

THE CAPTIVATE COLLECTION

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8 Introduction: The Captivate Collection

RANDY BENNETT, DIRECTOR, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND PARTNERSHIPS
UF COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATIONS

ENGAGEMENT

THE CAPTIVATE COLLECTION



10 What's the Key to Media Success? Products that Build Relationships

DAVID COHN, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, AJ+



13 What BuzzFeed, Medium and Adafruit Know About Engagement

RYAN SINGEL, CO-FOUNDER, CONTEXLY



17 Be Social, Leverage Technology, Build Stuff

TOM KELLEHER, CHAIR/DEPARTMENT OF ADVERTISING,
UF COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATIONS



21 Monetize Passion, Not Pageviews: A Q&A with Jim Brady

JIM BRADY, CEO, STOMPING GROUND



24 What Customers Want is Invisible to the Eye

KAILA COLBIN, CO-FOUNDER, MINISTRY OF AWESOME

STORYTELLING

THE CAPTIVATE COLLECTION



29 From Story Told to Story Lived

DARREN "DAZ" MCCOLL, GLOBAL CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER, SAPIENTNITRO



32 An Actor's Guide to Better Storytelling

ROB BIESENBACH, CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT AND WRITER



36 Creating a Richer Storytelling Experience

MARK POTTS, FOUNDER, NEWSPEG.COM

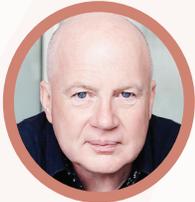
MARKETING

THE CAPTIVATE COLLECTION



41 The Dawn of a New Era in Marketing

RISHAD TOBACOWALA, CHIEF STRATEGIST AND MEMBER OF THE DIRECTOIRE+, PUBLICIS GROUP



44 “Emotional fulfillment, not technology, will be the stand-out offering of a winning brand”

KEVIN ROBERTS, CEO WORLDWIDE, SAATCHI & SAATCHI



48 Don't Call It Advertising Anymore

DOUG WEAVER, FOUNDER AND CEO, UPSTREAM GROUP



51 We Need a New “Church and State” in Digital Publishing

JASON KINT, CEO, DIGITAL CONTENT NEXT

METRICS

THE CAPTIVATE COLLECTION



55 Chasing Clicks: Metrics Should Support a Strategy, Not be a Strategy

MATT BOGGIE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT,
THE NEW YORK TIMES



59 The Disconnect Between Analytics and Engagement: How Publishers Can Bridge the Gap

SACHIN KAMDAR, CEO, PARSE.LY



63 Video Production is on the Rise – But Who’s Watching?

JOSH SCHWARTZ, CHIEF DATA SCIENTIST, CHARTBEAT



67 Stakeholders are in Charge, so Organizations Count on Data Analytics and Insights

JUAN-CARLOS MOLLEDA, CHAIR/PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT,
UF COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATIONS

MILLENNIALS AND ENGAGEMENT

THE CAPTIVATE COLLECTION



71 Agile Content Marketing will Replace Social Media Marketing

JEFF FROMM, PRESIDENT, FUTURECAST



75 Communication and Engagement are Smaller Parts of a Larger Equation

DAVID ARABOV, CEO AND CO-FOUNDER, ELITE DAILY

When you can do the common things of life in an uncommon way, you will command the attention of the world. — George Washington Carver

The ability to capture people's time and attention and move them to action has become increasingly challenging in today's media environment. Proliferating platforms, ubiquitous connectivity, an explosion of media choices and other factors have fragmented audiences and shifted media behavior.

Consider these data points:

- The average adult's attention span is 8 seconds, down 4 seconds from 2000. The average attention span of a goldfish: 9 seconds. (Statistic Brain)
- Adults spend about 14.5 hours a day across 7 media platforms (Statista)
- Millennials spend an average of 17.8 hours a day with different types of media and trust user-generated content 40 percent more than information from other media (Crowdtap)
- In 2012, media consumption in the U.S. averaged 63 gigabytes per person per day, or roughly 7 DVDs worth of data. (USC)
- The average American adult uses four different devices or technologies to get news. Nearly 7 in 10 of adults under 30 say they learned about news from social media in the past week. (API/AP)
- The average adult, by one conservative estimate, sees between 300 - 500 marketing messages a day (Telesian)

- Meanwhile, 74 percent of U.S. DVR users record shows so they can skip advertisements (Motorola)

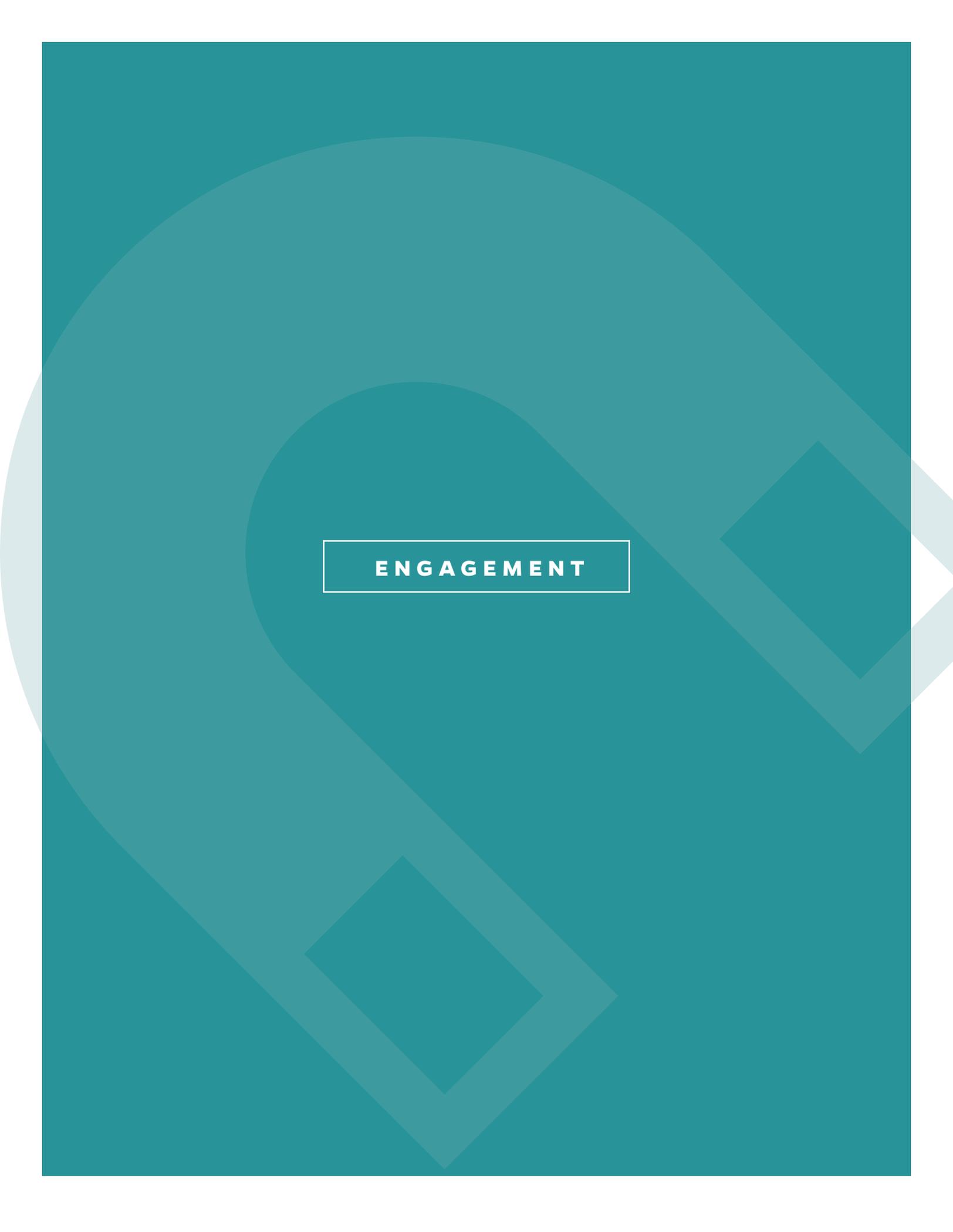
Media companies are scrambling to find new strategies to engage elusive audiences, particularly young adults.

The Captivate Collection, compiled by the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications, provides perspectives from leading news, advertising, public relations and entertainment executives on captivating audiences in an increasingly cluttered media universe. The aggregation of these thought leaders is unique and offers insights to any media executive challenged with engaging and influencing audiences.

The articles in this collection originally appeared in the Captivate collection [online](#). The online collection contains additional thought pieces and is updated periodically with new perspectives. Please visit and recommend us there. And feel free to share this publication with your colleagues.

—**Randy Bennett**

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The image features a solid teal background. Overlaid on this are several large, semi-transparent geometric shapes: a large circle on the left, a large square on the right, and a large diamond shape at the bottom. In the center, there is a white rectangular box with a thin white border containing the word "ENGAGEMENT" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font.

ENGAGEMENT



WHAT'S THE KEY TO MEDIA SUCCESS?

PRODUCTS THAT BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Any essay about the future of news, even when it's the relatively near future, should start with a caveat: The future **is unpredictable**. And an essay on the future of engagement should also point out that buzzwords are often fungible. Pinning down the meaning of engagement, let alone its future, is a snipe hunt.

DAVID COHN Executive Producer · AJ+ @digidave



That said, I have sensed a changing tide in the last few years and I expect it to continue. The two most important elements of this change: [Media and technology companies are becoming conflated](#). Perhaps eventually indistinguishable. Secondly, questions around news products and consumer experience have taken the forefront over questions of “who” or “what” is journalism. I will focus on that here.

From 2001 to roughly 2011 the debate in journalism communities was about who is a “journalist” and what is “journalism.” Today these questions are a bit of a joke, best epitomized by the “but are bloggers journalists” [satire response](#) in Twitter.

But now, pointing to [Snowfall](#) as a “marquee” moment, product is being discussed in journalism communities over these old academic conundrums. And key to this are questions of how the product builds a relationship, dare I say “engagement,” between content and readers.

[From a blog post](#): *I would argue the “citizen journalism” debate was mistakenly put in this context (if it is not from a journalism organization, it must not BE journalism to a consumer) but I think history has shown this debate to be false. And it’s not that the new frontier of “product” will make us question whether something “IS” or “IS NOT” journalism, instead it will fundamentally free us up to think*

through the experience of consuming news and it is here (defining the experience of journalism in digital context) that fortunes will be made. This is where you get Vox, Circa, Rookie.com, Scroll Kit (now acquired by Automatic) and more.

In days long since passed there were two products: the subscription, for loose relationships, and advertising for transactional strong relationships. Today there are many products. Where once subscriptions meant repeat readership, today loyalty to a news brand has taken a back seat to Google’s search product or various social networking products. All news brands look the same in your Facebook feed, so there is no loyalty except to the social network itself.

An ongoing relationship with a small audience is more valuable than a mass of fly-by readers that will never return. And in place of subscriptions, products that create loyalty are invaluable.

Online subscriptions are still an option to create that ongoing relationship – but even the successful New York Times metered-wall, backed by the most trusted brand in news, can only claim 3 percent of its 31 million unique monthly views as digital-only subscribers ([another roughly 5 percent may be print subscribers viewing content online](#)). The question then is: What about the other 92 percent? Why aren’t they ‘engaged’ – can we offer them something besides ‘subscribing’ to be engaged with? How can we ensure these aren’t fly-by eyeballs?

ALL NEWS BRANDS LOOK THE SAME IN YOUR FACEBOOK FEED, SO THERE IS NO LOYALTY EXCEPT TO THE SOCIAL NETWORK ITSELF.

