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Foreword

Dear reader,

Social media has become one of the most ubiquitous communications forms in modern culture. Some think that it's the democratizing force civilization has been waiting for, as it allows for the spread of information in real-time by real people. Thanks to social media, regular people have more power to disseminate their thoughts and ideas than ever before. Others see social media as a problem, inundating our lives with information that we might not need—making us “distracted from distraction by distraction,” as T.S. Eliot once said.

On the Internet, what happened two weeks ago can sometimes be considered ancient history, as trends move at an ever-accelerating pace. Strategies for capitalizing on those trends need to move at breakneck speed as well or risk getting left behind. It's an exciting time for communications, but it's also a difficult one to navigate intelligently.

This edition of *PR News' Digital PR & Social Media Guidebook* has one essential purpose: helping you maximize your communications effectiveness in the digital world. The articles in the pages that follow, produced both by the PR News staff and more than fifty communications industry thought leaders, focus on most every facet of digital PR and social media.

In our businesses, we're reminded every day how much the digital space is changing the way we do our jobs. Having Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube accounts are now requisites for every business despite these platforms' relatively recent arrival on the media scene. How can we best put them to use? How do we effectively engage with audiences that have just recently been given a voice? And how can we know if our strategies are working?

In this guidebook, we explore these questions and others. We expound on how digital communications is influencing branded content and how the content-creation process is giving companies a powerful avenue to connect with their customers. And we also show how digital PR and social media are changing the more traditional areas in which PR plays a critical role—from internal communications to influencer relations to legal concerns.

Regardless of the sector you practice in, we think that the lessons contained in this book will benefit you as you continue to evolve your marketing-communications strategy.

I want to thank our contributors to this guidebook who so eloquently shared their ideas, tips and best practices. And I want to thank you, our readers, for letting us help you as you learn new skills, hone existing ones and grow your businesses.

Sincerely,

B. Greene

Brian Greene
 Editor, *PR News*



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Building a Strategy in One-Size-Does-Not-Fit-All World of Social Media Marketing

By Amy Schoenberger

Over the past decade, the list of emerging social media marketing channels has grown at an astonishing pace. While most brands recognize the important influence social media can have on their businesses, weary marketers continue to struggle to keep stride with the continued surge in social platforms and new consumer-facing technologies. A 2013 nationwide survey of marketers by digital marketing and media company Adobe indicated that social media is among marketers' biggest concerns and that it will be one of their key focus areas over the next three years. This concern is warranted—according to the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, more than 7 in 10 adult consumers in the United States actively use social media. The numbers speak for themselves.

If brands can offer a way to make connections with their consumers happen organically, blending seamlessly into the way people are already living their lives, then they've nailed it.

The New Norm

Facebook, with its 1.1 billion users, is no longer the only game in town. LinkedIn and Twitter report 250 million and 200 million users respec-

tively. Further, Instagram, Pinterest and Tumblr continue to gain traction among millions of fans—not to mention the up and comers such as Snapchat, Path and more. And, while some suggest that the bubble may burst, new channels and growing numbers indicate that consumers' love affair with social media is not about to lose its spark. Mark Zuckerberg said it best: "People have really gotten comfortable not only sharing more information and different kinds, but more openly and with more people—and that social norm is just something that has evolved over time."

Taking a Platform-Specific Approach

Today, a decade since the birth of Facebook, one thing is clear: Social media programs must be purposeful and should complement a full-range of offline and online tactics to advance overall marketing strategy and impact a brand. However, that does not mean that a brand must or should be present on every social media channel, despite the pressure they may feel to be everywhere. Nor does it mean that the same brand content can or should be pushed out over all platforms. In fact, trying to be all things to all consumers across all channels is a great first step to disengaging and losing fans and followers.

Each social platform and channel has a distinct audience with different and sometimes contradictory needs and wants. Further, social media platforms can no longer be lumped together—the category is becoming increasingly fragmented into various subsets, from visual sharing, photo sharing, text sharing and

more. In response, savvy marketers are taking a platform-specific approach, pinpointing select channels and customizing channel-appropriate social content to target consumers. By doing so, they can:

- Maximize return on investments rather than diluting efforts and fragmenting resources.
- Create a genuine voice because they will know who they are speaking to and what motivates their audiences to engage.
- Exhaust platform offerings and opportunities, as they will have an incredibly deep knowledge of a few relevant channels and platforms. This kind of level of understanding is hard to achieve when always chasing the next new social media silver bullet.

