

Is content marketing replacing traditional news media?



By [Riaan Wolmarans](#)

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"Any brand that adopts content marketing is a potential competitor for traditional media."

The pressure that traditional news media finds itself under is clear from the amount of publications, both newspapers and magazines, that are closing down on an almost monthly basis, both here and abroad.

The pain is not only felt by print publications. Going online has also not proven to be a silver bullet, where the competition is not only brutal, but also increasingly coming from unexpected rivals. One of the newest threats to online media is marketing communication, courtesy of brands realising the value of content marketing.

Having come from a traditional news media background to my current position at an agency, I have seen two rather varied approaches to content creation. While the content created in digital advertising can certainly benefit from adopting the commitment to editorial quality that is the mainstay of the print media, it is the media that needs to pay close attention to developments in the advertising industry to inform a strategy that can see it survive well into the future.

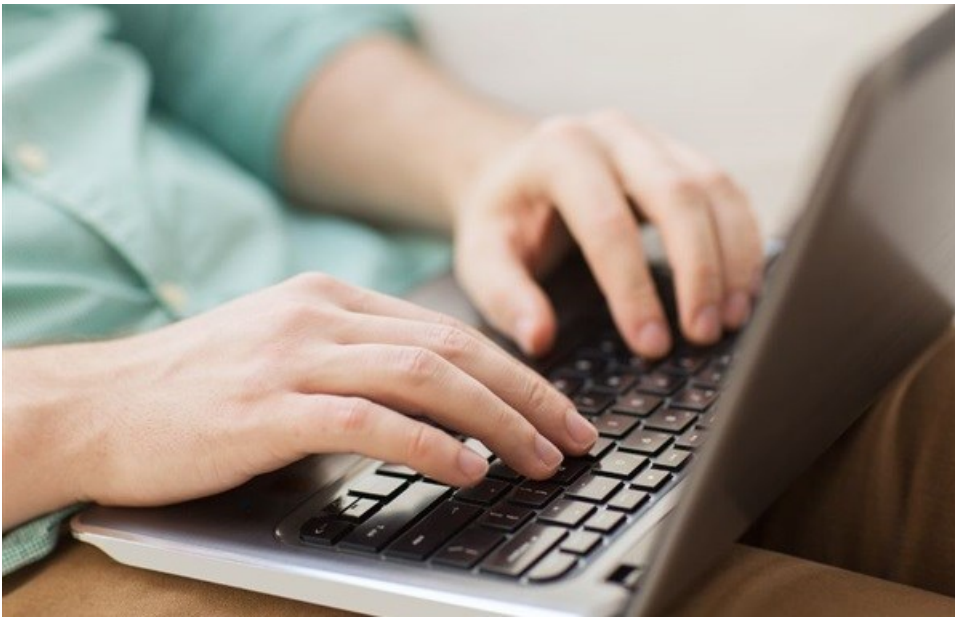


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Any brand that adopts content marketing is a potential competitor for traditional media. I first experienced this when I was the online editor for a prominent business paper. Budget day was traditionally the biggest day of the year for the publication and we made a massive effort to provide really good coverage of the event. Web traffic and sales used to peak on that day.

However, we increasingly saw the big banks starting to do their own budget day coverage through their own microsites, apps, budget day newsletters, etc., and I have to admit that most of it is done really well. A consumer might reason that there is no need to read the papers, because their bank has already sent them the summary of the budget that they wanted to see.

That underlines how the sustainability of traditional media can come under threat at any moment from an unexpected direction. For many years, the traditional business newspaper had its own niche with no real competition, but now it is facing competition from the financial institutions, which nobody saw coming.

Having now moved across from media to marketing, I believe that the two industries can learn valuable lessons from each other. At a newspaper, the line between the running of the business and the creation of content is quite well drawn. However, in this day and age, you cannot be just a content creation person anymore. You have to have an appreciation for the broader business aspects around that content.

When I was approached to move to MetropolitanRepublic, I was very interested, because it is a position that takes what I do, the creation and management of content, and brings it into a very commercial environment. Many people in the media could stand to do something similar and learn the lessons on this side of the fence, especially considering the current fortunes of the print media.

Although the editorial produced for a brand is of course not completely independent, South African brands are finally starting to realise that they can attract larger audiences and by extension sell more of their products and services if they use content marketing. Overseas brands have known this and used this approach for a long time already.

Branded content

Now that I am creating content for brands, I have to keep in mind the lesson that competition can come from anywhere. It is exciting to try to anticipate these trends and try to anticipate where the competition is going to come from next.

If you are selling soft drinks and all of a sudden the other soft drinks seller launches a campaign that not only uses above-the-line television and print advertisements, but also an entire online environment that is built for a campaign, with apps, videos, social media, etc., you are going to be left seriously behind if you do not compete with that.

Consumers know that content created for a brand is not entirely independent, but brand content can certainly benefit from being created under the same stringent conditions as media content, with a focus on accuracy and good proofreading. If you apply the principles that you learn in a newsroom to a commercial environment, the results we produce for our clients are clear.

A copywriter may be good at producing a great one-liner in an advertisement that can sell a billion cans of beer, but be quite poor at writing a longform article on the history of beer brewing. However, a longer article on that topic, written really well, could be a real asset for that brewery's website. You can do social media around it, it can keep people engaged on the website or other platform for longer, and provide other benefits. Although this is not advertising in the traditional sense of the word, content can allow consumers immerse themselves in the brand, and well-written content certainly adds to brand credibility.

The upshot is that when consumers spend more of their browsing time on branded sites, they are spending less time on traditional news sites. To survive, media sites should adopt the very strategies that brands are using to attract users. Although credibility and integrity need to be protected at all cost, content can be produced to not simply inform the audience, but to appeal to it on a number of levels. News has to be useful and captivating, while allowing for interaction on numerous platforms. This is a difficult challenge to overcome, because the target market for news media is more varied than that of most other brands. However, this has to be achieved, because those that do not recognise new realities and

threats are doomed to fail.

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