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That phrasing “eyeballs” is precisely part of the problem. If we think of readers as eyeballs how can we successfully sell advertising? Advertisers don’t want eyeballs – they want to touch the brains, the minds and the souls behind those eyes. Before we can offer up the whole human condition to advertisers – we must engage it wholeheartedly. Look critically at your advertising product for consumers. Do you wonder “where’s the beef?”

As I’ve written [before](#): “Engagement, even if we have trouble defining how to measure it, has value either because it bolsters a bottom-line metric (that can be monetized) or because ‘engagement’ helps advance the relationship between the publication and readers.” Before any organization thinks about how to improve engagement, they need to define it for themselves. You can’t solve a problem until you’ve clearly identified it.

...NEWS ORGANIZATIONS THAT BECOME INCREASINGLY STRUCTURED LIKE TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES AND FOCUS ON EXPERIENCES THAT ENSURE ONGOING RELATIONSHIPS OVER MASS “EYEBALLS” WILL WIN.

At [Circa](#) we created the “follow” feature. This is core to our product and it allows us to keep track of what a reader has consumed so we can better serve them in the future. As a story unfolds, we treat a returning reader differently than a brand new reader.

One gets the introductory experience to a story, the other gets information based on the context of what we know about them. Even while staying passive, this product is a new kind of engaging relationship with readers. It respects their context, previous knowledge and eliminates time wasting repetition of information. It is our version of a ‘subscription.’

It’s unknown what new products will surface in the next 3–5 years, but I am confident they will abound and I believe that news organizations that become increasingly structured like technology companies and focus on experiences that ensure ongoing relationships over mass “eyeballs” will win.

DAVID COHN is Executive Producer with AJ+. At the time of this writing, he was chief content officer of Circa, a startup redefining how news is consumed on the mobile phone and one of the first organizations to experiment with atomized news structures. During his career he had the opportunity to work on some of the first experiments in distributed reporting, social journalism and “citizen journalism.” In 2008 he created the first platform to crowdfund journalism. In 2010 he was named one of the “Ten Under 30” by Folio magazine and in 2013 Columbia’s Journalism School gave him the Alumni Innovation Award.



WHAT BUZZFEED, MEDIUM AND

ADAFRUIT KNOW ABOUT ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is the new hot buzzword in publishing. There's lots of talk from industry watchers and thinkers about concentrating on attention minutes or building a loyal audience. Unfortunately, there's **very little** engagement building **actually happening in publishing**. Many publishers are still chasing page views and cheap clicks. They continue to obsess over monthly uniques, even if they are crap visitors who show up from Facebook once due to a viral post and never visit the site again.

RYAN SINGEL Co-founder, Contextly · @rsingel



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Publishers fret over Facebook’s algorithm changes and are watching, with trepidation, as Twitter slowly starts to slide towards a feed that looks more and more like Facebook’s.

Legacy general interest publications and newspapers with cost structures from the print era are being hit the hardest. They face the threat of extinction. You need only to read the financial news about Newsweek and Time and USA Today to see this.

Their troubles are myriad. They have no voice. They have no community or don’t know what it is. Their audience is general, in a world where general isn’t needed. But not all publishers are doomed. The very visible publishers that are winning in the engagement environment are doing two things correctly.

One, each knows who their community is, and they feed those communities’ needs.

And two, these publishers have invested heavily in tech, innovation and data analysis: Vox, The Verge, BuzzFeed, The New York Times, Medium, The Washington Post, Bleacher Report, Upworthy and Vice. (One thing you’ll notice about all of those winners: not one of them uses Outbrain, Taboola, and the other bottom feeder arbitragers like Ad.Content and nRelate, etc.)

These are the winners in the general interest category, which is increasingly going to be hard to win

in as news becomes a commodity, sites with voices and a stance build a community, and aggregation sites siphon the juice from larger organizations that do real reporting without knowing their audience. The other winners are less obvious, unless you are looking closely.

One of our favorite publishers is [Adafruit](#). (Full disclosure: They are a Contextly client.)

Adafruit is a young manufacturing company based in New York City that sells DIY electronics components to a new generation of makers. They have 50+ employees, making and selling programmable electronics to customers who make LED jewelry or [kitchen drawers that open with a secret knock](#).

Adafruit publishes about 100 blog posts a week. Every employee contributes to their blog. The founder Limor Fried hosts a weekly hang-out called Ask an Engineer to talk about what their community is building and to help their customers build cool stuff. The company’s CEO Phillip Torrone describes Adafruit as a “publication that happens to sell electronics.”

They are constantly innovating, not just with products, but with their publishing.

They now have a different theme day – Fridays, for example, are [Raspberry Pi](#) day, and the content for the day centers on that theme and what people, including their readers, have built. They’ve got a vibrant [Google+ community](#), and encourage readers to

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share what they are building – which has led some volunteer sharers to eventually get hired.

But, it's not just niche publishers who are thinking about their community.

[Buzzfeed](#) – whether you love it, hate it or love-hate it – has done an extraordinary job thinking deeply about their audience and figuring out how to feed their audiences' need while simultaneously furthering BuzzFeed's growth. BuzzFeed's listicles, quizzes, and gif stories are all built around trying to figure out new ways to entertain and inform their audience. They think digital first – and aren't stuck on a model of replicating what worked in print.

Take for example, the annual [running of the interns story](#). This tells a behind-the-scenes media story of how big media organizations deal with the Supreme Court's archaic process of releasing opinions in paper form. It's a hilarious and informative new story format.

And when something like that works, BuzzFeed tries to understand it and figure out how to systematize it by building those insights into their tech stack. Here's BuzzFeed founder Jonah Peretti explaining that process to Felix Salmon in a [monster interview in Medium](#).

“When we have something that's a hit, usually our response is not, let's do more of those. Our response is, let's figure why this is a hit and make variations of this. This was successful because it was tied to someone's identity, it was successful because it had cats in it, or it was successful because it had humor, or it was successful because it tapped into nostalgia. If you're making entertainment content, which is a big part of

what we do, you look at that hit and you say, ‘Why was that successful? Can I do it again? Can I make something else that people really love and want to share?’ And you try to vary it, even though you know doing something derivative would work. Long term, you want to have a deeper understanding of how to make great things. That's really the focus. That comes from people in a room talking and saying, ‘Oh, let's try this, let's try that.’ And valuing people doing new things, not just valuing people doing big things.”

[Medium](#) is another media company that's thinking about engagement. Focused on essay-like content presented in a very clean reading environment, Medium puts the reader experience first. Writers on the platform see more than just pageviews – more importantly, they see read minutes.

Here's a very simple thing that Medium thinks about that many sites don't. When a reader gets to an end of a story, what do they see and what do you want them to see? Many sites show a long bio of the author. Others show a list of tags and categories. Is that what a reader is interested in?

Likely no. Maybe they want an easy way to dive into the comments and see a comment that editors promoted. That's what [Ars Technica](#) does.

Other sites lead with their share buttons. Others go with content recommendations, assuming readers want to dive deeply or find other interesting stories. The BBC has links to other sites' stories on the same topic. These are all valid ways to think about what a reader wants. But a long author bio isn't one of those. That's just a way of jamming in something the publisher thinks needs to be somewhere, without thought to the reader experience.

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Find another place to put that bio.

There's one lesson that many online sites have yet to fully grasp from the time when newspapers held a de facto monopoly on distribution and the means of information for a community.

These publications strove to act as the central hub of information for that community: with wedding announcements, cross-words, event listings, movie critics, local business news, and high school sports scores (even if, it turns out, that they weren't able to do that in the digital world where communities are much narrower).

These days readers' attention can go anywhere they like to get the news and entertainment that's useful to them. There's no monopoly on their attention in the morning, like there used to be when newspapers on the doorstep had no competition.

We live in a world where many sites try to get attention anyway they can: jumping on the trending hashtag of the hour; writing click-

bait headlines and re-writing other sites' work, often with the slimmest of attribution and no fact-checking.

But that race ignores the real question facing these sites, how do you convince people with choice to return to your publication?

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AND IT'S NO LONGER
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INSTEAD, IT MUST
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SERVING READERS.**

Legacy media companies that don't know how to innovate, that harbor institutional resentment against the loss of their monopoly and don't understand their communities, these will pass away or fade into obscurity.

The ones that will thrive will be those who think about how to serve their audience; that understand what brings people to a site and what gets them to return; and perhaps most importantly, what gets them to be a

loyalist.

Engagement isn't a trick, and it's no longer guaranteed. Instead, it must be earned with a publication-wide dedication to and mindset of serving readers.

RYAN SINGEL is co-founder of Contextly, a service that helps publishers increase readership through related content recommendations. Ryan started writing for Wired.com in 2002, after spending three years working for search startups in the DotCom boom. An online journalist from the start, he's always been on the digital side of barricades in the media revolution. His beats for Wired.com have included privacy, security, search, social networking, tech policy and startups. He also co-founded the award winning Threat Level blog.



ENGAGEMENT: BE SOCIAL, LEVERAGE

TECHNOLOGY, BUILD STUFF

Congratulations on your engagement. Go ahead and update your Facebook status. Tell the world **you're in a relationship. But with whom** (or what) are you engaged, and what exactly do we mean by “engagement” anyway?

One way to parse through all the definitions of engagement is to look at how the concept is observed.

TOM KELLEHER Chair, Department of Advertising
UF College of Journalism and Communications · @tkell



IDENTIFYING ENGAGEMENT

It would be almost impossible to identify mutually exclusive categories of engagement, but to move this discussion forward with a little extra clarity, we might think of three types.

1. Engagement can be seen as the way people interact with technology and content – a sort of human-computer or human-content interaction. When you see reports touting increases in Twitter, Facebook or YouTube engagement, chances are that engagement is measured by some accounting of the number of likes, comments, shares, tweets, retweets, favorites, views, etc.

2. A level deeper, engagement is the way people interact with each other. The term conversation is up there with engagement in today's buzz lingo. Are people actually responding to each other in meaningful ways? This is a bit trickier to measure on a large scale than the mere number of comments or replies. It requires more qualitative observation and human judgment, but it isn't that hard to identify. We know it when we see it.

3. Engagement is also psychological. In addition to the behavioral indicators above (e.g., clicking on things, responding to each other) engagement can be treated as a cognitive or affective phenomenon. Or it can be some integration of the two. In fact, conceptual synonyms for engagement – terms like involvement, interactivity, activation and arousal – are among the theoretically hardest terms to nail down because they imply a mix of thinking, emotion and behavior.

LOOKING AHEAD – ADVERTISING ENGAGEMENT

The future of advertising lies in consumer engagement with brands and products. Mass media are not going away as channels for advertising, but online ad spending long ago outpaced print advertising in newspapers and digital advertising more recently surpassed national TV spending in the U.S. Investment in interactive advertising will continue to accelerate. Large-scale marketing success in the next few years will be driven by mobile and cross-platform messaging, and automated but personalized interactions.

Advertising planning will require new competencies in media math. We already are seeing dramatic shifts from static rate cards to live auctions for media buying. CPM (cost per thousand) is giving way to CPC (cost per click) and CPA (cost per action). For planners, this first type of engagement is probably more important than humanistic dialogue. Buying and selling are at the heart of exchange relationships, and digital marketplaces depend on technological efficiencies.

Creatives will still focus on psychological engagement as that coveted mix of perception, cognition and emotion that leads to consumer behavior, but creatives too will need to pay more attention to emerging technology. They must empathize with how their audiences engage brands and products across social, local and mobile platforms and devices.

**LARGE-SCALE
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LOOKING AHEAD—PUBLIC RELATIONS ENGAGEMENT

Converged and integrated public relations and advertising blend all three types of engagement, but public relations relies most on engagement as interaction between people. Building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between large organizations and publics now entails the management of countless online interpersonal interactions. Publics are more likely to interact directly with someone within an organization than ever before. They are less likely than before to get their information about organizations from a reporter who got her story from a news release that was written by a public relations person who interviewed an executive inside the company.

