

Content is King, Context is Queen – Together They Rule!

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Marketing has always been about choices. What to deliver and the how, where, when and to whom to achieve corporate ends and deliver marketing ROI.

These continue to be incredibly interesting times for marketers and the marketing models they employ to capture market share, build reputation and communicate the company story. While the objectives, strategies and expected outcomes of marketing activities have not materially changed over the past decade, the impact that technology has had, and continues to have, on how marketing fulfills its mission and agenda cannot be overstated. More to the point, the unrelenting advance of digital and social media platforms, channels, tools and tactics makes the market mix more ephemeral than it has ever been. For marketing professionals (or amateurs, since everyone tends to fancy themselves as marketing savvy), the ability to tolerate ambiguity and accept the increasingly transitory nature of the marketing art and science is perhaps the single most important skill to possess going forward.

Marketing has always been about choices. What to deliver and the how, where, when and to whom to achieve corporate ends and deliver marketing ROI. In the analog world, those choices were made against the portfolio of content – advertisements, collateral, presentations, thought leadership – and the channel options that included TV, radio, direct mail, events and publications based on the revenue plan, marketing budget and target audience.

Now that digital/social/mobile media has redefined the way organizations and their communities of interest interact, marketing has entered a transitional era that is engendering both evolutionary and revolutionary methods to deliver the organization's value propositions, manifest a continuing dialogue and ensure that interested parties remain engaged throughout the decision-making process.

Emerging from this dynamic environment, and driven by the growing need to influence target audiences closer to their decision points, is a more profound emphasis on developing and

disseminating meaningful content. Content, in one form or another, has always been the lingua franca of successful marketing but as the volume and variety of viable communication channels has exploded with advent of digital, social and mobile media, the challenge to deliver has become more pronounced.

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But content only realizes whatever inherent value it possesses when it crosses the horizon of those targeted consumers, users and buyers at resonant points in the purchasing/procurement cycle. That is why context is becoming the coin of the realm in new era marketing models. Content provides meaning while context provides currency. Content, by its very nature, is enduring or should be – a white paper, case study, video, e-book or how-to-guide. Its shelf-life is ideally and hopefully measured in months, if not years. Context is ephemeral and generally unique.

The increasingly digital marketing model requires that content be guided by context, that whatever target audience is to be engaged should be researched, modeled and monitored so that the most resonant content is delivered to the most prospective candidates at the most optimal time. Ideally, this window materializes when the prospect is experiencing the greatest need (Pain), possesses the greatest sense of what will address that need (Value), and has the ready facility to execute a transaction.



That far too many marketers still don't appreciate that content has become the most valuable asset in their arsenal remains highly problematic. That those marketers who recognize the importance of content but have not incorporated the notion of context into their market development equation is potentially life threatening.

Content is King

Content has always been the central evocation of the organization's marketing strategy. Whether through traditional analog media channels, creative hard-copy collateral, event-driven presentations or provocative thought leadership pieces, content articulates the who, what, why, when and how of the business to its varying constituencies. Even in less disciplined organizations, the focus on promoting a market position, creating a brand presence, and

defining propositions for the value the organization intends to deliver has resulted in a de facto content strategy. While content is only one means to an end, more focused and creative content strategies have generally delivered more robust ends.

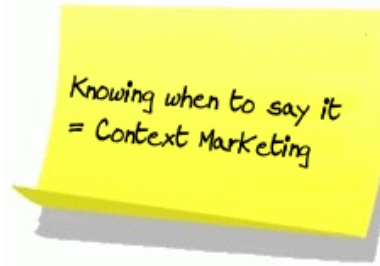
The establishment of digital marketing and, more recently, the emergence of social and mobile media marketing have significantly elevated the importance of content in the marketing model and mix for each and every type of organization. In today's consumer marketplace, whether business-to-consumer (B2C) or business-to-business (B2B), the power of initial and continuing engagement rests with the prospective buyer. Traditional outbound marketing channels have been aggressively truncated and replaced with an inbound channel that must encourage the audience to select an option that offers the quality of information necessary to form an opinion on the path to making a decision. To bias that choice towards the organization's products and services is the role of quality content.

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The challenge today is shifting the marketing mindset regarding what constitutes quality and resonant content away from the tradition of flashy and creative advertising and collateral and towards a notion of content that requires no bells and whistles to be engaging. That necessitates a strategy and a commitment to invest in content that articulates the unique value the offering represents, telling the story in the cleanest and most concise manner possible. That sounds simple but old habits die hard. If marketing can make you laugh or tug at your heartstrings, it has succeeded in creating an emotional response. Does that make you want to buy the products or use the service? Perhaps, but if someone is experiencing some pain that is increasing in intensity, they want something that addresses that pain. That "something" should be the proposition for purchasing the product/service delivered via content that articulates that value and that should be easily accessible on the prospect's terms. The value proposition is not the salve for the pain. The value proposition is what the salve does to the pain.

