

# CONTENT MARKETING INSIGHTS FROM IAB'S JANUARY 2013 TOWN HALL

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In a Content Marketing Town Hall hosted in the IAB AdLab in New York on January 24, the IAB expressed its interest in helping members wade through growing complexity in Content Marketing with a focus on Publishers and Brands working together. As a starting point for the IAB's involvement, this article reviews some of the insights shared during this inaugural event.

Insight to help you get started...

- **Content Marketing is Old News:** An Introduction
- **Social Media:** Making Connections in Content Marketing
- **Content Was Made to be Shared:** Five Case Studies
- **Making it Work, Staying Simple:** Reducing Complexity
- **Guardrails:** Ethics and Safety for Brand and Publisher
- **Next Steps:** A Look At Where We Go From Here

## Content Marketing is Old News: An Introduction

Opening the IAB's first-ever Town Hall on Content Marketing was special guest, Joe Pulizzi of the Content Marketing Institute (CMI). Pulizzi opened with a story about a man who had a great idea for improving plows in 1837. But with no capital to manufacture and sell his invention, this man instead offered courses on how to plow more efficiently. Impressed with the course, attendees would then ask about any products that might make their jobs easier. This man with a plow was John Deere. Today the John Deere brand publishes *The Furrow*, the world's largest farming magazine.

Pulizzi's opening story brought to life the magic of content marketing and the fact that it's been around for a long time. But in today's complex world of high tech social interaction and content-hungry consumers, being successful at content marketing can be overwhelming and messy. Also, publishers, who largely form the IAB's membership base, want to know how they fit into the content marketing model that seems to be turning brands into competitors.

**But first, what is content marketing and why all the buzz?**

The buzz is this: consumers want content. Giving them content is a very effective way to get their attention. Publishers know this; it's the reason that their ad space is so valuable to brands. Now brands want to be publishers too. The problem is that producing content is expensive and doing it well takes skill. Also, if brands are publishers, where does that leave the original content publishers in the explosion of content marketing. Looking through the appropriate lens, content marketing actually opens up a world where publishers and brands can work together to amplify each other's content. There's a win-win situation here were everyone involved benefits.

*"...if brands are publishers, where does that leave the original content publishers..."*

## Content Marketing is...

Defining content marketing will take an industry, but in short, it's something like what John Deere did. He offered information to an audience who wanted to do things better. He made a connection with them and got them to trust his expertise on a particular topic. He made his product available, but he waited for them to ask for it. And because of the trust he built with them and because of the need he knew they had, they did ask.

As you'll see in the case studies covered later, different strategies are used to build a content marketing strategy. Because creating content is expensive, some strategies turn to some form of content syndication, a way of reusing content in different places. While not content marketing in its purest form, content syndication is one of the many ways to offer content to an audience. Done well, the consumer sees a site full of content that is meaningful and relevant to them, and also consistent with the source of the content. Done poorly, and the consumer sees a messy page full of random, unorganized messages that they are not interested in and therefore do not engage.

As the IAB steps into working with the online advertising world to identify and address the needs of the Industry in content marketing, some big picture ideas highlighted by presenters and attendees are captured here in an effort to provide something that can help members navigate the increasingly complex content marketing arena.

## Social Media: Making Connections in Content Marketing

In a panel discussion moderated by Joe Pulizzi, representatives from BuzzFeed, Unruly Media, and AddThis weigh in on how well brands and publishers are using social media as an important and integral part of their content marketing strategy. At one point Pulizzi commented that when publishers are asked, "Why are you on Facebook?" the overwhelming response has been, "I don't know." With that kind of response as the rule and not the exception, as Pulizzi points out, some guidance is needed on social media's role in content marketing.

### **A Grade for Publishers' Use of Social Media**

When asked what grade panelists would give publishers for their use of social media, BuzzFeed's Jonathan Perelman, VP of Agency Strategy and Industry Development, asks, "When are we going to go from calling it 'social media' to just 'media?'" because media is inherently social. The content publishers who get that get an A+. Those who don't get it get a D-.

Long before technology offered a platform for sharing media, the purpose of media, for brands, has always been to reach an audience and inspire that audience have more favorable purchase intent and, ideally, to share the featured message with their peers.

Michael Goefron, Director of Operations at Unruly Media, reminds us that content should elicit an emotional response. Whether brand or publisher, the message should connect with the reader. Goefron gave content publishers a 'B' in their use of social media because, he says, "They're out there, but they need to be more authentic."