I have been a big proponent of the join-the-conversation approach to social media, and I stand by the idea that good human conversation is necessary for success in public relations, but the real work now is managing public relations in a way that optimizes the meaningfulness of all those conversations. The overarching goal of public relations is for organizations and publics to adapt to each other in mutually beneficial ways.

FROM JOINING CONVERSATIONS TO BUILDING PERSONALIZATION

In early fall 2004, I was a professor at UNC-Chapel Hill. I had been studying and teaching “new media” for several years prior at the University of Hawaii, but I was still a few months away from joining “the-facebook.com,” a privilege bestowed on me with my unc.edu domain membership. Twitter didn’t exist.

Blogs were new and hot, and I wanted to know what they meant for strategic communication. I had the chance to hear a visitor named Doc Searls tell me and others in person that public relations people, marketers and advertisers needed to lighten up and join the conversation. I was shocked right into a new research agenda that focused on the soon-to-be-raging topic of social media.

Ten years later I’m a new professor and chair of the advertising department at the University of Florida

(again just off the jet from Hawaii). And now I’m trying to figure out what engagement means for advertising and integrated communication. This time the spark comes from a speaker I heard at an academic conference in Montreal last month. Michael Krempasky, a general manager for Edelman’s digital public affairs team, told his audience of professors and graduate students

that one of the keys to effective digital strategy is that you have to build stuff. He used Obama’s 2012 campaign as an example. Of the hundreds of people working on digital in that effort, only a handful were assigned to purely “social.” The rest were busy writing code, building apps, and figuring out the digital nuts and bolts of the machine to mobilize voters.

I looked down at my phone during Krempasky’s presentation. I figured it wouldn’t seem rude because those around me would assume I was live-tweeting the talk or posting to the group Facebook page. You know, joining the conversation. But the app on my phone wasn’t Twitter or Facebook. It was a conference app called Guidebook that let me custom-

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ize my own personal schedule at the conference, synced my calendar, pinged me when I had a session to attend, showed me maps, and – if I was so inclined – let me engage conference-related content on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. But I wasn't so inclined. I'd say 90% of that app's utility to me was practical and data-driven, and only about 10% was social.

Shocked again.

It's not that social isn't critical for the future of engagement. It is absolutely necessary. Searls was and still is right. But he and his fellow visionaries were first and foremost builders of stuff. They are developers who taught communicators something

about communication in their world of technological innovation.

People need training, apps that facilitate the conversations need development, feedback needs analysis, and creative strategies need adaptation. It all requires personalization, but that personalization must scale for big brands, large organizations, and massive markets and publics. Communicators must work closely with developers.

Mass personalization – it's a paradox and a mandate. Solving it will take a mix of technology, data, research, planning, creativity and social. I'm guessing about 10 percent social.

TOM KELLEHER is chair of the Department of Advertising at the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications. Tom has been a member of the faculty at the University of Hawaii for the past eight years and served as chairman of the School of Communications from 2010–2013. He also served on the faculty at the School of Journalism and Communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill from 2004–2006. His first book, “Public Relations Online: Lasting Concepts for Changing Media,” released by SAGE in 2006, was among the first scholarly textbooks in public relations to focus on the implications of social media and “Web 2.0” technologies for theory and practice.



MONETIZE PASSION, NOT PAGEVIEWS:

A Q&A WITH JIM BRADY

How do you define user engagement? What are the metrics that you use to gauge engagement performance?

Brady: Engagement metrics are typically defined by site structure and mission, whether or not you're trying to build page views to sell against or build engagement. In our case, **our key focus is how many times we get people back to our site in a month.** Our goal is to get people to read our journalism and take action in the community. To build and become part of affinity groups and groups of interest. So for us, engagement is the number of times they come back, if they're leaving comments, if they're attending events.

JIM BRADY CEO, Stomping Ground · @jimbradysp



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The metaphor is like having someone in a meeting and being bored out of their skull. They're there, but that's not engagement, that's attendance. Engagement is action and a two-way conversation. Having people come to your site and learn something and leave with something to do. I don't need a million people every month, I just need the right 150,000.

UF: *What are the key trends that are shifting consumer media behavior and forcing a rethinking of how we engage users?*

Brady: The continued disaggregation of the traditional model is a key factor. It's hard for any brand to attract enough audiences to build a business around. Today's audiences' affinity is not with traditional brands but with friends and influencers.

The battle today is not about getting the most page views but to get a smaller amount of people to your site and to come back often. The goal now is to be relevant enough to get people to think about your site as a place to go, whether through social or not. I don't need a million people every month, I just need the right 150,000.

UF: *What are the key characteristics that separate those media companies who are successfully engaging users with those who are not? Who do you think is doing it best?*

Brady: Ninety percent of the most interesting things are coming from the new news sites. [Buzzfeed](#) is doing a really good job with engagement. They have won that war by understanding the platform and putting up compelling content. They understood for a long time

that the average news consumer today is not wired the same way our generation was. They don't worry a lot about juxtaposition of stories and tone the way older news organizations do so it's OK to put cat pictures next to an Iraq story.

They also understand that a headline doesn't have to tell you everything about the story. For traditional news organizations, the headline for the movie "Old Yeller" would have been "Dog Shot." It's OK for the headline to draw people in without giving away the ending. It's the same issue with the traditional inverted pyramid. That structure is designed to get people to leave sooner.

NPR is doing it right, particularly with their [NPR One](#) app that lets listeners choose the stories they want to listen to. What Vox is doing with [Vox Card Stacks](#) that provide summaries and context for big news stories is also interesting.

[Gawker](#) has done some interesting things with commenting. They were not afraid to blow up the commenting model and try new things. The key for many sites is how to attract readers without having to put a lot of their own resources against it. That's why comments are important and people shouldn't shut them down just because 10 percent of the commenters are psychopaths.

Another great example is [The Guardian](#) in London. They got a raw dump of 700,000 MP expense reports. They offered up the database to their readers to comb through and if they saw anything odd, they could report it to The Guardian and they would investigate.

TODAY'S AUDIENCES' AFFINITY IS NOT WITH TRADITIONAL BRANDS BUT WITH FRIENDS AND INFLUENCERS.

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They used the crowd to work the project and used them as a mass reporting force.

UF: *How will your new [Billy Penn](#) site be different than other media ventures you've worked for, particularly around engagement?*

Brady: The big difference is that what we are trying to do now is monetize passions and not pageviews. For example, we might curate a lot of stories about development in Philly. People will get one button to get deep information about development. We hope from there people will build groups around that topic and then we would monetize those groups.

On top of that is real-world engagement. If you're covering a limited physical area, if you can get people in a room or bar, it brings engagement a level up.

Local media can only scale so far. We're going to try to figure out how to scale all of those groups into meaningful numbers. We also hope to get half of our revenue from events and memberships.

UF: *What would you recommend to traditional media companies to help them compete more effectively with the Buzzfeed's and Upworthy's of the world?*

Brady: Stop making fun of the new companies and look at what they're doing well. Laugh all you want but in the digital news area, they are kicking a lot of asses. I get tired of the eyerolling and pissy comments. They are showing us the way.

UF: *What are the key skills that future journalists (or marketers) should be developing to be successful in their craft?*

LOCAL MEDIA CAN ONLY SCALE SO FAR. WE'RE GOING TO TRY TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO SCALE ALL OF THOSE GROUPS INTO MEANINGFUL NUMBERS.

Brady: Understand engagement and partnerships and the power of audiences beyond putting up comment boards. Students also need to know more about the business side. If we crank out 10,000 new journalists but only half understand the business, we're not going to move the profession forward. Entrepreneurism is important for students to understand.

I also get a little worried that we are breeding a whole generation of journalists who are good at a lot of things but not great at any of them. We are trying to teach them reporting, video production, data analysis, social media. But to stand out in this environment, you need to build a specific expertise. You have to have a sun in your solar system. Pick something you can build around. All of the rest of the skills will make you even stronger.

JIM BRADY is the CEO of Stomping Ground, a mobile-focused local news startup that will launch its first site, BillyPenn, in Philadelphia this fall. Jim is the former Editor-in-Chief of Digital First Media, where he oversaw the 75 daily newspapers, 292 non-daily publications and 341 online sites that are owned by Journal Register Company and MediaNews Group. He also oversaw the launch of Project Thunderdome, which redefined how DFM produces journalism by centralizing the production of non-local content so that local papers can focus on their local communities.



WHAT CUSTOMERS WANT

IS INVISIBLE TO THE EYE

In 1961, Ray Kroc bought a small restaurant chain off of the McDonald brothers. The rest, as they say, is history: the exponential expansion, the investments in real estate that made the parent company so financially successful, the rigid systems and processes – including forced revolution of the potato-growing industry – that ensure every Mickey D’s french fry from Finland to Fiji tastes identical.

KAILA COLBIN Co-Founder, Ministry of Awesomeness · @KColbin



In 1961, Ray Kroc bought a small restaurant chain off of the McDonald brothers. The rest, as they say, is history: the exponential expansion, the investments in real estate that made the parent company so financially successful, the rigid systems and processes – including forced revolution of the potato-growing industry – that ensure every Mickey D's french fry from Finland to Fiji tastes identical.

Kroc wasn't the first to come up with the idea that consistency and scalability through systems and technology are the foundational pillars of a global franchise. From Henry Ford to Walt Disney, from H&M to Home Depot, the Western commercial landscape has become dominated by this type of factory-produced, churned-out offering.

But it's not just products that have become standardized. The automate-and-replicate mindset has extended, Borg-like, from what-we-sell to how-we-behave, and is now seeking perfection everywhere from analog customer service scenarios ("Welcome back to the Four Seasons, Mr. <Lname>; would you like Room <Room-Number> like last time?") to digital email missives ("Dear <Fname>, We truly value you as a customer."). Engagement is governed by scripts, bots, and autoreplies. Quantitative metrics over qualitative relationships. Bland repetition over quirky uniqueness. And the more pervasive technology becomes, the stronger the temptation to rely on it in every possible scenario.



**AS ENGAGEMENT
BECOMES MORE AND
MORE AUTOMATED,
WE RESPOND MORE
AND MORE STRONGLY
TO PEOPLE WHO FEED
OUR DESIRE FOR
HUMAN CONNECTION.**

I understand why management loves automation, really I do. People are expensive, unpredictable and hard to train. We don't scale well. Sometimes we say stupid things. We have emotional baggage, controversial opinions, conflicting belief systems. We aren't always as compassionate as we should be, or as clever as we could be, or as thoughtful as we need to be. It's easy to see why service organizations (and, believe me, every organization that has customers is a service organization) would want to ensure absolute consistency in customer interactions.

To be fair, we as consumers often want absolute consistency as well. We want products to be consistently high quality. We want websites to work consistently well. We want people to be consistently honest, genuine, professional and attentive.

