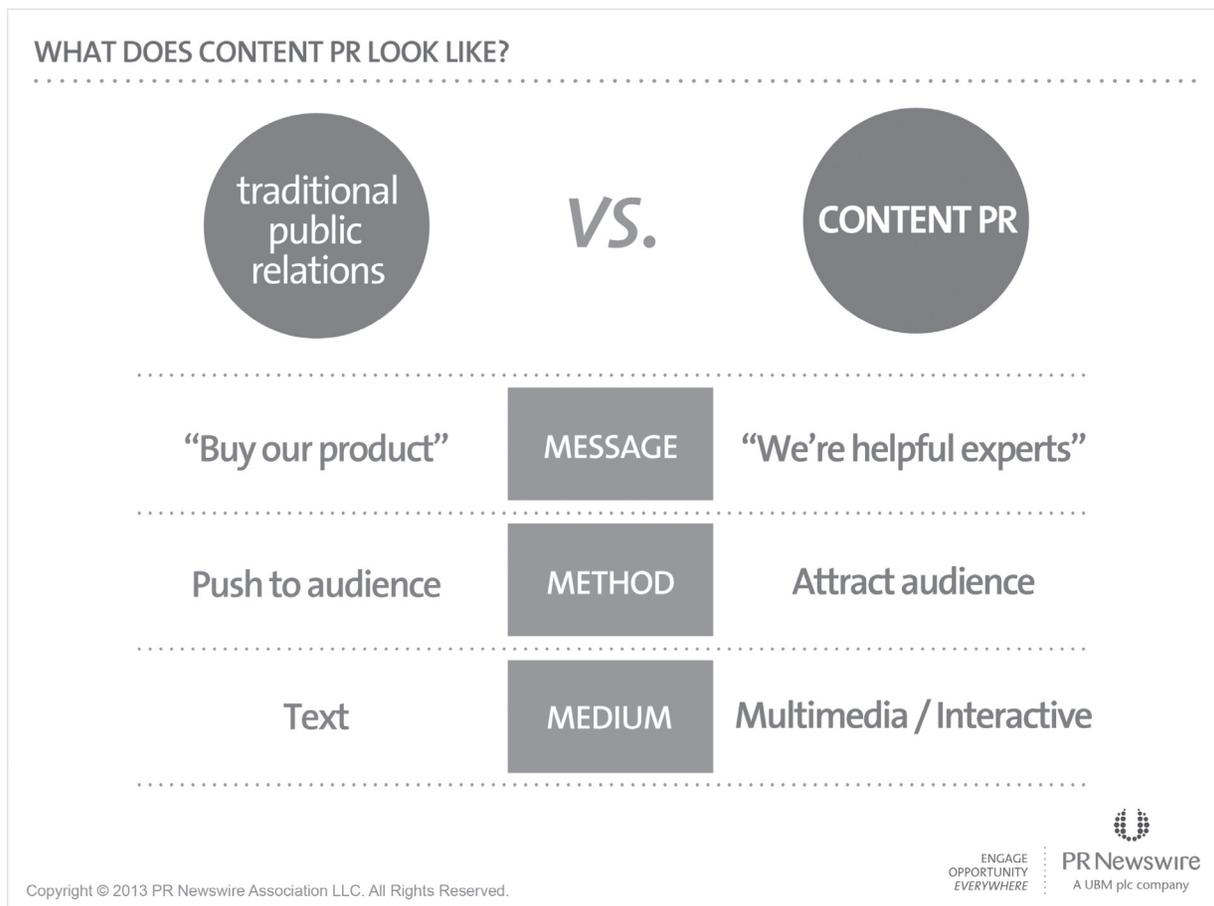
Additionally, PR pros understand the subtleties of the story and how to wrap information in context so that it makes sense to an audience. Marketers are in step with marketplace trends and buyer pain points, and they often develop content designed to speak to the issues and interests of current and poten-