*"When are we going to go from calling it 'social media' to just 'media?'"*

## Social Media and Technology

On the backend side, Greg Cypes, Director of Product at AddThis, brings some focus into the technology of social media in a content marketing campaign. He offers that traditional media grew much faster than social media and says that there's a long way to go before brands embrace social media beyond the simple metrics of 'followers.'

Cypes adds that you can't treat every article the same. For example, a video of "Basset Hounds That Run" is shared differently than articles about a specific health condition. And though content may be targeted to elderly women, brands must keep in mind that the sons of those elderly women may share content with their mothers and so must not be excluded from the audience. Finally, optimizing for traffic with SEO alone isn't enough. Publishers must optimize for both social performance and SEO.

*"They come looking to share...Make it shareable."*

The big idea for social media in content marketing is that it must be used to make a connection with the audience, not just to offer a lot of random, irrelevant content. "They come looking to share," notes Perelman of BuzzFeed. Make it shareable. And don't forget to consider the technology and metrics that must be integrated as part of a complete campaign.

## Content Was Made to be Shared: Five Case Studies

If brands publish content and drive traffic to their sites, then what need do they have for content publishers?

There's an old proverb that goes something like this: *A candle never lost its light by lighting another candle.* Search the Web and you'll find several variations of this quote attributed to several different sources, but the follow-up to this proverb is that when multiple candles are lit, the room gets a lot brighter. The same is true with content. The more that content is shared, the more traffic is driven to sites—everybody's sites, brand and publisher alike.

Producing content is expensive, but sharing content with each other is one way to scale the amount of content that any one publisher can offer. Content marketing is about offering the stories that consumers crave, but in order to feed the audience, content must be placed in multiple places so that the consumer will find it when it's needed.

### Kicking Things Off

John LoGioco, SVP and GM at Outbrain, kicked off a series of case studies at the event with a slide representing the content marketing landscape. He notes that in the last couple of years, digital content marketing has become crowded and fragmented. Today, marketers must wade through a puzzle of functions before the brand is represented in the content where consumers find it.

However, complexity aside, the innovations in this space have opened up a world of opportunity where brands, publishers, and everyone in between can collaborate in new and innovative ways that benefit everyone. Five different case studies presented at the Town Hall show how collaboration between brand and publisher can happen either directly, or by working with third party content distribution or management companies who facilitate content sharing for mutual publisher and brand benefit.

## Working Together Directly

Mark Howard, SVP of Digital Advertising Strategy at Forbes Media, and Tim Clark, Corporate Blogs Editor-in-Chief and Social Media Strategist at SAP, shared how they work together using Forbes' BrandVoice. With Forbes, brands like SAP come to publish their content on Forbes.com. Forbes gives them their own dedicated "BrandVoice" placement where brands benefit from a quality audience, rich SEO, and the opportunity for the brand's articles to be as native as the quality articles Forbes provides.

## Content Distribution

Andrew Susman, Owner-Operator of StudioOne, and Ken Zinn, DVP of Marketing for the Online Business Unit at Sears Holding, offer a content distribution success story on Sears' Nuestra Gente Publication. Breathing life into a dying printed publication dedicated to its Hispanic audience, StudioOne added a digital front to the magazine with content populated using its wide array of topics generated by its network of publishers. Consumers like this because they get content that is meaningful to them. Brands like this because it gives them a way to connect with their consumers and increase purchase intent. And publishers benefit because when consumers engage, they share, which drives content back to the publisher.

*"...when consumers engage, they share, which drives content back to the publisher.."*

NewsCred offers a content distribution model that is partnered with journalistic publishers like Reuters, Associated Press, Mayo Clinic, and The Economist. Shafqat Islam, Co-Founder and CEO of NewsCred, and Brett Curtis, Global Business Director at Thompson Reuters, share how they work together to provide content to sites like Pepsi Pulse. Like StudioOne, NewsCred can build a site for its brand clients and populate it with licensed content from its publishers, but NewsCred also offers a way to monetize the content for publishers. Obviously that's a benefit to publishers, and brands like Pepsi Pulse, can market their brand with premium, licensed content.

## Facilitated Content Sharing

While content marketing is all the rage in getting consumer attention, rich display ads still play an important role for brands in their marketing campaigns. Some innovations working their way through the marketplace include technology that capitalizes on the power of display advertising with content marketing.