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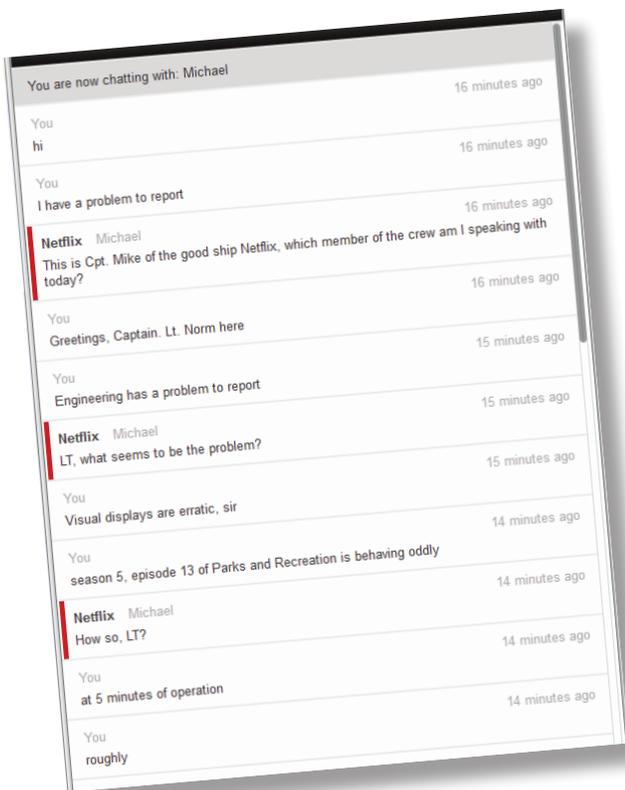
But when we engage with one another as human beings – whether it’s face-to-face, on the phone, through email, or via social media – we don’t want to encounter automata on the other end of the interaction. We want people who can understand our actual needs, who can relate to our actual desires, who feel as we feel and laugh as we laugh; if a policy or a rule makes no sense, we want to deal with people who can change or override it. As the Frank Herbert character Darwi Odrade says, “Give me the judgment of balanced minds in preference to laws every time.”

Consider, for example, our surprise and delight when we do find ourselves on the receiving end of a truly human connection – as happened last year when a Netflix customer service rep introduced himself to

a problem-reporting customer as, “Captain Mike of the good ship Netflix.” The “Captain” asked which member of the crew he was speaking with... and, when the customer replied as an officer of Star Fleet, the entire ensuing conversation was held in character. A VentureBeat [post](#) about the interaction was shared almost 15,000 times on Facebook; who knows how many times the screengrab of the chat was shared.

Or, on the media front, consider the difference between spam and true personalization. Newsweek’s Zach Schonfeld recently did a [week-long experiment](#) in which he replied to every email he received (instead of directly deleting the hundreds of press releases that jammed his inbox). The irrelevant missives he received are simultaneously hilarious and depressing, highlighting the need to ask two very simple questions: who is going to receive this communication, and why should they care?

“Over the course of the morning, I respond to a release about a French company specializing in the production of mechanical components with a chirpy ‘I don’t know much about drilling and op-tronic assembly, but thank you for sharing!’ I get an email about a professor who is available to comment on Hong Kong’s democracy movement and reply saying I’ll be sure to keep him in mind if I cover Hong Kong’s democracy movement even though I know I probably won’t wind up covering Hong Kong’s democracy movement... At one point I get an email about USA Insulation – ‘the country’s largest retrofit insulation company’ – opening a location in Rockland County....”





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As engagement becomes more and more automated, we respond more and more strongly to people who feed our desire for human connection. We don't want to feel like we're being stepped formulaically through a pre-determined funnel. We want to be seen as individuals, appreciated for who we are, tamed the way Antoine de St. Exupery's Little Prince tamed the fox:

“‘One only understands the things that one tames,’ said the fox. ‘Men have no more time to understand anything. They buy things all ready made at the shops. But there is no shop anywhere where one can buy friendship, and so men have no friends any more. If you want a friend, tame me...’ “

In the product world, there is pushback to the automate-and-replicate world of Wal-Mart and West Elm, and the market for handmade, local, craft items has become insatiable. For large companies, the challenge is now to resolve the inherent contradiction: how do you satisfy customers at scale, when the very thing they're after is uniqueness?

The answer lies in understanding what to scale. Etsy has achieved a \$600-million-plus valua-

tion by automating the platform through which people can engage with each other on a personal level, and their success holds the secret to the future of engagement. They scaled the bits where we want maximum efficiency, so that we could more thoroughly enjoy the bits where we don't.

Do not seek to automate that which should not be automated, and do not seek to systematize that which must remain alive. Automate your logistics, your inventory, your accounting. But when it comes to connecting a person in your company with someone who patronizes your company, for any purpose whatsoever, allow humans to be humans: quirky, unexpected, responsive, and alive.

It is harder to quantify this kind of engagement. But that doesn't make it any less valuable, as St. Exupery knew:

“‘Goodbye,’ said the fox. ‘And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.’”

KAILA COLBIN is a co-founder and trustee of the non-profit Ministry of Awesome, an organization dedicated to watering the seeds of awesome in Christchurch, New Zealand as well as the Curator of TEDxChristchurch and the founder and director of New Zealand social media consultancy Missing Link. She is also a PMP[®] certified Project Manager, Chairman of the Board of the New York-based Natural Gourmet Institute for Health and Culinary Arts, a board member of CORE Education Ltd. and a member of the Advisory Board for the Christchurch Transitional Architecture Trust.

STORYTELLING



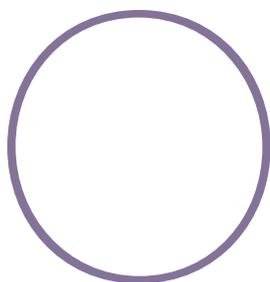
FROM STORY TOLD TO STORY LIVED

Each of us has personally experienced a variety of ways that the world around us is rapidly changing. It's fairly easy to recognize that the catalyst for that change is technology. The way we get through the day today is very different than it was five years ago, a year ago, and how it will be just six months from now...

DARREN “DAZ” MCCOLL Global Chief Strategy Officer, SapientNitro@daz_mc

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One thing that hasn't changed for marketers is that our main objective is to change consumer behaviors and shift perceptions. I think our ability to understand what makes people tick is one critical aspect of a

necessary evolution in how we accomplish this objective. Alongside that, lies our ability to create sensing and adaptive worlds leveraging those insights.

People connect with brands and brands connect with people through two main avenues – emotional connections, where they share values and also through experiential connections, where there's some sort of behavioral interaction and participation. Bringing these dimensions of connection together creates shared stories; stories where the brand becomes part of the consumer's world and story. This calls for the science of storytelling to evolve so that we craft stories that are non-linear and include experiences and emotional connections.

While story will always be integral, our strategy for engaging consumers in today's always-on world involves an evolution of the timeless craft of storytelling. We've found that people are much more likely to connect with, remember and share an experience that they participate in themselves versus one they just hear, read or watch. Therefore, we feel that "experience" is the un-

derleveraged and key element for effective storytelling in the digital world. We need to tap into our ability to create immersive and participatory experiences within the story, to move from a story told to a story lived.

Storyscaping® is our approach which suggests brands create worlds – not just individual elements, like ads, sites or apps – that encourage, inspire, and foster interactions both from an emotional and an experiential level.



WE NEED TO TAP INTO OUR ABILITY TO CREATE IMMERSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY EXPERIENCES WITHIN THE STORY, TO MOVE FROM A STORY TOLD TO A STORY LIVED.

Storyscaping is a holistic effort that is part art and part science, and it takes a cross-pollinated diverse team. If you're interested in seeing the full step-by-step approach, check out the New York Times Best Seller that I co-authored: Storyscaping – Stop Creating Ads, Start Creating Worlds. It serves as a roadmap to help brands evolve in an organized and successful way.

The following are a few of the Storyscaping guiding principals from the book:

Determine Brand Purpose. The foundation of success rests on having a cause or belief that positively resonates with internal and external participants. This will likely be related to your history or foundation as a business. It should be powerful and meaningful; every kind of company has such a purpose, and today you need to make sure it connects with customers. Your core purpose is your belief about making people's lives or world better. How does your brand make the world a

better place and customers' lives better? Once you figure that out, be incredibly authentic in how you deliver the message about your product and how you engage with participants.

Understand the Participants. Assess your ideal customers and learn everything you can about them. What do they desire? What do they need? How do they feel about things? How do they behave? Really look into their behavior patterns and the way they do the things they do and why.

Become a Mentor. Customers do things that serve their own interests. Brands need to shift away from acting as the hero of the story (“If we build it, they will come”), and begin to play a supporting mentor type of role (“we are creating a cooperative and participatory environment where we share with our customers”). While this is a pretty simple premise, it requires a shift in perspective and behavior for most company leaders. We believe it's one of the most worthwhile shifts you can make.

Create A World. When customers participate with brands, they actually enter a world where they are encouraged to explore various points of interconnection. Explore how technology can open up our realms of possibility for creating customer experiences that inspire stories at various points within that world. Also explore the ways technology can increase your ability to sew endless cohesion among the points within that world. In

other words, design each point to finish with a comma, rather than a period.

Employ Organizing Ideas. Above any “big idea” hovers an “Organizing Idea”, which serves to inspire experiences that change behavior and drive transactions while it keeps the whole effort organized and focused. Determine an Organizing Idea that encapsulates your purpose and positioning while linked to consumer understanding. Then develop your Story System around it.

Recognize the Ripples. Traditionally marketers have tried to figure out what would create a big splash. Today, we can put more emphasis on the ripples from that splash. Thanks to social media, if you make a single customer really happy (or really unhappy) large numbers of people are likely to hear about it. Capitalize on that logic. An event, even for a relatively small number of customers, can be a very worthwhile investment if those customers share images and comments about the experience with their social networks. Look for ways to create social capital.

Storyscaping is designed to put you back in the marketing driver's seat and fill your company with deeper connections with your participants. The model is non-linear; you can start anywhere, as long as you have an informed Organizing Idea and you apply it to the Experiences Space. Ready to shift from creating stories told to stories lived?

As Chief Brand Strategy Officer for SapientNitro, **DARREN MCCOLL'S** primary role is to help business grow by bringing insight through strategy and inspiration to creativity. He is a co-author of the New York Times best seller *Storyscaping—Stop Creating Ads, start creating worlds*. Darren has worked with numerous local and global brands such as: Virgin Blue Airlines, Virgin Megastore, McDonald's, Nestlé, Foster's, Burger King, Subway, Footlocker, Coca Cola Brands, X Games, ESPN, Ford and Mercedes Benz, Visit Florida, BBVA, Ideal Image.



AN ACTOR'S GUIDE TO

BETTER STORYTELLING

Google the term “storytelling in business” and you’ll get 17 million results. Storytelling is clearly a hot topic, and we’re all told repeatedly we should use more stories in our everyday communications. Yet one question goes unanswered in most of these reports: what exactly is a story?

ROB BIESENBACH Corporate Communications Consultant and Business
Writer · @RobBiesenbach



Let me give you a hint: a quote from Steve Jobs is not a story. A customer testimonial is not necessarily a story. A picture of a dog in the rain may or may not be a story. A true story – one that carries the full impact a story promises – contains certain fundamental elements.

I was talking to a woman down on the production line named Estela. Her job was to inspect the gum before it went out the door. When I asked her what she did to ensure quality, she walked me through her processes from start to finish, showed me a checklist of all the criteria she looks for and demonstrated how the x-ray machine works.

SO WHAT IS A STORY?

A colleague of mine sought to answer this question for a book he was writing. His research led him to 82 different definitions of story!

The one he settled on happened to be the definition I was taught at Chicago's famed Second City, the birthplace of comic legends from John Belushi to Tina Fey. Its [training center](#) is also where thousands of ordinary people like me go to study the art of improvisational and sketch comedy.

They taught us that story is a **character** in pursuit of a **goal** in the face of some **challenge** or obstacle. How that character resolves that challenge provides the dramatic interest that keeps us captivated.

Now you can layer on other elements, from an ironic twist to a moral lesson, but these are the essential building blocks for crafting a simple, effective story.

STORY AT WORK

One of my favorite stories involved a company I worked with that manufactures candy and gum. They wanted to demonstrate their commitment to quality, so we went looking for stories.

**JUST AS IMPORTANT
AS WHAT GOES
INTO A GREAT STORY
IS WHAT YOU LEAVE
OUT. BECAUSE A
PERFECTLY GOOD
STORY CAN BE RUINED
WHEN IT'S WEIGHED
DOWN WITH A LOT OF
UNNECESSARY DETAIL.**

It was interesting, but it wasn't a story. It was just information.