One Size Does Not Fit All

Facebook or Twitter? Snapchat or Vine? LinkedIn or **Google+**? All of the above? Narrowing the social playing field and customizing content by channel requires companies to examine their marketing objectives, goals and budgets. Further, they should also ask themselves the following questions:

- **Who are you?**
Personify your brand—what is your point of view, and what can you say that no other brands can say? What do you stand for, and how can you communicate that via the social media platform you're focusing on?
- **Who are you trying to reach?**
Who is your target consumer? Define them as more than a gender and age range. What are their habits, likes, dislikes, needs and wants? How do they translate to social media? Look at the latest e-marketer report and find out what motivates your consumer.
- **Where is your consumer most active?**
Where are your consumers most active? What are their online media habits? Do they check Twitter or Facebook first when they wake up in the morning? How are they shar-

ing information with their networks? How are they receiving information? Who influences them and whom are they influencing?

- **Do you have the right team in place to set yourself up for success?**

Marketing roles are going to shift completely, and we will see more of an investment in people with highly specialized skillsets. Do you have someone who can write for social? Do you need someone who has photography or visual editing skills? Do you have enough manpower to manage several platforms, or are you best equipped to manage just one or two channels?

Best Case Examples

Here is a look at three prime examples of companies taking a platform-specific approach, showing that they understand their consumers' social media habits:

Facebook: Consumers connect with friends and share everyday life events. They catch up without having to pick up the phone or schedule a visit.

The insurance company **Allstate** wanted to find a way to connect with consumers while making its brand relevant within the context of people's social circles. Instead of talking insurance, Allstate created a Facebook page based on a fictional character featured in the company's advertising—"Mayhem." Mayhem's humorous posts have garnered him 1.7 million likes.

Putting a face and name to a relatable, although fictional, character makes consumers feel like they are interacting with one of their friends and connects them to the brand.

LinkedIn: LinkedIn members want to connect with industry-related colleagues and peers. LinkedIn is the virtual form of a networking event or career fair.

NPR uses its LinkedIn page to post content of interest to job seekers, including articles. They often link the content back to the NPR website.

Positioning itself as a resource for job seekers

opens the NPR brand to a whole new audience, drives traffic to its site, and gets consumers to think of the NPR brand as a strong and relevant resource.

Twitter: Consumers flock to Twitter for breaking news, pop culture stories and events. They also use Twitter to connect with like-minded people (not necessarily friends) who can offer counsel and advice.

When an unexpected blackout occurred during the 2013 Super Bowl, **Oreo** was at the ready and immediately joined in the fun. Oreo posted a simple graphic with the now-famous caption, “You can still dunk in the dark.” It was the tweet heard around the world.

The content was highly relevant and showed consumers that Oreo is tuned in to its audience. Further, it underscored the brand’s distinct, fun personality.

Conclusion

Marketers need to think critically and strategically to figure out how to employ social media to build consumer relationships and, in doing so, build their brand. If brands can offer a way to make connections with their consumers happen organically, blending seamlessly into the way people are already living their lives, then they’ve nailed it. No matter what new platforms emerge, brands will be primed for success as long as they continue to tailor content with consumers’ specific social media habits in mind. **PRN**

Amy Schoenberger is director of new media at Cone Communications.

With Content Marketing, Brands Have Lots to Say and Lots of Places to Say It

By Michael Winkleman

For years, custom publishers—the original purveyors of content marketing—have talked to their clients about the value of controlling the environment in which their content is published and the distribution stream through which it travels. They suggested that brands launch their own magazines, publish their own books, and enhance their brochures, annual reports, and catalogs with reader-driven content that was both informational and entertaining.

