



CONTENT MARKETING PRIMER

DEFINITIONS, BENEFITS, TYPES AND MARKETPLACE

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PUBLISHERS, MARKETERS AND AGENCIES

This paper provides the industry with a framework for thinking about and discussing content marketing as it relates to definitions, benefits, varieties and transparency principles. The IAB seeks to shine a light on this dynamic and evolving space and provide guidance and best practices that will ultimately help shape its formation and future growth.

This primer will serve as the basis for future IAB initiatives in the content marketing space to provide greater clarity to the market and is a companion piece to the previously issued IAB Native Advertising Playbook.

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1. INTRODUCTION

With the growing, industry-wide discussion over the definition of content marketing, it is important for the Interactive Advertising Bureau and its members to have a firm position on this topic from the view of publishers and sell-side facing organizations. Core to this discussion is the convergence between technological development, publisher interest, advertising demand, and changing consumer behavior.

The objectives of this document are to a) eliminate confusion and establish alignment regarding competing definitions, content marketing platforms, and strategies; b) provide an overview of accurate, up-to-date information on content marketing; c) offer meaningful guidelines on navigating editorial standards and sponsor presence; and d) address the need for clear disclosure to consumers and businesses. To note, it is intended that this report will be updated as necessary to reflect changing market conditions and also function as a jumping off point for deeper exploration on a variety of topics related to content marketing.

The IAB Content Marketing Task Force was led by Susan Borst, Director of Industry Initiatives at the IAB, and member co-chairs Andrew Susman, Co-Founder and CEO at Studio One, Chris Schraft, President at Time Inc. Content Solutions and Lisa LaCour, VP Global Marketing at Outbrain. The Task Force consists of nearly 50 IAB members representing publishers and technology platforms. See Appendix for complete list.

2. BACKGROUND: THE RISE OF CONTENT MARKETING

For both B2C and B2B, content marketing has become an increasingly important part of the marketing mix. Various industry sources report that 86% of B2C marketers now include content marketing in their marketing mix.¹ On average, 28% percent of B2C marketing budgets are allocated to content marketing, and 55% of consumer marketers plan to increase their content marketing spend in the next year.² For B2B marketers, the percent including content marketing in the mix is even higher than for B2C. In a 2013 study, 93% of B2B marketers reported that they are using content marketing. On average, 30% of B2B marketing budgets are allocated to content marketing, with 58% planning to increase their content marketing budget over the next 12 months.³ While the size of the market will be better determined by clarifying the definition of content marketing, it is clear that advertisers are accelerating their adoption of traditional journalism and publisher techniques to engage today's digitally empowered consumers. The rise in content marketing is driven by the shift in consumer behavior resulting from technological change and both the growth and the fragmentation of media channels. As media has changed, so have the fundamental requirements for successful brand engagement with consumers.

3. WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING?

First, it is useful to define content within today's digital context. Content is the essential material that makes up a digital publisher's consumer-facing business. Different content mediums include articles, videos, photographs, modules, infographics, quizzes, and the core user experience of how those assets are presented via website, mobile site, or application. Content is our "programming" - it builds an audience of unique visitors, subscribers, and stakeholders.

Content marketing is the marketing technique of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience. Content marketing subscribes to the notion that delivering high-quality, relevant, and valuable information to prospects and customers drives profitable consumer action. The originator of the content is a consumer- or business-facing brand that traditionally communicates with consumers via advertising, public relations, or a retail sales channel. Within this paradigm, content assets, experiences, strategies, and

tactics are adopted by a marketer who is ultimately pursuing the more traditional marketing goals of brand preference, brand equity, and brand awareness.

Content marketing differs from advertising, advertising-based story-telling and other promotional vehicles in one specific way: the intent of this mode of communication is to provide useful, educational, or entertaining information on its own merit. Content marketing is a pull strategy, unlike advertising, which is push. This marketing technique intends to “pull” the consumer toward the brand and create a user experience which will ultimately increase brand awareness and preference.

Much of the confusion around definitions arises from the breadth of the terminology. Similar to any digital publisher’s competitive road map, content marketing is a naturally broad idea and encompasses a wide range of online and offline tactics, from social media to syndication to native advertising to the use of content assets within IAB standard ad unit space. Marketers are using some or several of these under the content marketing umbrella, and the smartest marketers are utilizing many, if not all of them, simultaneously.

4. THE BENEFITS OF CONTENT MARKETING FOR PUBLISHERS, ADVERTISERS AND CONSUMERS

1. **For Publishers:**

As the experts in content, publishers are an important part of the content marketing ecosystem. Publishers can benefit from increased revenue opportunities and also get additional content on their site at the same time. Publishers can provide research, writing, design, video production, and distribution of content to help a “vendor become a publisher.” Developing high-quality content marketing material may also include posting on a media site as well as distributing it via social channels.

Revenue opportunities include:

1. Paid native ad units
2. Sponsored story features
3. Custom publishing editions
4. Content recommendation widgets
5. Value of co-branding

Publishers can also take advantage of syndication opportunities of publisher’s content to brands.