So I asked her what her kids think of what she does. That's when she lit up. She pointed to a code on the back of one of the gum packages. That code tells you exactly when and where the gum was made, right down to the individual shift and production line.

The kicker is, her children can read the code. So when her family goes to the store, the kids run straight to the candy aisle, turn over the packages of gum and when they find the right code, they yell, "This is mommy's gum! My mommy made this gum!"

Now that's a story. It's got a great character at its center: a mom. Her goal is quality, and among the challenges she faces is complacency – how do you maintain your focus on what many would consider a mundane, repetitive task?

She resolves that challenge by thinking of her customers as family. Three things make this story especially effective.

CHARACTERS COUNT

Think about the great characters from TV and movies: Walter White, Tony Soprano, Indiana Jones. They're what keep us tuned in. It's why we've been watching "I Love Lucy" for more than half a century. It's right there in the title: we love her.

So your number one job as a storyteller is to find a character that resonates with your audience. And what's more relatable than a mom looking out for the health and well-being of her children?

In the end, nobody really cares about processes or programs — they care about people.

EMOTION FUELS STORIES

Emotion is what gets us involved in a story. When Ryan Gosling or Jennifer Lawrence pour their hearts into a role, we feel what they feel.

An emotional appeal breaks down our defenses, leaving us more [open to influence](#). Yet so many erstwhile storytellers would get hung up on the technical aspects of Estela's story, and it would end up looking like this:

"Our employees are committed to quality. They use state-of-the-art technology and inspect every pack of gum according to 32 proprietary criteria — all to ensure that the gum you buy is as fresh and good as the day it left our door."

But that's not a story. First, there's no character. And second, it's all data and information. It doesn't stir the soul.

As renowned marketer [Seth Godin says](#), "The market is not seduced by logic. People are moved by stories and drama and hints and clues and discovery. Logic is a battering ram."

FOCUS IS ESSENTIAL

Just as important as what goes into a great story is what you leave out. Because a perfectly good story can be ruined when it's weighed down with a lot of unnecessary detail.

**WORK THE KEY
STORY ELEMENTS.
FIND THE EMOTIONAL
CORE. CUT THE
FAT. AND KEEP
REFINING AND
POLISHING YOUR
STORY UNTIL YOU'VE
GOT IT RIGHT.**

In sketch writing classes they taught us that every scene starts with a strong premise and every word and action must support that premise. It has to drive the story forward.

So you may have a joke that's guaranteed to send your audience rolling on the floor laughing. But if it doesn't address the premise, it has to be cut. Funny for the sake of funny is not good enough.

Similarly, every story we tell must have an objective. And any extraneous fact or detail that doesn't serve that objective must be cut. Interesting for the sake of interesting is not good enough.

Question every detail. Eliminate the interesting, but not mission-critical, asides. Cut the irrelevant names, dates and numbers. Get rid of the clutter and keep the story moving forward.

EVERYBODY CAN TELL A STORY

While some people play fast and loose with the definition of story, others are intimidated and think storytelling is just for the experts.



CAPTIVATE

But I've found that with a simple structure, anyone can tell a decent story. We may not reach the heights of Mark Twain or Martin Scorsese, but that's okay. No weekend golfer expects to play like Tiger Woods.

Start by thinking of your audience's big challenges. What's stopping them from achieving their goals? Find a character who's overcome those obstacles. It could be an historical figure, someone you work with, or even a member of the audience you're trying to reach.

Work the key story elements. Find the emotional core. Cut the fat. And keep refining and polishing your story until you've got it right.

If you can learn to craft and tell a good story, there's almost no limit to what you can do: lead employees, sell to customers, rally teams, nail a job interview, earn a raise and much more.

Just focus on the fundamentals.

ROB BIESENBACH is fighting to put an end to dull, ordinary communications in our time. He helps his corporate clients cut through the clutter to engage employees, customers and other audiences. He is also a Second City trained actor. He brings these worlds together in his workshops and books—*Act Like You Mean Business* and *11 Deadly Presentation Sins*—which are helping people become more skilled, confident communicators so they can enjoy more success in life. You can follow him on Twitter: @RobBiesenbach



CREATING A RICHER

STORYTELLING EXPERIENCE

A great story once began: It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. For the art of journalistic storytelling these days, it's both. It's the best of times because we have a wealth of storytelling tools at our disposal today unlike anything we've seen before: video, audio, interactive features, mapping, data visualization, simulations, computational gadgets, the ability to link to the world's knowledge. The ways that we can tell a story these days are virtually limitless.

MARK POTTS Founder, Newspeg.com · @pottsmark



But it's the worst of times because most news stories still are being told the old-fashioned way: in text, often via an inverted pyramid, with a lede, a couple of quotes, a nut graf, and on and on for hundreds or thousands of words – pretty much the same way stories have been told since, well, Charles Dickens wrote “Tale of Two Cities” – and long before that.

Those written storytelling conventions arose, logically, out of our oral traditions – as written language developed, it made sense to commit stories to paper using only words. But it's illogical today, with so many alternatives available, to keep telling the vast majority of stories the same way we always have. Some stories lend themselves to so much more than words, and we now have the ability to better match the form to the story.

Sure, there have been notable exceptions to the dominance of the written word. Everybody seems to point to the New York Times' famous 2012 effort, “[Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek](#),” which brought together graphics, maps, links and interactive features – albeit with a backbone of standard text. [Not everyone is as taken with “Snow Fall,”](#) but in a frozen wasteland of old-fashioned storytelling, it stood out. It certainly wasn't the first effort to try to tell stories with multimedia. The Philadelphia Inquirer's mammoth “Black Hawk Down” project, back in 1997, was one of the first to combine audio, video, documents and other elements with conventional text.

More recently, in 2010, The Washington Post's Ian Shapira, told a moving story of a woman's Facebook chronicle of her declining health and death after childbirth by using Facebook's own features and format to tell [the story](#). The result still was heavily text-based, but it demonstrated a creative use of computational media – the medium became the message.

More ambitiously, Nate Silver's [FiveThirtyEight.com](#) has marshaled data to find new ways to tell stories – although supposedly cutting-edge journalism enterprises such as FiveThirtyEight, [Vox](#) and Pierre Omidyar's [First Look](#) still rely largely on text to get their stories across. Even something like The Washington Post's much-vaunted new [Storyline](#) feature turns out to be the same-old, same-old presentation of text, dressed up in a fancy layout.

That's not enough.

Fortunately, there are other, more advanced examples of creative use of new journalistic storytelling tools, especially using computation, data and maps, though they're still too few and far between. The New York Times has a longstanding, regularly updated [interactive feature](#) that lets readers simulate the tough choices need to balance the federal budget. [A recent interactive Times feature](#) tracked how Americans move away from the states in which they were born. And the Times used an [interactive map](#) to track the dispersal of surplus military equipment to local police forces, a story that more traditionally might have been told through inches of dry text and a few anecdotes.

AS WE CONTINUE TO EXPLORE THE NEW TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS AVAILABLE TO US, IT IS LIKELY THAT NEW FORMS OF STORYTELLING WILL EMERGE AND TAKE HOLD.

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One of the most ambitious examples of advanced multimedia storytelling is “[Welcome to Pine Point](#),” an exploration of a defunct mining town by Canadian documentarians Michael Simons and Paul Shoebri-ge, in association with the National Film Board of Canada. Seamlessly blending video, sound, maps, text, interactivity and other elements, “Welcome to Pine Point” presents a rich storytelling experience that makes even “Snow Fall” look traditional. Other notable recent multimedia efforts include The Guardian’s “[Firestorm](#),” The Tennessean’s “[Because of You](#),” and PBS/Frontline’s “[A Perfect Terrorist](#),” which uses video in unusual non-linear and interactive ways.

To be sure, these sorts of ambitious multimedia and computational storytelling projects are not easy to create – they require multiple skills (video, audio, programming, etc.) and, generally, teams of people. It’s usually a lot simpler and less expensive to tell a big story with a few-thousand well-chosen words. And let’s face it. It’s easy to fall back on the tried and true text storytelling tricks.

But we’ve got much better tools today. Simulations and news games can put readers – even that word implies text-first formats – into the middle of a story, experiencing and interacting with it directly. Appropriate use of tools like data, video and audio, especially mixed together and with other forms (yes, even words) can provide a much richer storytelling experience. If, as the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, what’s a video worth? Or a simulation? Or some other form of multimedia or interaction?

Ironically, as we continue to search for new forms of storytelling that mix and match these amazing new tools to create a new vocabulary for sharing stories, we’re seeing green shoots of new kinds of storytelling: the 140 characters of Twitter, used well, can get across large amounts of information, and encourage interaction with the audience that adds to the story. (Check out one of Silicon Valley magnate Marc Andreessen’s famous [tweetstorms](#) (@pmarca) to see how a dozen sharp tweets can express deep thoughts and trigger fascinating discussion.)



Twitter's value as a staccato breaking news bulletin service, of course, is well-known, as was recently demonstrated again by dramatic coverage by The Washington Post's [@WesleyLowery](#) and others of the police killing of Michael Brown and the subsequent unrest in Ferguson, Mo. Storify collection of tweets and

liveblogging are other tools

to tell rapidly-changing stories in new ways.

Similarly, lists and slide shows can convey volumes of info in an economical few lines or clicks. Many journalists don't usually think of these as storytelling media – indeed, we often deride them – but they're providing new and entertaining ways to tell tales, as the success of BuzzFeed and other "listicle" purveyors demonstrate.

It's worth noting that online business publication Quartz recently posted a job opening for a reporter to create what it called "Things," explaining that "'Thing' is simply our catchall term for stories that break free of the traditional article format to convey information in ways that work better on the web. Developing those new storytelling methods – and empowering others to use them, as well – is the challenge of this job." Hear hear.

As we continue to explore the new technological tools available to us, it is likely that new forms of storytelling will emerge and take hold. They may not supplant text, but hopefully they will greatly supplement it, at the very least. We must recognize that every subject we cover demands its own unique storytelling. A visual story benefits from visuals rather than written descriptions. A story based on data needs to show, rather than tell. Twenty years into the digital revolution, we're still trying to invent the best way to tell stories. As we do, the best of times will be ahead.

Footnote: Josh Stearns, director of journalism and sustainability for the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, has compiled an excellent list of interesting online storytelling examples over the past couple of years that can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

MARK POTTS is a leader in the development of innovative strategies and products in online and print media. He created one of the first electronic news prototypes in the early 1990s, and then co-founded The Washington Post Co.'s digital division. As co-founder of Backfence.com and GrowthSpur, he was a pioneer in the field of hyperlocal news and information. In 2014, Mark founded Newspeg.com, a visual news-sharing site that has been described as "Pinterest for news."



MARKETING



THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA IN MARKETING

Philip Kotler defined marketing as understanding and meeting the needs of customers. This definition of marketing still holds and is more relevant than ever since **customers today are far more empowered than before** due to enabling technology and services including mobile computing, social networks and assisted search. Marketers must now upgrade their marketing to meet the needs of the empowered age. **It is time for empowered marketing** for an empowered age. Empowered marketing is one that respects the new capabilities and tools that people have at their disposal and a marketing outlook that leverages these new tools and technologies in ways that transform the way marketing is done.

RISHAD TOBACOWALA Chief Strategist and member of the Directoire+
Publicis Groupe · @rishad



CAPTIVATE

In an empowered age, people are exhibiting dramatically new habits in the way they become aware, consider, buy and advocate. These new habits supplement and do not necessarily in the near term replace the ways they traditionally evaluated and bought products and services. However, in time, we anticipate that these new behaviors are likely to become dominant.