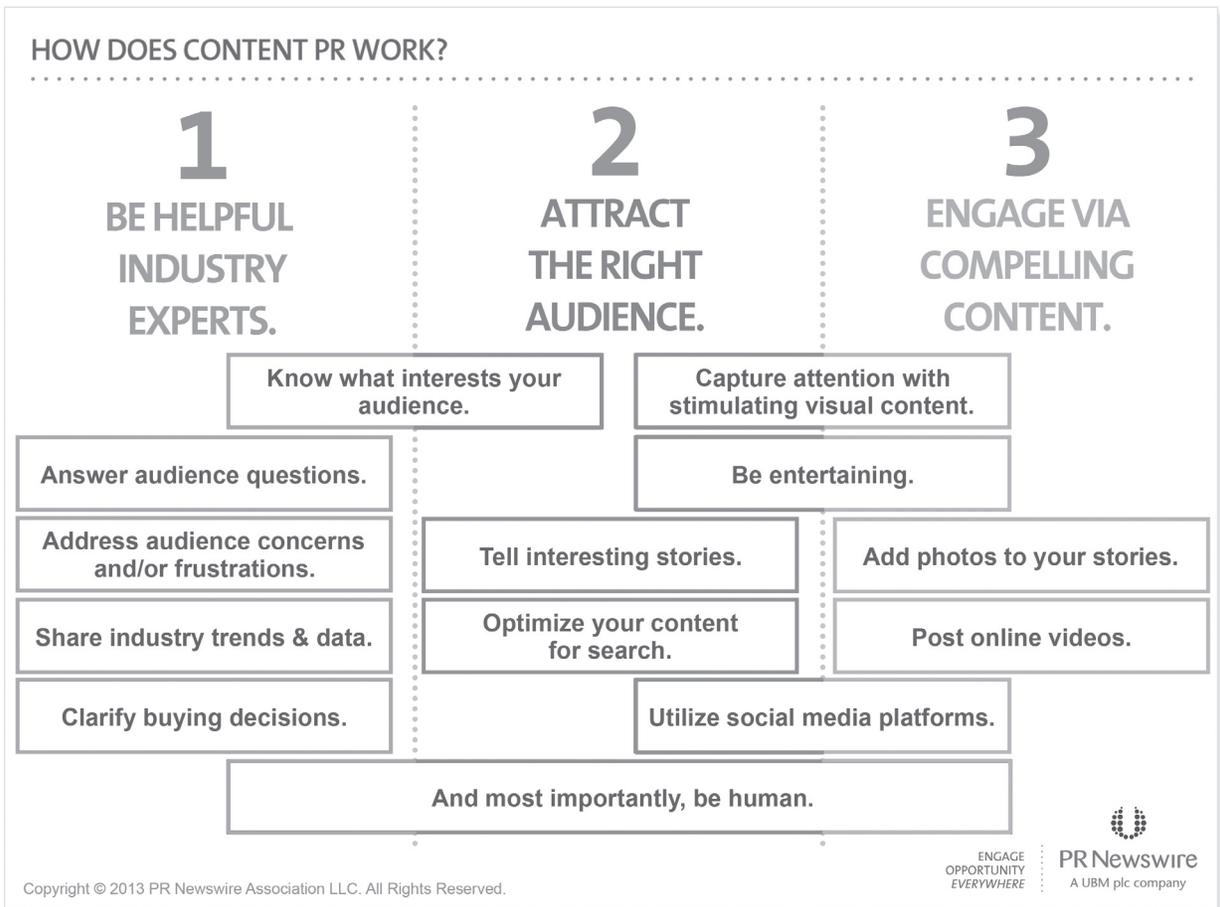
tial customers. At the intersection of PR and marketing, one finds newsworthy owned content that both teams can utilize and promote.

A brand with a truly integrated program won't be terribly concerned with pigeonholing this prospect, at least not at the outset. They'll be developing content that's designed to engage and inform the prospect, inspire mentions from bloggers and invite social sharing.