2. **For Advertisers:**

Advertisers are accelerating their adoption of traditional journalism and publisher techniques to engage today’s digitally empowered consumers. Content marketing helps establish deeper relationships with consumers, which in turn results in an increase in brand preference come buying time. By providing consumers something of value – whether entertainment or information – marketers can engage and induce them to invest their time in and attention to the content. By tying the valuable content to a brand or by having the brand add the value, it allows for a positive connection with the consumer which goes beyond the hard sell. Brand marketers can partner with publishers to either ensure a more custom experience for consumers or to pursue a more automated approach to placing content. In addition to “pulling” consumers toward a brand identity, advertisers can use data recorded by information/measurement companies to optimize content and increase user engagement.

3. **For Consumers:**

Today's digitally empowered, constantly connected consumers are harder to reach and influence than ever before. They've become skilled information hunters who seek out high-value content in real time along the digital path to purchase. They're willing to engage with brands but demand a value exchange—their time and attention in exchange for service, utility, and entertainment. As a result, we've seen brands increasingly adopt a publisher's perspective to using relevant content to engage consumers across paid, owned and earned media. When brands put the consumer first with the focus on relevancy versus selling, consumers feel they are in the driver's seat on what content they consume. Consumers value the less intrusive nature of content marketing which, ideally, leads to a more positive association with the brand and a higher inclination to take action. Action can be in the form of interaction (clicks) and, importantly, the sharing of branded messages on social networks. Successful content that consumers receive is targeted, of high quality, is informational, relevant and is typically free. By engaging with brands through social media channels, consumers can also experience reputable customer service and a two-way conversation with advertisers with whom they could not otherwise directly communicate.

5. HOW CONTENT MARKETING WORKS ACROSS ALL THREE CHANNELS OF THE ECOSYSTEM

The publishing component is often a central element of the overall content marketing strategy. Given the immense paid media budgets available among the larger advertising brands, a great deal of strategic thinking goes into how to invest those budgets into a strategy that results in a successful content marketing campaign. In this light, content, and how it is distributed, becomes its own work-stream adding to and complementing traditional advertising placements to create what is growingly referred to as an ecosystem.

The framework of "owned, earned, and paid" is often the nomenclature of choice for discussing the publishing and distribution of content marketing assets. While there are many instances of content marketing usage with regard to one channel or another, the ideal approach for a sophisticated marketer is to think about the totality of channels available and consider the role for content across owned, earned, and aid.

Of course, there are inherent operational challenges with integrating this kind of system. Its integration requires close coordination with many suppliers, partners, and agencies, each of who, if not incentivized against an interdependent goal, can be territorial or disjointed. Marketers who are determined to embrace this system are experimenting with the best mix of partners and specific roles and swim lanes to increase the collective chances of success.

** While industry standard nomenclature used to describe media framework is seen as paid, earned, and owned, content marketing always starts with content, or owned, media.*

Owned

The role of owned within this ecosystem is to behave very much like a publisher's site might – a curated, engaging environment where content pertinent to the interests and passions of the consumer are covered in great detail. Different content assets can be programmed in sequence as a curriculum of sorts – leading consumers to learn and experience fresh things about the general subject matter and ultimately about the brand itself.

Outside of the pure value of the content itself in terms of the consumer experience it provides, there is also what is referred to as the discoverability benefit. Over time, a sufficiently supported, content-rich site experience will surface higher against key terms in search. The quality of the content and the amount of time consumers spend on that content will increase the score significantly. Content of low value with an exclusively promotional or self-serving approach could even be penalized, underscoring the importance of a content marketing approach to the overall digital strategy in place among marketing organizations.

As social media presence is part of the owned channel, these destinations act as valuable companion components to other web destinations, either taking a lead or supportive role for the consumer. Content that lives on an owned site could fuel activity in social, exchanging traffic and activity between the two channels as set forth in a broader strategy.

In many instances, this is not a case of “either/or” but of “and/and,” where content assets move fluidly wherever and however the consumers demand them.

Examples of owned media include any and all websites, mobile sites, apps, games, or other kinds of browser-based experiences requiring a URL; social media footprint includes Facebook page(s), Twitter handle(s), YouTube channel(s), Tumblr, Vine, and Instagram accounts.

Earned

Earned media can be used to best measure whether a content marketing system is working optimally. It can also be used to amplify content.

Extreme virality is rare and hard to replicate. But achieving unpaid lift, amplification, and extension of a message is central to the success of a content marketing approach. In this way, advertisers and partners will lean on the content creation resource to adapt the output based on earned performance. Additionally, you will find instances of teams seeking additional unpaid lift from publishers in connection with large activations in which both brands (advertiser and publisher) have a stake.