The three biggest shifts are enhanced expectations, connected experiences and self-marketing.

A simple example of a company that has both fueled and benefited from these shifts is Amazon. They both have created and responded to people's expectations for speed, value and service, seamlessly connected all aspects of the "marketing funnel" and fed a habit of us marketing to ourselves as we search, evaluate and comment on products and services. Today 30% of all e-commerce searches start on Amazon versus only 13% on Google.

These trends of self-marketing is fueled also by social networks, increased expectations by new companies like Uber, Warby Parker and others that fixate on delighting people and ensuring that every single experience pre, during and post experience is tightly linked and seamless. It is this era that marketers must get prepared for rather than fixate on the buzzword bingo of "big data", "cloud", "programmatic buying" or conference mumbo jumbo which sometimes are ingredients to delivery but not the recipe nor the meal itself.

To thrive in this era marketers must re-consider their partners, their organizations and even themselves. The future does not fit in the containers or mindsets of the

past. Putting crap on a cloud and making it mobile and serving it with programmatic technology still does not change the fact that it is crap.

The new era requires five key changes.

1. Invest in superior products and services since it is the best form of marketing. Today in a connected age with social networks that allow word of mouth at scale, investing in great products and services is the best marketing investment. You do not want a viral buzz about

your advertising. You want people to be advocates of your products and services. Think less about advertising and more about utilities, services, employee training and arming advocates while defanging detractors. Worry about the content and experience of your marketing interactions more than fixating on how cheaply you can distribute these interactions. One superior interaction is worth many many mediocre ones. Marketing is moving from wholesale spraying to custom

hand holding. Focus on the poetry of the interaction and not just the plumbing of the delivery.

2. Recognize that everything is marketing. In a mobile age your customer tweets, Instagrams and posts about every aspect of their service or product experience. If the hotel room is good but the gym sucks, the world will know it. If the product is good but the customer support is not, this will be telegraphed. Ensure that your digital presence and your analog reality are both world class and connected. Recognize that the phone in your customer's pocket is really their key interaction in many ways with your products and services.

3. Make your Brand API Friendly. Brands will matter more and more in an age of self-marketing, fragmen-

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tation and change. Brands are the ultimate navigation devices. They are the beacons people will steer by. It is critical that your company and your brand are easy to access, connect and collaborate with in a connected age. Is it easy to find on search engines, is it easy to engage with on social networks, is the data and experiences on your website modular and distributed, are components of your product and service developed in ways that your customers and other distributors can incorporate them into their marketing. Can customers easily understand the authenticity, values and purpose of your company and its people?

4. Get real. The new stuff is difficult and requires new skills.

It has been 20 years since the Netscape Browser and the start of digital marketing. Consumers in many markets have so absorbed technology and devices into the way they shop and behave that some marketers have begun to believe that the “digital” era is over since it should now be all merged again. We hear “digital first” and “digital at the core” loudest from those who are the least digital. Digital is not just about technology. Digital is a mindset. It is about a whole new way of thinking about marketing. It is a world where brands matter, insights matter and storytelling matters. BUT the way brands are built, stories shared and insights extracted and leveraged are different! Yes BRANDS. Yes STORY-

TELLING. Yes INSIGHTS. But NO to the same way of doing things in a connected, empowered, self-marketing, mobile age where commerce will be baked into more and more marketing interactions.

The new stuff is hard. It’s difficult. It requires technology and coding and new organizations and measurement and partnerships as well as brands and insight and storytelling.

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5. Marketing is a growth game not a share game.

For too long, marketers and agencies have defined themselves too narrowly in categories as product companies or service companies. As media agencies or creative agencies or promotion agencies or PR agencies. All these definitions

were before we entered into an age of digital leakage where media and creative and technology blend, where barriers between industries leak, where service and product congeal. Where the world for marketers include the worlds of commerce, content and more. Where Google and Facebook and Twitter are not threats but great opportunities and stairways to new markets. It’s an era to think with a fresh sheet of paper and with courage. To attract, retain and grow amazing talent.

It’s an age of abundance where talent and time is short. So get learning, get partnering and get going.

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“EMOTIONAL FULFILLMENT,

NOT TECHNOLOGY, WILL BE THE STAND

OUT OFFERING OF A WINNING BRAND”

The marketing landscape has **changed exponentially** over the last decade as both marketers and consumers have become more sophisticated, technologically adept, price smart and also conscious of the impact of having a good reputation.

KEVIN ROBERTS CEO Worldwide · Saatchi & Saatchi@KRConnect



Technology has reset the value equation across the spectrum of audience engagement. Power has switched from the supply side to the demand side of commerce, disrupting the one-way brand model that focused on winning minds. Technology + creativity is transforming every industry - retail, finance, logistics, manufacturing, energy, transport, food, education - delivering power and wonder to the audience at digital speed.

People have the world at their fingertips and at the command of their voice. Far from being reliant on brands to manage the information tsunami, people know how to get what they want - and fast! Brands that manipulate, under-deliver or over-price get seen through instantly. Contrary to popular thinking that people are overwhelmed by information, consumers are extremely savvy navigators and have no hesitation about consulting reviews, comparing prices and checking social media currency. The consumer cycle is: see it; search it; shop it; share it.

The tech-led empowerment of customers will only grow as the 'Internet of Things' connects everything to everyone, driving down the marginal cost of production and distribution, just as technology has done with the supply of information.

In this always-on, impulse-led, instant Age of Now, brands, choices and deals are prolific for brand-fatigued, tech-enabled and 'entitled' consumers. Consumers expect more for less, and can switch faster. Brands are under siege, finding it ever harder to com-

mand premiums and retain loyalty. Only 23 percent of consumers in a 2012 Corporate Executive Board study said they have a relationship with a brand. Another study showed the majority of people worldwide wouldn't care if more than 73 percent of brands disappeared tomorrow.

The days when marketers could look forward to the majority of customers coming back to the showroom for a repeat buy are largely gone for most (but not all) brands. According to research in 1980, 80 percent of U.S. auto purchases were made by repeat customers;

by 2009 the figure had plummeted to 20 percent (CNW). In an August 2014 study, only three brands - Toyota, Honda and Ford - kept at least 50 percent of their customers coming back on average (Kelley).

Is this the end of brands? Does the march of technology condemn brands to a low-margin battle of attrition? For attention grabbers, yes. Brands still have to be created today,

but this is a table stake. The path for marketers wanting to kindle brand power and loyalty has less to do with functional elements such as distribution and advertising, and more to do with emotional fulfillment. Brands have to show truth and engage deep. The have to make the leap from being trusted, liked and admired - to being loved.

Emotional expectations of brands are on the rise. Consumers are asking "how does this brand improve my life?" and "how do I feel about this brand?" There is a thirst for authentic connections. Passive consumers are being replaced by active brand voters who opt into a brand ethos that meshes emotionally with their own lives.

THE PATH FOR MARKETERS WANTING TO KINDLE BRAND POWER AND LOYALTY HAS LESS TO DO WITH FUNCTIONAL ELEMENTS SUCH AS DISTRIBUTION AND ADVERTISING, AND MORE TO DO WITH EMOTIONAL FULFILLMENT.

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People want to be involved in the story, whether it's the middle, end or the beginning. This applies East to West. Chinese consumer spending is expected to grow from \$2.03 trillion in 2010 to \$6.18 trillion annually in 2020, a threefold jump (Boston Consulting Group). In 2013, a major study of consumer behavior in Tier 1 to 4 cities in China involving 22 product categories found that emotional factors ranked first as a reason to buy for more than half of the categories considered. And another 2013 study about direct marketers looking for ways to tap into a receptive audience of eager television viewers concluded that consumers with a strong emotional connection to a brand are 47 percent more likely to contribute revenue.

Focusing on emotion makes perfect sense. Psychologists like Nobel Economics laureate Daniel Kahneman have shown how people are not rational decision makers. The Canadian neurologist Donald Calne encapsulates “the essential difference between emotion and reason is that emotion leads to action while reason leads to conclusions.”

Emotional fulfillment, not technology, will be the stand-out offering of a winning brand. People like technology – but people mostly really like other people. The more digital life gets, the more people will value being understood, touched and involved by other people. The brands that win will be real and personable – whether it's a live person on screen, a physical store interaction or the mass intimacy of a stadium event, football to rock.

And Big Data? Is it the new nirvana, the perfect marketing moment? Gartner has said that by 2017 the CMO will spend more on IT than the CIO. Good luck to the new ‘Chief Metric Officer,’ unless she or he is also a ‘Chief Magic Offi-

cer,’ because magic will always need to be sprinkled. Big Data needs Big Emotion, because algorithms will never read and respond to humans the way humans do. The Big Data machine can read the lines, but not between them. Relevance is one thing, irresistibility is another. Big Data can turn up at the perfect moment, but not ignite it. It can spit out stories based on what came before, but it can't dream the difference and feel the empathy that builds billion-dollar loved brands.

Big Data and Big Emotion have to join forces, not fight each other. For example, Saatchi & Saatchi works with [Hotspex](#) in Toronto with their heatmap-based Emotional Measurement Technology to find the emotional space a brand will grow in and to get an emotional balance sheet to see strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and paths to avoid. With [Protobrand](#) in Boston we have just developed Lovemarketer 2.0 which has identified the eight critical factors that lead to brand respect – for example competence, innovation and social and environmental responsibility – and the seven critical factors that lead to brand love – for example desire, connection, devotion and exclusivity.

Here are five keys for businesses and brands to get to the future first:

BE A CREATIVE LEADER

Cultures that have the most ideas are best placed to win, because creativity has unreasonable power. Ideas have re-framing power, talking power and sharing power.

Old world power, scale and money have been eclipsed by the velocity of ideas. Winning as a brand demands a climate where creativity can thrive, where diversity

THE IRONY IS THAT WHILE LOYALTY WAS NEVER EASIER TO LOSE, IT HAS NEVER BEEN EASIER TO WIN FOR A BRAND THAT IS EMOTIONALLY-TUNED, EMOTIONALLY-CAPABLE AND EMOTIONALLY-EXECUTED.

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is standard and where ideas fly in all directions all of the time. There is a dream in full view for everyone to reach for. Creativity and innovation are in everyone's job description, and the crazies and misfits (especially the loyalists, the fans) get a seat at the decision table. Everyone on the production team gets responsibility, learning, recognition and joy in equal measure. This is the blueprint for Creative Leadership.

BE PARTICIPATORY

The more that brands bring their consumers, customers and partners into their secret garden, the greater the rewards that will flow back in, and the bigger the garden will grow. The new ROI is Return on Involvement, and the fan base is critical. Fans are not usually a numerically significant percentage of a brand's overall buyers but have outsize impact on building a winning brand. This is about influencers, shared values, inspiring community, word of mouth, creating movements, co-creating and story sharing. To reorder a classic line of the late great Steve Jobs: Amazing. Click. Boom!

BE VISUAL

More than 50 percent of the cortex, the surface of the brain, is devoted to processing visual information. Images, Instagram and infographics are becoming hot properties in the information-tsunami for good reason. People today are aesthetically adept; they process images thousands of times faster than text, and love to share cool imagery. We are drawn to beauty and universality.

BE FAST

Priceless value arrives on time and whether we're talking curing killer diseases or simply feeding the kids, there is less time available for people than ever. Across production, distribution and communication, brands have a need for speed. Tom Peters summarizes the way to win: "Test fast, fail fast, adjust fast."

BE EMOTIONAL

Emotion is the primary key to winning on the road ahead, and in the technological century, the potential for a brand to deliver on heightened emotional demands is greater than ever. There is extraordinary capacity to understand people, interact, customize, personalize and touch lives.