While some doubted the efficacy of this approach, the research—and the results—bore out their claims. For several years in a row, for example, studies conducted by the research firm Roper for the Custom Content Council found that while consumers were well aware that the custom publications they were receiving (from their car companies, hospitals, financial planners, retail stores and more) were produced and distributed by brands looking to sell their products and services, the vast majority—85 percent,

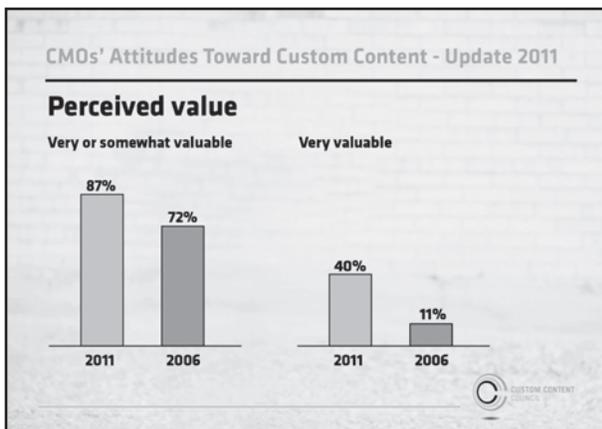
year after year—said that it was fine with them as long as the information provided to them in the custom publications was useful.

The explosive expansion of channels through which branded content can be distributed has exposed a growing consumer base to branded content.

More than that, some three-quarters of respondents routinely said that if they were given the choice of learning about a company through an ad or through an article in a company-sponsored magazine, they'd choose the magazine every time.

The reason for this consumer acceptance could be explained by growing sophistication on the part of marketers, who have come to realize that solid content brings readership, readership fosters interest, and interest drives sales.

Every year, in fact, judges for the Custom Content Council's Pearl Awards, which are focused on editorial, design, and strategic excellence, comment on how much better that year's entries are than the previous year's, how much more effectively they address their audiences' informational needs, and how well they represent their brands. This is particularly brought out through the contest entries that look at how well specific branded-content projects bridge the print/electronic divide, how well they're integrated



Statistics from survey that Roper conducted for the Custom Content Council.

with other marketing programs, how well they achieve corporate objectives, and how well they provide return on investment.

Branded content, in all its forms, is not going away—in fact, it’s likely to expand its reach.

What’s also responsible for this consumer acceptance is the fact that the explosive expansion of channels through which branded content can be distributed has exposed a growing consumer base to branded content. Consumers still receive sponsored “magazines” in the mail, via email, and on their tablets, of course, and corporate websites are now more likely to pair useful content with sales messages.

But increasingly prevalent is the “sponsored content” that appears on news sites that run the gamut from **Buzzfeed** and **The Huffington Post** to **Bloomberg Businessweek** and **InsideCounsel**. Often, this sponsored content, which has come in many cases to be known as “native advertising,” is picked up by readers who forward it via social media to friends and colleagues, expanding the reach of the content—and the brand.

The growth of native advertising has rung alarm bells among some journalists (concerned about a breach in the traditional church/state wall) and regulators, such as the **Federal Trade Commission**, who worry that consumers are being misled by content that so closely resembles editorial content—if only because it is, in fact, more editorial than marketing in both focus and execution.

At a recent FTC hearing on the “blurred lines” that the trend toward native advertising has exposed, many panelists (who included lawyers, journalists, marketers, publishers, and consumer advocates) debated the question of effective labeling: whether branded content should be called “sponsored,” “advertising,” “promotion,”

or something else, and where—and how prominently—that labeling should be placed.

Several researchers cited studies demonstrating that readers rarely noticed or remembered seeing such labeling. In fact, sometimes readers remembered seeing labeling that had not existed. Others cited both empirical and anecdotal research showing that regardless of whether consumers noticed the labeling, these consumers (as in the Roper/CCC study) didn’t care whether the content was sponsored or “organic.” And, building on that level of acceptance, several of the panelists representing brands and publications noted click-through rates that showed greater interest in clearly labeled sponsored content than in content that didn’t have as clear a brand connection.

At the end of the FTC hearing, the conclusion among both panelists and FTC regulators was that branded content, in all its forms, is not going away—in fact, it’s likely to expand its reach. At the same time, however, there was universal acceptance that the connection between the sponsoring brand and the content needed to be clear, not only to protect the consumer but also to enhance the positive impact that content marketing can have on the brand itself.