Martini Media is an agency focused on marketing luxury brands. CEO, Skip Brand, looks to the IAB's Rich Media Branding Units (Display Rising Stars) released in early 2012 for many of its campaigns. Of particular note for certain Branding Units are modules within the ad unit that encourage interaction and increase engagement. Skip Brand reports that these engaging display units, on their own, have proved to be 43% more effective than standard ad units. However, when content was shared within one of the ad unit's modules, engagement with the ad increased by a third. Also, when consumers engage with the content, the ad follows them to the content source, increasing impressions for the content owner.

*"...when content was shared within [the ad], engagement increased..."*

Another content sharing model, facilitated by Ricochet Media, incentivizes brands to share publisher content by linking the brand's display ads to any content they share. Amy Hyde, Director of Product Strategy and Business Development at R&D Ventures for New York Times Company, and Asli Hamamci, Director of Digital at Mindshare share how Ricochet Media's platform works.

On the publisher side, publishers create a profile that defines which ad units they accept and what their rates are. On the other side, brands upload their ads and use Ricochet-formatted links to share across their social media profiles. When consumers click the links, they are greeted by great content that includes the brand's ad. The ad stays with the link as other users share across their networks. A pilot of this technology with New York Times saw a 14% increase on clickthrough rates.

### Tying it all together

Each of these case studies takes a different approach. The solution that works for your business depends on your vision and business goals. Despite which solution, or combination of solutions, works for you, the big idea growing out of these case studies is that the content space can be shared between brands and publishers and even between publisher and publisher. In fact the more publishers build partnerships with each other and with brands, the more everyone benefits.

"Every piece of content is a gold nugget in the right place at the right time," posits LoGioco of Outbrain. If you partner with each other and look to some of the technology and other third party services that can help you come together, you can ensure that your content is in the right place at the right time.

*"Every piece of content is a gold nugget in the right place at the right time."*

## Reducing Complexity

As Pulizzi (CMI) noted when he closed his opening keynote, "There's a lot of opportunity in content marketing, but it's going to get messy." As more of the digital age moves in to capitalize on content marketing, more innovations will add to the maze of options. How can brands and publishers wade through the complexity?

*"There's a lot of opportunity in content marketing, but it's going to get messy."*

Hal Muchnick, President of Kontera, knows about complexity and how to make it simple. Kontera is a solution that processes the noise of content "conversations" and pins down points of passion relevant to audiences of the brands they work with. It's all automated. As long as brands and publishers know what they want to achieve, they can define a campaign that delivers the most impact.

Speaking with Muchnick, Bill Powers, EVP of Corporate Development at Swoop, also knows a thing or two about turning a complex marketing era into something simple. With a focus on food, Swoop finds recipes or food articles and provides a Swoop-branded tag that offers additional details such as healthier alternatives for a specific ingredient, links to sales, or articles that offer more insight on health benefits. Consumers aren't crowded with additional content or ads on the page; food-centered publishers can keep visitors on their page longer, and brands (and publishers) are represented in a systematic way that helps them learn more about what consumers want.

Muchnick and Powers offer some lessons they've learned about making content marketing work and keeping campaigns simple.

## **Making it work**

### **Relevant to the consumer**

First and foremost, consumers want content that is relevant to them. When content is found in places where consumers expect it to be, we can call it "native" and consumers enjoy and trust the content they find. However, consumers recognize when content is out of place and will penalize both the brand and the publisher, sometimes with a cry that rings throughout the Internet bringing long-term damage to one party or the other, but likely both.

### **Scalable and automated for the advertiser**

When a brand seeks to engage in content marketing, they don't necessarily understand the long-term commitment that content marketing requires. Even if they do understand it, they don't necessarily want to commit all the resources to developing and maintaining a steady stream of custom content. In many cases, brands need a solution that offers a stream of relevant content for their consumers without the additional business unit required to keep it alive. An automated system to filter content that's engaging and appropriate for their audiences is what will usually work best.

### **Programmatic for the publisher**

Publishers already have a full time staff devoted to creating, posting, and broadcasting their content. They don't need added work to help a brand with their content strategy. The more programmatic a solution is for the publisher, the more publishers can buy into partnering with other companies in their content marketing strategies.

## **Stay Simple**

### **Define what you want to achieve**

Content marketing is designed to drive engagement and influence behavior. Before you get started define the behavior you want to drive. Do you want to drive downloads? Video views? Pins, likes, etc.? Sign-ups or page views? Without a clear vision of what you would like to achieve, staying simple simply won't happen. A seemingly obvious step, defining campaign goals is an important step to get right.

### **Use business metrics that make sense for the medium**

Digital content marketing, along with social media, have outgrown the campaign metrics in use today. Look beyond the standard metrics available and look at the best way to measure success based on the behavior you want to drive in a campaign. Similarly, establish business terms that support the campaign.