### PR Tactics for Content Marketing

Delivering content in context with an additional layer of social credibility is crucial in order to keep your brand top of mind in the buyer's decision process. Ensuring your content is surfaced continually among a specific constituency is another element of success, and there are a number of tactics communica-





tors can use to achieve consistent, contextual visibility of content. These include:

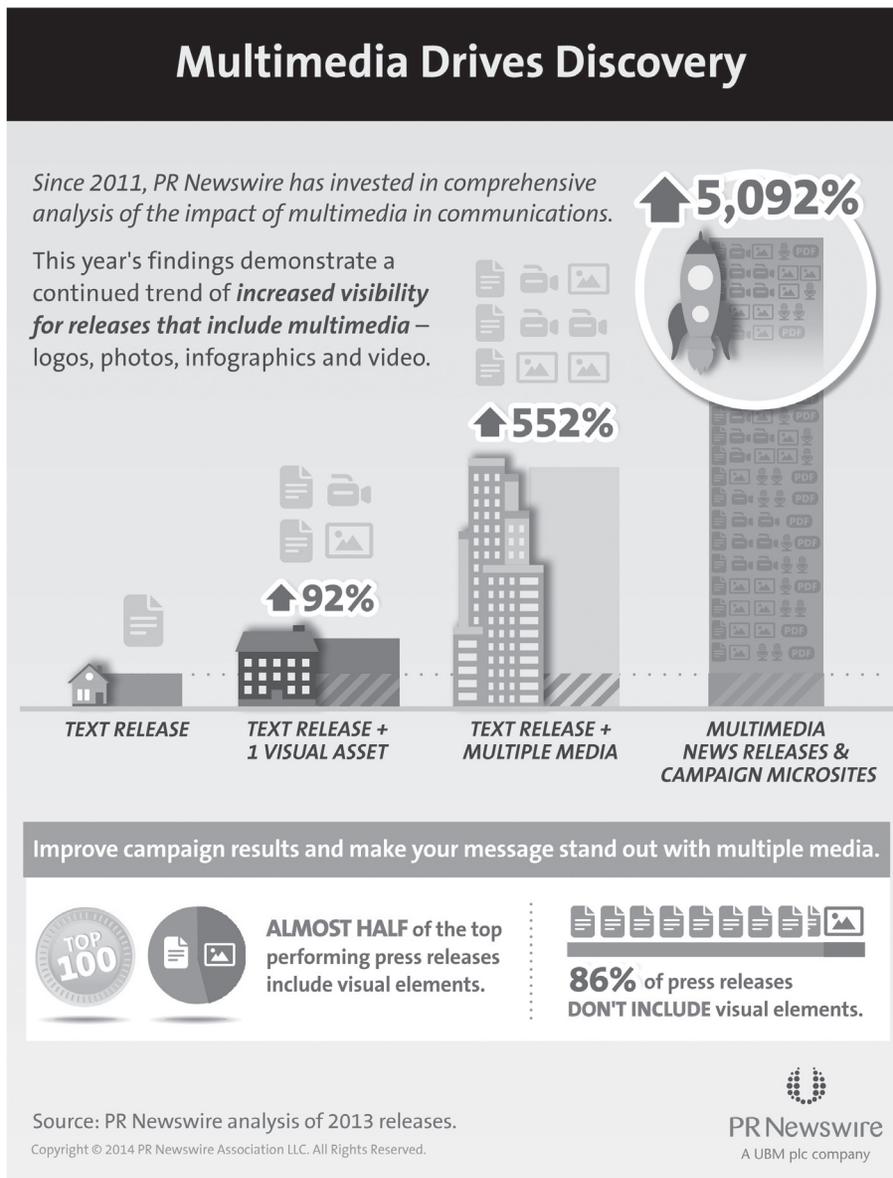
- Capitalize on attention opportunities created by industry news trends, tying messages to trending developments or syncing your content calendar with the editorial calendars of key publications.
- Atomize content and repackage it, emphasizing different angles or message elements, to increase audience attraction and appeal to narrow interests. Break apart white papers, webinar transcripts and other big blocks of content, and surface interesting messages and facts.
- Incorporate visuals in all your communications. Content with visuals generate better engagement among the audience, arresting their attention and keeping them on the page longer, especially in the case of video.

This helps brands build affinity, and it encourages important following actions from the audience. When audiences spend more time on your Web site and interact with the content there, it sends a powerful and positive signal to search engines, indicating that the your content is valuable. That, in turn, contributes positively to search rank. Incorporating PR tactics into the content marketing mix will help marketers reach beyond their email databases and social media followers into new audiences, introducing the brand to prospects in a credible, contextual manner.