Content, in a very real sense, has become the currency of marketing for both analog and digital platforms. It possesses

inherent and intrinsic value when it succeeds in communicating the proposition the organizational business model is constructed to deliver with its products and/or services. The very best content also possesses a shelf life that allows it to be reused and re-purposed over time in multiple initiatives via multiple channels. Great content is a function of what you say amplified by how you say it – the difference between a compelling story and a snoozer.



Context is Queen

If content is the currency of marketing, then context is how smart organizations will increasingly be spending that currency going forward. Context is the dirty little secret in the new, increasingly digital marketing model. As more people connect via an expanding array of devices – desktop, laptop, tablet, mobile phone, smart TV, iWatch, GoogleGlass – the always-on, real-time connection to the market makes context – the who, what, where, when and how – much easier to understand and act on via context-aware computing platforms and data analysis.

Context amplifies the value of content by providing a frame of reference for engaging individuals or groups in a more natural and timely way. A content strategy that aligns content and content delivery with the time and space-sensitive position of the target should change or influence consumer behavior. More simply, context marketing is delivering the right content to the right people at the right time. However valuable a piece of content might be prima facie, its value is diminished when delivered at the wrong point in an individual or organization’s decision process.

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Context is now emerging as the key differentiator for marketing organizations as they attempt to reach out and touch prospects with content that dovetails nicely with key inflection points in the decision process. This is a direct result of extraordinary leaps in connectivity that not only bring people and organizations closer together but also gather incredible volumes of data, both real-time and historical, on prospective customers. Connectivity enables real-time and ubiquitous access via both fixed and mobile devices and the generation of “always on” engagement. Data, or “big data” in the parlance of the moment, includes more than time and location when developing a holistic context. Context depends on a wealth

of information extracted from economic, social, cultural, emotional, and environmental factors. The challenge, and the opportunity, is that context is dynamic. The dynamic could be as simple as attempting to deliver relevant content to a mobile user as they move through a mall and their near-term needs and wants change as they pass different stores.

But this is really nothing new. Context has always been a key element of marketing success. What is different is the level of intensity and focus being allocated to understanding and leveraging context in the marketing model. Add context to traditional marketing and you create a more personalized and relevant interaction with an individual or group.

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Together They Rule!

To bottom line this, as we used to say, content marketing is knowing what to say and context marketing is knowing when to say it. That very few organizations are actually executing a context-informed content strategy should not come as a surprise. In a kind of “learn to crawl before you walk and learn to walk before you run” evolution, far too many companies have yet to make content development the beating heart of marketing. Those happy few that have split the atom on content are now challenged with a digital universe that is always on, highly mobile, multi-device/platform and capable of generating extraordinary volumes of data on each and every sentient being. Successfully architecting the content model that effectively leverages context should remain, at least in the near-term, as both a Holy Grail and competitive line of demarcation.

Content and context are now fundamental to the effective building of brand. One could argue that they always have been but that would avoid a couple of sharp truths. We have never been possessed of so many dynamic channels through which to distribute content and we have never possessed the quantity and quality of data that allows for the narrow defining of buyer personas that this digital marketplace provides. Importantly, the investment and application of a content and context strategy should not be viewed as a short-term campaign or initiative. To be effective as a strategy and/or tactic, content and context marketing must build relationships incrementally over time, developing trust and

emotional connection. This is brand building at its core – managing how and what someone thinks about you.

It is also about more than just being a social business, a digital business or a mobile business. The past fifteen years have launched an inexorable journey from the dominance of the outbound model to the emergence of the inbound model. Consumers want to interact on their terms and that means delivering meaningful value to them when they want it, where they want it, and how they want it. Consumers have embraced the new forms of digital, social, and mobile media and are increasingly comfortable with those channels and platforms. But, it is relevant content and meaningful context that nurture deeper, more lasting relationships and deliver greater customer lifetime value.

Establishing an integrated approach to content and context allows an organization to tell the story they want to tell to the people they want to hear it at a point in the relationship that is optimal for both parties.

Content is king because no other asset a company creates or procures possesses the power to change perceptions in a way that moves people to make the “right” choice in the decision making process. Managed strategically, content can be leveraged and repurposed to address multiple opportunities over long periods of time. It is enduring. Context is queen because content by itself too often fails to realize its potential, deliver its expected ROI, and change the minds it was intended to change. Context humanizes the interaction, makes it timely and relevant, and serves to overcome buyer inertia. But context has no real shelf life. It is ephemeral.

Establishing an integrated approach to content and context allows an organization to tell the story they want to tell to the people they want to hear it at a point in the relationship that is optimal for both parties. The challenge with content has always been about creating something that is relevant, valuable, and engaging while also possessing a reasonable shelf life. The challenge with context is that it moves at lightning speed with a dynamism that shrinks the window for achieving the envisioned impact. Both elements require an ever greater understanding of the consumer that, for many organizations, is currently out of reach. But this is the new normal for content marketing, and for marketing in general. However embryonic their effort, organizations must embrace and invest in

content and context and deliver their intellectual capital with a marketing structure that is agile and expeditious.