The irony is that while loyalty was never easier to lose, it has never been easier to win for a brand that is emotionally-tuned, emotionally-capable and emotionally-executed. The commercial opportunity is not just to drive repeat sales but also to command premiums, build share and extend range.

Brands are becoming human relationships, and the strongest relationships have mystery, sensuality and intimacy, the stuff we care about. The more empathy, magic and love that brands stream out, the more that comes back in a multiplier effect. This is about more than irreplaceability. It is about irresistibility, a brand with Loyalty Beyond Reason - a Lovemark.

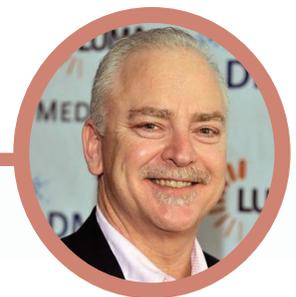
KEVIN ROBERTS is the New York-based CEO Worldwide of Saatchi & Saatchi - one of the world's leading creative organizations and part of Publicis Groupe, the world's third largest communications group. He took up his position as CEO Worldwide with Saatchi & Saatchi in 1997, and will move to the position of Executive Chairman in January 2015. In 2004, he wrote *Lovemarks: the Future Beyond Brands*, a ground-breaking business book published in 18 languages, showing how emotion can inspire businesses and brands to deliver sustainable value. *Lovemarks* was named one of the ten Ideas of the Decade by Advertising Age in 2009. He has just published a 10,000 word "Red Paper" Brand Loyalty Reloaded, which can be found at saatchikevin.com.

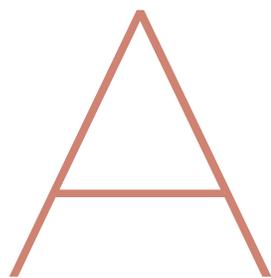


DON'T CALL IT ADVERTISING ANYMORE

It's an interesting wrinkle in time for the colliding worlds of advertising and digital empowerment. Exactly 20 years ago I was part of the team that sold **the very first banner ads on the World Wide Web**. On 10/27/94, Wired Magazine flipped the switch that lit up HotWired, the “cyberstation” that ushered brands like IBM, Volvo, MCI, Club Med and – famously – AT&T into the digital age. From the humble origin of a dozen brands paying \$15,000 per month for static banner placement with zero analytics, web advertising is closing in on \$50 billion in annual spending.

DOUG WEAVER Founder, Upstream Group · @UpstreamDW





t precisely the same moment, the banner ad (and related forms like the 15-second video pre-roll and the mobile display ad) has become a social touchstone that evokes a firestorm of condescension and condemnation at every turn. Indeed, the 20th anniversary of web advertising has mobilized the kill-the-banner crowd like so many pitchfork-wielding peasants out to stop Dr. Frankenstein. To the casual observer this all may seem a bit schizophrenic: Can the digital ad business really have been built and sustained on top of such a flawed delivery vehicle? And if web advertising techniques are really so ham-handed, why are they now being co-opted by the behemoth of television in the forms of screen overlays, dynamic ad serving and programmatic distribution?

Interesting questions indeed. But they are also the wrong questions. Over my 20 very active years serving media companies other digital and traditional advertising players, I've had a front row seat for a show that is consistently mistranslated, misdiagnosed and misunderstood. Digital advertising was born to an internet that people read and watched. During that seminal period of tiny gif images and narrow, scrolling columns of type we started calling those who put content on the web "publishers" - a role that was even then retiring to a world of hagiographic nostalgia. And advertising - well, that was a science to be grafted onto the web from other forms of publishing and broadcasting as technology and bandwidth allowed. Those first crude banners were nothing more than outdoor ads writ small. That they gave way eventually to larger, more picturesque 'mag-



azine' ads and then to TV-style video spots meant more and more growth, but it also continued to miss the larger point that defines the true value of digitization - and lights our path for what happens now.

Let's be honest in admitting that we haven't really been all that much of a literary culture for much of the last 50 years and the internet doesn't change that. You're now

WHAT WILL CREATE THE NEXT GREAT WAVE OF GROWTH FOR THE ADVERTISING BUSINESS? I BELIEVE IT WILL HAPPEN ONLY BY CONFRONTING THE TRUTH THAT ADVERTISING IN A DIGITAL WORLD MATTERS MOST WHEN IT LEAST RESEMBLES ADVERTISING.

just over 400 words into this essay: statistically, it's already one of the longest things most American's will read on the internet today. Over these two decades, the web has become something everyone does - not something they watch or read. We look for answers, we pass jokes back and forth to one another, we settle arguments. We preen and strut, we compare and buy, we "snack" on short bits of video. We organize things, we plan projects, we opine. Does this mean that content no

longer matters? Or that it matters more than ever? The maddeningly simple answer is that it matters when it matters; when it's closely aligned with the experience the consumer is living at that moment in time. And not for its own sake.

This leads me to the crossroads confronting those who aim to create the next \$50 billion of revenue through "digital advertising" and for the advertising industry as a whole. The rocket ride from 1994 to 2014 has been driven by a combination of shifting consumer behavior (the increased time spent on browsers and devices is inescapable even to the staunchest traditional media die hard) and our ability to efficiently "tag



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along” with the experiences consumers are choosing to create for themselves digitally. Always on, always in our hands, the internet has become an extension of us as people. But advertising, mostly, has not kept up.

Two dominant trends in digital advertising today are data optimization and the programmatic trading of advertising display opportunities. In the first, we are overlaying information to identify and make decisions about those who we might show our ads to. In the second, we are building the technology and functionality to trade “ad futures” with one another. Both of these are critically important, “hard trends,” and they’ll continue – to some point – to usher more dollars into digital channels. But they are also both exercises in division and reduction: *help me show my ad to fewer of the people who don’t matter; help me buy fewer of the ads that don’t work or don’t matter.*

So what, then, will create the next great wave of growth for the advertising business? I believe it will happen only by confronting the truth that advertising in a digital world matters most when it least resembles advertising. Google and (to a lesser and less consistent degree) Facebook start the value creation at the point of consumer action and intent. The form that “advertising” takes is malleable and built into the experience: a helpful suggestion via some text as they answer my search query; a post from a marketer on a topic around which I’m already active. BuzzFeed has made a huge splash by helping marketers create just the kind of snackable con-

tent-McNuggets that we already like to trade with one another across the very platforms – Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr – where we already trade them.

But this is the tip of the iceberg. Many current techniques will look as archaic in 2024 as the earliest banners look today. But the companies and leaders who will endure and thrive are those who consistently answer a different set of questions: *What is the consumer doing today with digital tools and how can I help her do it better? How might we create new value by blending discovery, commerce and productivity into a new experience shared by consumer and marketer?*

If there were no such thing as an “advertising budget,” how would we create a connection between consumers and brands, companies and products that can bring new value into the consumer’s life?

These are the questions to be confronted not only by “digital advertising” leaders; after all, what advertising will not be digital by the time we reach our next ten year milestone? No, this is the existential moment for all of what used to be called Madison Avenue and “the Media.” Because when Wired flipped that switch 20 years ago they also set in motion a chain of events that prompts the re-imagination of all advertising.

From this point forward, don’t call any of it advertising. It will either be something much, much bigger – or it will be background noise.

DOUG WEAVER is a highly-regarded strategist and opinion leader in the world of online advertising. Over the past 16 years he’s worked with more than 600 leading companies, including Facebook, Yahoo!, Apple, Fox Sports, USA TODAY, CBS Digital Media, YuMe, The Wall Street Journal, NBC Universal, National Public Radio, Tremor Media, ESPN, About.com and The New York Times.



WE NEED A NEW “CHURCH AND

STATE” IN DIGITAL PUBLISHING

Much of the digital content industry is lost today in discussions about **the blurred line between publisher and advertiser** – otherwise known as the divide between church and state. Questions revolve around concerns about consumers’ ability to distinguish editorial from advertising content, whether they understand an ad is not necessarily an editorial endorsement, and what happens if they lose faith in the content publishers work so hard to produce.

JASON KINT CEO, Digital Content Next · @jason_kint



Though these are legitimate concerns, the line between media and marketer has already blurred as brands like Red Bull and Kraft excel in the art of creating media, while media outlets like the New York Times and Vox perfect the craft of brand content. In this new reality, it's not the re-building of a crumbled wall between editor and publisher that's needed but the raising of a new kind of wall, one which separates click-bait from bona fide content.

Whether they're brands or publishers, what motivates content producers to go to great lengths to produce high-quality content day after day is the need to engage consumers in meaningful ways. Holding consumers' attention, maximizing the amount of time they spend with the brand, and provoking the kind of emotion that spurs repeat visits which translate into brand loyalty requires content producers to consistently offer substantive, smartly packaged ideas consumers can relate to and interact with.

But blended into the competitive mix is a host of shadier players who survive by capitalizing on the consumer trust which publishers and marketers so painstakingly build. For these "trust parasites" who have optimized themselves to a single purpose – the one-time click – the kind of authentic engagement (consumer time spent, attention gained and emotion aroused) which benefits both consumer and ad-

vertiser is wholly irrelevant. By combining endless tracking data with the ping of an advertising server, with no regard for the value of the consumer relationship, trust parasites are able to eat up a disproportionate share of the digital advertising pie.

Though purveyors of trust parasitism may claim their practice hurts no one (and some may even go out on a limb to say it offers some kind of benefit), in

truth these kinds of practices threaten to undermine the bond between consumer and content that serves as the backbone of the marketing ecosystem. Fool consumers one too many times and their trust is broken, seriously damaging the credibility of both editorial and marketing content.

The real "church and state" question facing us today is not how we keep advertisers and publishers apart but

how we keep quality and credibility quarantined from the damaging effects of parasitic click-chasers. We see this challenge play out almost every day in native advertising, where producers of high-quality content are unfairly associated with pernicious practices like camouflaging paid ads as recommendations (e.g. "You may also like...") optimized not to provide benefit to the reader but for the sole purpose of garnering one more click.

It's clear that the industry needs a framework to establish a new divide. Recent research, like Digital Content Next's [newly released study](#), shows that time-based metrics can provide a more accurate assessment of engagement by measuring the amount

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of time a consumer spends with a brand, as opposed to the number of clicks it gets. With 80 percent of digital publishers saying they are interested in buying and selling ads based on these metrics, this is an encouraging development.

Much like the wall between church and state, the new wall of quality content will have to be re-built

every day as unique cases and circumstances arise. But unlike the old wall, this wall will need advertisers, publishers and consumers to cooperate in order to create and maintain it. Only this kind of mutual insistence on quality can ensure the industry continues to produce the energy source which keeps our proverbial lights on – the quality content people trust and value.

JASON KINT is the chief executive of Digital Content Next, a trade association that exclusively serves the diverse needs of digital content companies that manage direct, trusted relationships with consumers and marketers. A 20-year veteran of the digital media industry, he previously led the evolution of CBS Sports into a multi-platform brand offering premier broadcast, online and mobile sports content as SVP and General Manager of CBS Interactive's Sports Division.

M E T R I C S



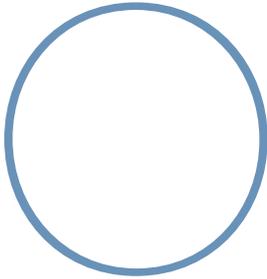
CHASING CLICKS: METRICS SHOULD SUPPORT

A STRATEGY, NOT BE A STRATEGY

On July 5, 1989, a pilot episode of a new sitcom called *The Seinfeld Chronicles* aired on NBC. It received good, but not great, ratings for the time, coming in second on the night overall. The network debated whether or not to purchase more episodes; during testing, audiences did not understand this program's format or connect with its characters, and network executives' previous experiences told them it would skew to a small, urban audience and never reach national popularity.