The confluence of those conclusions points to a great opportunity for marketers (B2C or B2B) to take advantage of both consumer interest in branded content and the range of channels available through which it is distributed.

With so many channels available for content distribution, there’s a tendency to create a piece of content and send it across all channels. Resist that. Audiences are different, with different reading habits and informational needs.

You Have Lots to Say—the Trick Is How You Say It

Conditioned to communicating in and through sound bites, key messages and breaking news, many brands don't necessarily think about the wealth of information (much of it evergreen) they have at their fingertips. By virtue of creating, producing and marketing their products and services, they understand broad societal, economic, technological and cultural trends, fueled by demographics, psychographics and a host of other forces. Most brands have an army of subject matter experts ready to wax eloquent on the topics they deal with every day. What's critical, however, is the way in which the topics are discussed, how the story is both conceived and told.

Key to this is remembering that:

- **One size does not fit all.** With so many channels available for content distribution, there's a tendency to create a piece of content and send it across all channels. Resist that. Audiences are different, with different reading habits and informational needs. Channels are different, not only in terms of length requirements (1000 words, 300 words, 140 characters) but in terms of approach and presentation. Make sure you fit in. As Andrew Essex, vice chairman of the ad agency **Droga5**, told *The New York Times*, native ads "should not come across as anything that doesn't belong. That is what we mean by native: it belongs."
- **Show don't tell—thought leadership is key and expertise is paramount.** The tendency of most marketers when they approach writing content is to showcase the brand, describe its attributes, and go for the sale. While that may work with such instruments as traditional advertising, brochures and product promotion, content marketing needs to be more subtle. It needs to be rooted in the reader's informational needs. It needs to take a higher road, even if the call to action is not clear.

Much branded content is a form of

thought leadership, through which the brand, often through the words of its subject matter experts, shows how smart it is about a given topic. If the reader dives into the content because it's covering a topic of interest and comes away from the content believing that the brand has demonstrated its expertise, then you've come that much closer to not only making a sale but developing customer loyalty.

- **Style is important, but not at the expense of substance.** For content to succeed, it must be informational. While you don't want to give away the store, you do want to provide the insights, expertise and knowledge that will allow a reader to come away from the article believing that you've enriched them, allowing them to enrich you in return.

Content Specifics—Going Beyond What You're Selling

At the FTC hearing, in discussing the sort of content a brand might provide in a native advertisement, one of the panelists suggested a continuum along which content might fall, from clearly related to something with a less obvious connection.

The example this speaker provided could be adapted for almost any brand, whether it's B2C or B2B, whether it's a product or service. In this example, the sponsor was an eyewear emporium. Consider these three treatments, any of which could provide a successful connection between the brand and the consumer:

1. **Most direct:** an article focused on trends in eyewear this season.
2. **Less direct, but still clearly connected:** an article looking at studies that suggest that excessive use of mobile devices has an impact of vision.
3. **Much less direct, but perhaps most engaging:** an article on the top ten travel destinations this year—which, of course, you'll see better with proper eyewear.

Paying It Forward: Vantiv's ROI from Content Marketing

OMNICOMMERCE = in-store + e-commerce + m-commerce

Although mobile payments have attracted a lot of attention:



10% are interested in using mobile phone payments



Usage is still low and likely to remain that way for awhile

39% say they will be using mobile phone payments in five years



2% have actually used mobile phone payments



However, mobile technologies are having a profound impact on merchants, driven by consumer shopping habits.



55% research and purchase online



46% purchase in-store without online research

Coupon downloading by phone has grown in popularity

Online research and purchasing of products worth more than \$50 is now more common than shopping in the store and purchasing without online research.

15% have purchased a product in a store with a downloaded coupon



The blurring of lines shows up in the growth of "showrooming."



28% regularly use showrooming while shopping for higher-priced items.

35% have used showrooming to shop in-store but purchase online.

38% have used showrooming to shop in one store and purchase in another.