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**Driving discovery of the content your brand publishes requires its own strategy.**

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ever, ensuring that your messages reach the audiences that they are intended for is what will lead to measurable outcomes for your business. Delivering content to relevant audiences across the Web on social channels, via news web sites and in industry niches allows your content to be easily discovered. When people read your content and share it within their networks, these social conversations amplify your message and increase exposure to relevant groups of people. Discoverability essentially lays the groundwork for building trust.

Learn to recognize newsworthy messages within the content your brand generates and pitch it proactively to industry bloggers, peers

with strong social followings, influencers and stakeholders. Driving discovery of the content your brand publishes requires its own strategy, and garnering earned media with your company content can significantly increase the lifespan, reach and effectiveness of your campaigns. **PRN**

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*Sarah Skerik is vice president of strategic communications at PR Newswire/MultiVu.*

# Creating Remarkable Sponsored Content That Consumers Would Want to Pay For

By Ana Maria Raynes

When Ellen DeGeneres assembled her celebrity friends at the Oscars for what instantly became the world's most famous “selfie,” it was a watershed moment for what is known today as “sponsored content.” That night, the image was re-tweeted over 2 million times, setting a new record. But few of the show's 43 million domestic viewers recognized that the entertaining and seemingly spontaneous event was essentially a smart-phone marketing stunt.

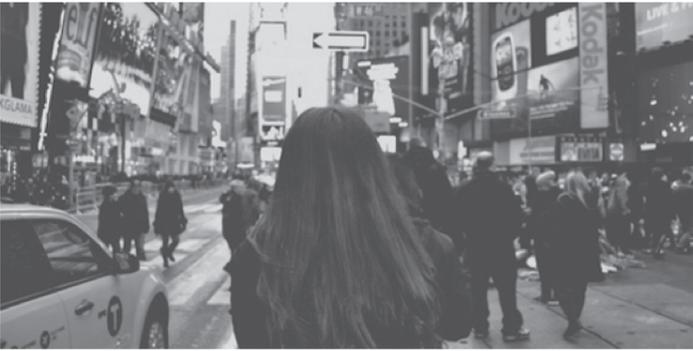
Sponsored content, a term often used interchangeably with “native advertising,” refers to content that is consistent in form and appearance to the publisher's (or, in the case of Ellen's on-camera tweet foray, the broadcaster's) original content. It's “native” in the sense that it's specific to the particular platform on the medium in which it appears—in this instance, the Academy Awards presentation on a TV network. It could not work anywhere else.

In public relations, perhaps the element that comes closest to sponsored content is the advertorial, in which advertisers attempt to gain attention by providing content in the context of the user's experience. But the relationship is extremely limited, since advertorials obviously are not native to a single platform and rarely contain the entertainment value that makes

creative sponsored content “shareable.”

With the rise of sponsored content, the lines around ads become blurred because the content is the ad. The rise in the success of native ads is due to the creativity that brands employ when delivering sponsored contextual messages. With native ads, no two placements will look alike because the advertisement must adapt to the format, function and user experience of each medium.

For example, **Uber**, a mobile car service app, chose to write a list-based article on *Elite Daily* to introduce the Gen Y audience to its service. The article, “Thirteen Things New Yorkers Do Differently” reached my inbox when a young woman on my team forwarded it to me because a majority of her friends were sharing it through social media. Uber was smart to not include itself within the article (although the brand was mandated by the FTC to place a “Sponsored by Uber” tag



13 Things New Yorkers Do Differently

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above the article). Uber captured its audience natively through content that is relevant to the audience it wants to attract.