Diving into a content marketing strategy doesn't have to be complicated, but the growing options that are available can be overwhelming. Keeping in mind these principles for making it work and keeping it simple will help you sort out the solutions that will work for your company, whether you're a brand or a publisher.

## Guardrails: Ethics and Safety for Brand and Publisher

Today's content marketing audience is savvy. When they smell a foul, the whole Internet seems to know about it. Most of the companies involved in content marketing seem to know the rules, but every now and then, someone slips up. Even companies well seasoned in the content business are not immune, and when they slip up, the injury can take awhile to heal.

A common concern voiced by attendees at the Town Hall was that brand safety seems to be a higher priority than publisher safety. The publisher is just as much at risk for consumer revolt than brands, perhaps even more so. Somehow, consumers find it easier to forgive a brand for sneaking its content in where it doesn't belong. They're used to being wooed by brands wherever they go. But publishers get "punished" more severely when consumers feel that trust has been breached.

*"When [consumers] smell a foul, the whole Internet seems to know about it."*

Despite who gets hurt more, both brands and publishers are vulnerable to damage that can be difficult to recover from.

Some of the suggestions coming from the audience and presenters included:

### **Be authentic**

People visit because they see something they like. They return because they know they will find something that speaks to them. They tell others because they feel appreciated. When spam and messaging focused on sales seeps through the cracks, they'll leave. If sales attempts are aggressive, they'll not only leave; they'll take others with them and many will give a warning to other would-be visitors. Separate the content from the ads.

### **Be transparent**

Consumers can smell a misplaced article almost as soon as they see it. Be open and honest about your content sources. Label articles that are sourced from somewhere else. If an article is sponsored, say so.

### **Make your policies clear**

When working with partners, make sure that they know what your policies are for advertising and content marketing. Of course, you can only do that if you have policies and guidelines for content marketing in place. Companies that work together should understand each others' businesses along with goals and expectations of everyone involved.

While practical, these guidelines were pulled out of a Q&A session at the IAB Content Marketing Town Hall. A lot of work needs to be done before more formal and detailed guidelines can better serve the content marketing community for both publishers and brands.

## Where do we go from here?

If content marketing is so old, why does it seem so new? Innovations in technology and the growing content needs of the consumer have begun to reshape the landscape. Committing to a long-term content marketing strategy is expensive. Publishers know this; they put all their resources into ensuring that they can produce a steady stream of content that drives an audience to their sites and keeps them there as long as possible.

It used to be simple. Brands relied on publishers to provide the content that drove traffic to their product pages. But now "brands are publishers too," notes Muchnick of Kontera. And now there's a whole ecosystem of services and technology that bring publishers and brands together to run content marketing campaigns together.

*"It used to be simple...But now brands are publishers too."*

How can IAB play a role in helping its members and the content marketing community improve the interactive experience that brings consumers to the Web?

Among some of the needs expressed in the audience were:

- Content creation and curation guidelines
- Meta language for content syndication
- Consumer protection
- Publisher and brand safety guidelines
- General content marketing best practices

The IAB Content Marketing Initiative has only just begun, and IAB members are beginning to assemble the Content Marketing Congress. The goals of that group have yet to be established, but clearly, the market is looking for guidelines on how to work together, develop some direction, and even just on how to get started.

If you are interested in joining the IAB Content Marketing Congress, or any working groups that develop, please contact Susan Borst ([susan@iab.net](mailto:susan@iab.net)). If you are interested in becoming a member of the IAB, please contact Julie Van Ullen ([Julie@iab.net](mailto:Julie@iab.net)).

We hope this document has provided some insight and inspiration to encourage you in your content marketing endeavors. There's a world of opportunity out there for those who aren't afraid to get their feet dirty. Now go make a mess!

This document can be found at <http://www.iab.net/media/file/ContentMarketingInsights2013.pdf>

### About the IAB

The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) is comprised of more than 500 leading media and technology companies that are responsible for selling 86% of online advertising in the United States. On behalf of its members, the IAB is dedicated to the growth of the interactive advertising marketplace, of interactive's share of total marketing spend, and of its members' share of total marketing spend. The IAB educates marketers, agencies, media companies and the wider business community about the value of interactive advertising. Working with its member companies, the IAB evaluates and recommends standards and practices and fields critical research on interactive advertising. Founded in 1996, the IAB is headquartered in New York City with a Public Policy office in Washington, D.C. For more information, please visit [www.iab.net](http://www.iab.net).