Millennials

THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE OF MILLENNIALS



All Consumers

82%

Smartphone/tablet ownership:

61%

21%

Receive coupons on phones:

15%

Use showroom techniques:

31%

Compare via mobile device and purchase online:

20%

29%

Compare via mobile device and purchase in another store:

17%

RESULT

MOBILE CHANNELS ARE NOT REPLACING TRADITIONAL CHANNELS. THEY ARE BEING ADDED TO THEM.

Soon after **Vantiv**, a payment-processing company that serves financial institutions and large merchant organizations, was spun off from **Fifth Third Bank**, it embarked upon a content marketing program designed to familiarize the market with this new entity and establish itself as a thought leader in the industry. The fulcrum for the program was a survey of U.S. consumers and their attitudes about payment systems (credit cards, debit cards, mobile payments, etc.). This was coupled with a telephone survey of top executives in its market. When the surveys were completed and the results analyzed, the findings provided the basis for the company's content marketing strategy.

The strategy was built around four webinars. For each of the webinars, the company generated a white paper. The white paper was distributed to webinar attendees and then posted on the company's thought leadership Web page, where it was used to collect information from people looking to read the paper. The white paper was then repurposed for different channels. Two-page fact sheets (called Vantiv Points) and one-page summaries of the white paper were sent to the sales team, clients, analysts and the media. Blog posts drawn from the white papers appeared on the company's blog, as did thematic infographics (see illustration at left). The company's PR team approached trade publications with bylined article pitches. Key findings were posted on **LinkedIn** and sent out as tweets.

As a result of the volume of material created, the thought leadership section of the company's website became its most popular destination, and a host of business and general-interest publications used the content in articles covering the growth of mobile payments.

As a direct result of the content marketing program, Vantiv brought in:

- 4,431 prospects, of which 665 converted (attended webinars, downloaded papers, or expressed interest in the company)
- 281 came in directly because of thought leadership marketing efforts (they were not in the database prior to the campaign)
- 377 names were passed on to sales (qualified as solid potential leads)
- 87 turned into "opportunities" and 59 were closed—new business won
- 59 pieces of business represented revenue in 2012 of \$1 million
- Return on investment was greater than 400 percent

In considering this, there are three key points to keep in mind:

- By sponsoring this content, you own the article and can control the message.
- Through clearly labeling the content as sponsored, you're reinforcing the connection between your expertise and your brand—there's nothing to be gained by being anything less than transparent about your sponsorship. If nothing else, you want to make sure your content is reinforcing the consumer's trust in your brand.
- By pairing the content with connectivity devices through banner ads, links or contact information, you're allowing readers to act upon their positive reaction to the information you've provided for them.

Channels and Formats Reinforce Each Other

There are several reasons for making sure that your content exists in as many available channels as possible. First, of course, is that it increases the size of the net with which you're catching consumer interest. Perhaps more important, however, is that the channels and formats are not mutually exclusive. When readers see your content in various venues—in print, online, via social media, for example—and it's reinforced by seeing your message in traditional ads and in conventional media, the likelihood of a response and of enhanced consumer interest and loyalty grows. Toward those ends, remember that:

- **Print is alive.** Though some brands and publishers have abandoned print in favor of electronic communications, many are beginning to find their way back, understanding that print, while no longer preeminent, remains—and is likely to remain—a critical part of the content marketing mix.
- **Standard publicity has a place.** While “paid” and “owned” media are both increasingly popular and increasingly important, “earned” media, with its clear third-party endorse-

ment, retains its value. The trick is figuring out when earned trumps paid and owned media—and when it should complement it.

- **Native advertising won't kill organic advertising any more than video killed film.** Some critics worry that the move toward branded content will obviate the need for traditional advertising. The experience of the brands and publishers who spoke at the FTC conference is telling: when a banner ad accompanied native advertising, responses increased. Working together was better than working apart.

Content isn't going away. Neither is content marketing (or branded content or native advertising). It clearly meets both reader needs and brand objectives. What's critical is doing it right—for the brand, for the audience, for the venue, for the channel. In the end, the FTC indicated that it was not likely to take action to regulate native advertising, if only because it seemed clear that the market would correct itself. And that's the beauty of content marketing. If you do it right, the market responds. If you don't, the market doesn't respond, which means you learn to do it right the next time. **PRN**

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