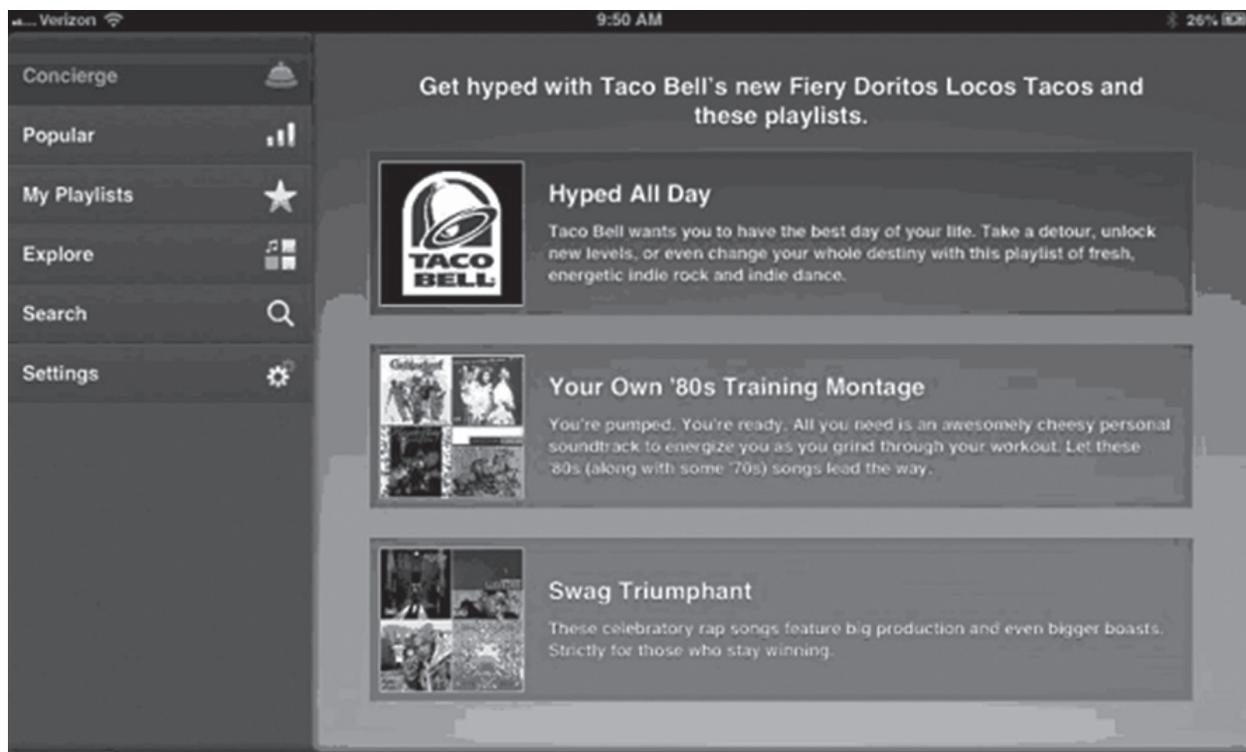
The bar for creative online advertising continues to rise. As consumers' content options grow, their time gets more limited and their skepticism toward blatant marketing increases. This is good news for everyone involved. Brands will be challenged to connect with consumers on a deeper level, building loyal and passionate followings while consumers will continue to be in the driver's seat in judging the content they choose to consume.

Brands like **Songza**, a music-streaming app that uses a team of 50 freelance music experts who arrange songs based on a certain mood or activity, has secured sponsorship deals with **Febreze**, **HSN**, **Samsung** and **Taco Bell**. What differentiates Songza is that it didn't encourage these brands to buy interruptive ads similar to those at **Pandora** or **Spotify**. Instead, Songza's editorial team collaborated with each company to craft branded playlists.

## Publishers need to figure out new ways to provide value in order to survive.

By making the brand part of the music selection process, Songza can incorporate the brand into its platform without ruining a user's listening experience. Brands, in return, receive the entire share of voice within that playlist. The results were seen all over **Twitter**, as fans were ecstatic that Taco Bell had become their personal DJ. However, thinking way outside the box does come with a hefty price. The rumored price tag to run a branded playlist for four weeks is said to be \$500,000.