While social media profiles/accounts fall into the owned channel, once brand content is shared, that content then transfers into the earned channel. Basic instances of earned media include the common re-tweet, Facebook share, and share widgets that make the process of sharing across various social media platforms more accessible. More evolved strategies can include full-fledged PR efforts. In a way, cross-linking content or sharing feeds can be a way of sparking earned media – but the key thing to remember is that earned media cannot be purchased directly or truly owned by a brand.

Paid

Publishers are experimenting with a number of different paid ad unit types designed to distribute content. These include in-feed units, recommendation widgets, promoted listings, custom playlists, and traditional search, as well as standard (IAB) ad units that incorporate native elements. Each of these varies based on form, function, technology integration, measurement, market dynamics, and ad disclosure language. This topic is in greater detail in [The IAB Native Advertising Playbook](#) prepared by the IAB Native Advertising Task Force (released December 4, 2013.)

6. THE VARIETIES OF CONTENT MARKETING: ORIGINAL, REPURPOSED, AND CURATED

It is important to note several of the different approaches that marketers, advertisers, and their agencies might adopt when sourcing the content itself for use in content marketing strategies. One of the major accelerators for this variety is the emergence of venture-backed technology platforms that can facilitate specific aspects of this process.

Some advertisers advancing into the area of content marketing embrace the need to commission original content from a variety of different supplier classes. Others are more focused on finding ways to borrow, license, or repurpose existing content from publishers, with direct permission, through an intermediary (such as a technology platform), or under presumed fair use. The more sophisticated content marketers experiment across this spectrum.

When it comes to the marketplace for repurposing content, there are more complex considerations for the publisher and advertiser as well as with regard to consumer experience. A custom, original production exercise can be a cleaner, more transparent matter for the advertiser, publisher, and consumer, especially where the content created is “work for hire” that the brand can own in perpetuity.

On the other hand, commissioning original content requires investment, either in the production of the assets themselves or in some sort of media buy which covers impressions plus content creation resources. The curation of existing content from publishers is much less flexible, but conceivably, if the appropriate agreements can be struck and legal concerns satisfied, this approach represents an incredibly large pool of assets for a marketer to leverage. Often best practices that surround content curation include:

1. Linking back to third parties
2. Linking back to the original posting
3. Identifying and giving credit to the original source
4. Providing original text/commentary on the curated content

7. TRANSPARENCY / CONSUMER DISCLOSURE / FAIR USE

As with traditional ad units, content marketing efforts should be clearly disclosed to the consumer as such, whether the marketing activity is:

1. Paid native ad units
2. Third-party paid links
3. Social media endorsements (either organic or paid)

The IAB is firm that this is not an option but a requirement. The disclosure language may differ based on the marketing activity, but the goal is the same: to provide transparency. As outlined in the IAB Native Advertising Playbook, the IAB Recommended Native Advertising Disclosure Guidelines are as follows:

Regardless of native advertising unit type, the IAB advocates that, for paid native ad units, clarity and prominence of the disclosure is paramount.

The disclosure must:

- Regardless of native ad unit type, use language that conveys that the unit has been paid for by a third party, thus making it an advertising unit, even if that unit does not contain traditional promotional advertising messages.
- Be large and visible enough for a consumer to notice it in the context of a given page and relative to the device that the ad is being viewed on.

Simply put: Regardless of context, a reasonable consumer should be able to distinguish between what is a paid native advertising unit vs. what is publisher editorial content.

The use of content within standard IAB units should offer less concern for stakeholders, even if the unit is content centric, as most consumers are accustomed to general banner placements on page. So long as there is not a deliberate attempt by the publisher or advertiser to make the in-unit content seem like it is unquestionably part of the editorial experience, standard IAB units should be a comfortable place to experiment with content.

With a great many publishers leveraging the curation of original content, the general rule of thumb circles around the idea of giving credit to the creator of the content, who owns the copyright. Publishers that demonstrate that they have a variety of different sources to pull content from, in fact, become more credible themselves.

8. CONCLUSION

Every day, thousands of pieces of content are planned, edited, published, and measured to give brands a powerful, personal, and effective way to reach their targeted audience. The intent of content marketing is to provide useful, educational, or entertaining information on its own merit, without a call to action. The use of a combination of content marketing tactics across the owned, earned, and paid channels of the ecosystem can result in successful content strategies for publishers and advertisers, while also subsequently strengthening loyalty and increasing sales among consumers.

APPENDIX

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.

About the IAB Content Marketing Task Force

The Content Marketing Task Force is comprised of IAB members who volunteered to participate with the goal of producing this primer. The task force is led by: Andrew Susman – Studio One, Chris Schraft – Time Inc. and Lisa LaCour – Outbrain. For further information contact Susan Borst, the IAB Task Force Lead.

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Member Companies

AddThis
Aha Radio by Harman International
Altimeter Group
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Content Marketing Institute
Demand Media
Disqus
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Federated Media Publishing
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Unilever
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For a complete list of IAB Members as well as the Councils, Committees, and Working Groups who are actively shaping the interactive industry, please visit the [IAB Member Center](#).

Sources:

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