With brands having access to so many different options for placing their ads, there is a supply and demand imbalance developing in the media. Publishers need to figure out new ways to provide value in order to survive. Top bloggers, for example, have created forms of revenue through Twitter parties, conversa-



*On Twitter, fans were ecstatic that Taco Bell had become their personal Songza DJ.*

tions initiated by influential bloggers that take place on Twitter at specific times on behalf of a brand. When we talked to Vera Sweeney from Lady and the Blog, a mom lifestyle blog, she had this to say about Twitter parties:

“I host Twitter parties several times a month with my partner Audrey McClelland. Together, for one hour, we push out key messaging from our partner while engaging our followers in an interactive and fun conversation. We average about 10 million impressions for that hour. It’s a great way to make a lot of noise and get the word out about a product. We work with a variety of top consumer products, including P&G brands such as **Tide** and **Downy**. We have also done network gigs with the Olympics and the Emmys.”

The creativity and opportunity for native advertising is staggering. The major challenge is doing it correctly. The attraction for many advertisers is that the format doesn’t exactly feel like advertising. But publishers need to make sure they follow the guidelines. If a brand or publisher disguises native content as

editorial content or violates journalistic best practices, readers will recognize it and take to social media to expose the offending brand.

A great example of this occurred when *The Atlantic* posted an advertorial for the Church of Scientology. The advertorial followed FTC regulations, as *The Atlantic* tagged the piece as sponsored content. But it was still a very obvious sales pitch, and readers expressed their dislike for the article on social media. Eventually, the controversy reached *The Atlantic*’s president, the post went dark, and the publication apologized and adopted new policies.

For the most part, successful media brands have always been built on quality. In this age of experimentation, it will be interesting to see how native advertising will scale. The challenge ahead for brands and publishers will be to create native content that a consumer would want to pay for.

A great example of this is **Red Bull**’s “The Art of Flight,” a sponsored documentary film about snowboarding. The movie is all



*Red Bull’s documentary is a fun and exhilarating piece that plays to what the risk-taking Red Bull audience believes—that the drink does “give you wings.”*

## The Components of Native Advertising

Because native advertising units closely resemble editorial content on Web pages and are within the types of content streams familiar to users of social networks, they attract higher click-through rates and engagement levels from the people viewing them.

The **Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB)** has identified six types of native ads:

1. **In-feed units:** You've likely seen these native ad units on the pages of Forbes, Yahoo, Facebook and Twitter. They are often identified as being "sponsored by (brand)," "sponsored content" or "suggested post."
2. **Paid search units:** The familiar "sponsored listings" ads—in the form of small text ads or graphical units—seen on Google, Yahoo, Bing and other search engines. Such ads are usually accompanied by a small "Ad" graphic and may appear in a shaded area.
3. **Recommendation widgets:** These usually appear "below the fold" on publisher sites. Their disclosure language typically includes terms such as "you might like," "you may have missed" or similar language.
4. **Promoted listings:** Often seen on Amazon, eBay and Yelp, they typically are identified as being "sponsored products."
5. **In-image ad units:** These native units place relevant advertising within images which may be editorial in nature. Defined borders or other graphical demarcations differentiate them from editorial content.
6. **Custom native ad units:** These ads weave editorial and promotional messaging in ways that may be completely unique. *The New York Times*, Hearst and other leading publishers are currently experimenting with such ad units.

Native ad units are popular with advertisers and publishers because users respond well to ad units that seamlessly integrate with digital content. However, disclosure is vital in order to avoid negative blowback from users. The IAB recommends that native ad units "use language that conveys that the advertising has been paid for" and that such disclosure "be large and visible enough for a consumer to notice it in the context of the given page and/or relative to the device the ad is being viewed on."

Red Bull all the time—from the skis to the helicopter, everything is Red Bull. But the cinematography and storyline are so captivating and well produced that the overt Red Bull branding isn't bothersome. Red Bull is the brand to follow when setting out to create great native ads. They are authentic, they tell great stories, and they do not try to make a secret of the fact that it's an advertisement.

Smart brands think like great storytellers. Songza's CEO has said that his goal when creating content is audience-focused: "Make them share it." This is the element native ad-

vertisement has that no other ads possess. It's an especially important point that goes to the heart of sponsored content. In fact, most of the examples I have used in this article were shared with me by others.

This is a very exciting time for content creators. The possibilities and challenges for original, outside of the box content marketing is a breath of fresh air for the entire marketing field. **PRN**

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*Ana Maria Raynes is director of social media at Didit.*