MATT BOGGIE Executive Director, Research and Development,
The New York Times · @mattboggie



n the back of a gut feeling about the show's potential, [one executive took it upon himself to rearrange his own budget](#), even canceling a planned Bob Hope special, to purchase four more episodes of the show.

They didn't air until nearly a year later, and the show took another three years to become a critical success.

Seinfeld went on to air 180 episodes over nine years, and garner the highest advertising rates for any television show, a record it held for five years after it ended. It supported NBC's programming on Thursday nights for nearly a decade, providing a launching point for programs like *ER*, *Friends* and *Mad About You*. And it took knowing how to interpret, and even ignore, the data at hand and instead understand how the audience and the network's goals could converge in this new product.

Much has been made of new capabilities – often more imagined than available – to track each and every reader, guiding them to the very thing they most want to see. Companies from analytics firms to ad targeting systems to algorithmic content creators use the “power of Big Data” to promise hyper-personalized information delivery. And publishers are doing everything they can to optimize their experiences to wring out more clicks and more time-on-site, the two numbers most sought after by their advertisers.

Lost in this discussion, however, are two key problems:

1. This is all about to get a lot more complicated.

Publishers have been struggling with the web ever since the browser was created. Subscriber numbers have fallen, print advertising rates have plummeted, and where publishers have been successful in shifting readers and ads onto digital platforms, the revenue gained usually falls far short of making up the print losses. This has accelerated as mobile browsing becomes more and more important: right now, [fully half](#)

[of Americans under 30 use their mobile device as their primary Internet device](#), yet very few providers can find a way to create valuable ad presentations here. This struggle will increase as experiences with smaller, or no, visual elements are increasingly adopted. The industry has barely gotten to a place where it can understand the data behind the current two or three platforms it supports now, and certainly has no idea how to measure a reader's

interest in a report on Google Glass or on the Moto 360.

WHETHER A STORY IS SPREAD THROUGH PRINT, WEBSITES, MOBILE APPLICATIONS, OR WATCH-SIZED GLANCES, IT IS THE QUALITY OF THE STORY AND THE CLARITY WITH WHICH IT'S TOLD THAT REACHES HEARTS AND CHANGES MINDS.



Further, publication timelines have gone from very discrete — one paper per day, or magazine per week or month — to continuous, where breaking news alerts are pushed before an article is even written; where sites, apps and pages are updated hundreds of times per day, often by algorithms as much as by people; and where readers are in constant motion, changing their needs, context and capabilities in the process. Isolating variables in an environment like this is a superhuman challenge: did my story get more views because of something I did, or because of some externality? Are more people spending longer on this story because it's compelling, or because it's dense or long? If a story gets thousands of views, does that really mean it will have the impact we want it to?

In the far more complex publishing environment coming in the next few years, one metric, or even a handful, won't be enough. Different metrics by platform, use case, and device — some of which may be more anecdotal or sample-based than census-driven — will be required, and optimizing for those metrics could be as hard as selecting them and measuring them in the first place.

2. Even if we get the measurement right, we seem to be missing the point.

In many cases, the organizations struggling most with “engagement” are those that have decades — even centuries — of experience telling compelling stories. Why are they struggling with this new requirement to measure the performance of those stories in simple terms?

Unfortunately, the answer is simple: the critical metric of most journalism organizations is the *impact* of a story or a service, and measuring that is a very different (and far less scientific) exercise from measuring “engagement” through pages viewed or time spent, and sometimes, measuring impact and engagement are two different goals.

“Time spent” on a story is not necessarily related to its cultural import, its reach, or its ability to change a user's mind. These are — and have always been — the things we all most want to measure, and the things hardest to measure about journalism. Whether a story is spread through print, websites, mobile applications, or watch-sized glances, it is the quality of the story and the clarity with which it's told that reaches hearts and changes minds.

**IN AN INCREASINGLY
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The good news, however, is that the remedy is simple, and does make use of new technologies and techniques to reach readers, whether you're in the newsroom or the ad agency:

SHOW PEOPLE THE GOOD WORK YOU DO

This should be the sole motivation behind engagement, user measurement, audience development, or whatever other buzzword names this practice might acquire. The purpose of learning more about your readers and how they find you is to reach them more repeatably, more often, and to reach more of them tomorrow than you did today.

This should just be called what it is: “marketing.” Publishers want to trade a reader's time for the in-

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formation they provide, time that the reader now can spend in dozens of different ways, most of which have nothing to do with journalism. Convincing a reader to spend their time with your piece (article, video, game, podcast, etc.) requires *convincing* them. Find your readers in other places they read, communicate with them using as many channels as you can in a language they understand, and use the data at your disposal to tailor those efforts.

DO GOOD WORK

Marketing to a reader, and convincing them to come read or watch or otherwise consume your work, is a form of a promise: “if you give me a few minutes, I’ll give you something worth your time.” Some of the techniques typically used to “engage” a new audience fracture that promise: refactoring headlines for better SEO or reposting old content as new because of a timely hook, for example, may draw a reader in with a promise the piece can’t fulfill.

Often lost in the discussion of social measurement tools, audience metrics, SEO techniques and marketing strategies is the importance of the quality of the content itself; this does a huge disservice to what is arguably the single-best audience development

technique there is. Making content with which people *want* to spend time is critically important. Telling stories in new ways, from new perspectives and with new voices, helps build trust in a publisher’s brand so that the next enticement a reader is presented is more likely to be acted upon.

More to the point, however, creating good work is far more a function of the gut than the head. Editors are looked to for their judgment on what story is important to tell, where to give emphasis, how to clearly explain using text, photo, graphics, and video. Data should be used sparingly here, and should be used to refine, not override, the instincts of a newsroom.

The research and investigations we do in [The New York Times R&D Lab](#) point to a landscape of increasing reader choice, complexity of presentation, and refinement in data collection and analysis techniques. The organizations that adapt best to these changes will be those that use them to support a clear, concise strategy driven by their mission and values, not those that use them to try and guide their path. In an increasingly complex market, analytics and measurement should be used to refine and correct your message, not to decide what to say.

MATT BOGGIE is an Executive Director in The New York Times Company’s Research and Development group. As the lab is tasked with “looking around corners” and describing the future of media and information distribution, Mr. Boggie is responsible for researching and developing points of view on trends in media production and consumption, identifying phenomena worth further study, and shaping the development of new prototypes and applications the lab uses to educate and inspire. He recently oversaw completion of the Listening Table, a piece of furniture that helps document the conversations that occur around it, and the development of Streamtools, an open-source tool for consuming and analyzing live streams of information with a minimal amount of coding. Prior to joining the Times Company, Mr. Boggie was a senior manager with Accenture, working in consumer product design and strategy in the Media and Entertainment segment.



THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN

ANALYTICS AND ENGAGEMENT:

HOW PUBLISHERS CAN BRIDGE THE GAP

It's uncommon to hear of any news or content organization without an **analytics system** of some sort, or many sorts, in place. In fact, investment in analytics is predicted to go up, but the goals of the investments are sometimes unclear. What do companies really want out of having analytics? Bigger numbers to report? More detailed reports to share? There's a **crucial gap between that investment and the goal**, and not many companies are talking about it.

SACHIN KAMDAR CEO, Parse.ly



How does getting access to data translate into company success for a publisher?

The promise of it has excited the industry. Promising “attention” and “engagement” measurement

and action spurs pockets to open and saviors of the web to be heralded, but measurement in and of itself is only a different type of data, and with varying sources and types of metrics, it's rare that it's even useful for anything but the most general of comparisons or a reporter's instant gratification.

In the larger tech environment, data is not used to only measure engagement; it's used to spur it. Teams get access to data so they can make changes that increase log-ins for an app, that create features that users will interact with more and that produce products (ads) that users are more likely to see and click on in Facebook, Twitter or Google. The companies doing this are the same companies taking dollars out of the pockets of publishers, often while they use much of the content created by those publishers.

Which should indicate to publishers one unavoidable fact: to compete, you have to be able to use the data available to do more than measure; you have to use it to power your organizations. Data and analytics are the new Gutenberg Press: a whole paradigm shift for how publishing works. Without it, other companies make money off of the content you produce. Some publishers, particularly newer outlets unen-

cumbered by legacies of print products or business structures have quickly embraced this. But seeing revenue free-fall makes even the largest organizations take notice and makes them willing to steer their ships towards calmer waters.

The oft-quoted New York Times' [Innovation Report](#) was more than just a list of strategies and initiatives; it was a glimpse at their shift as they start to use data to guide company decisions.

DATA AND ANALYTICS ARE THE NEW GUTENBERG PRESS: A WHOLE PARADIGM SHIFT FOR HOW PUBLISHING WORKS. WITHOUT IT, OTHER COMPANIES MAKE MONEY OFF OF THE CONTENT YOU PRODUCE.

They discussed (among other things) three areas where they see opportunities based on data they already have, but they missed a major part of the story by not discussing how to use the data going forward. Here's our take on how The New York Times (and other media organizations) can use analytics to take advantage of these business opportunities.

1. Opportunity: Evergreen Discovery

From the report: “A new approach would be to take cultural and life-style content – about books, museums, food, theater – and organize it more by relevance than by publication date.”

The report discusses ways that the Times can build better pages and surface content that readers might still find interesting and useful. Making it easy for readers to find existing content reduces editorial effort while increasing readership and utility for the reader, a win-win for all involved. We've found that on Parse.ly's network of hundreds of news and media sites the average site has 11 percent of its page

views coming from evergreen posts, so it's certainly something most people can take advantage of.

NEXT STEP: DON'T LEAVE EVERGREEN IN THE PAST—USE IT TO GUIDE THE FUTURE.

The evergreen opportunity looks at content that has already been created and discusses how to make the most of it. But how does it help the publishers going forward? Information on what makes these posts different can be a powerful way to learn more about your readers and what they're interested in consistently hearing about.

It also provides a way for an editorial team to quickly see stories and topics readers are already familiar with, which means looking at evergreen content and examining what made it successful should be considered a crucial part of creating new content. We recommend reviewing evergreen content on a monthly basis among an editorial team. If a new story is coming out that happens on annual basis (college football, anyone?) find out if past coverage resulted in evergreen stories and see where those readers are coming from. Can you use the existing evergreen traffic to boost future readership?

2. Opportunity: Front-line Promotion

From the report: "One approach would be to create an 'impact tool-box' and train an editor on each desk to use it. The toolbox would provide strategy, tactics and templates for increasing the reach of an article before and after it's published."

The New York Times recognizes how important data and analytics, along with social media and distribution, are for reaching a modern audience. Starting to build that awareness into the corporate culture plays a key role in the success of making all of these suggestions work, and having on-the-floor evangelists certainly increases the likelihood of the culture catching on.

WHEN YOU CAN CREATE THIS CONNECTION, YOU CAN BUILD STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS AND ADD VALUE, WHICH ALLOWS FOR GREATER OPPORTUNITIES LIKE SUBSCRIPTIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS, PLEDGES OR EVENT TICKETS.

Next step: Make it easier for everyone to participate in the culture shift.

Telling people things are important, and actually allowing them to experience it for themselves are vastly different learning methods. For newsrooms to really see metrics and analytics as more than a measurement or tool, and actually as an insight into their audience and

a precursor to action from their staff, newsrooms have to think about integrating it into the workflow through CMS integrations, big-board screens, on-page extensions and more. Our users spend 36,000 minutes in Parse.ly every day which shows there's an appetite for understanding; newsrooms just have to provide context for it.

3. Opportunity: User-Generated Content

From the report: "We should experiment with expanding our Op-Ed offerings to include specific sections and verticals, opening up our report to leaders in the fields such as politics, business and culture."



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When someone spends their time creating work for any outlet, whether it's Facebook or your publication, they're creating a connection with the brand. When you can create this connection, you can build stronger relationships and add value, which allows for greater opportunities like subscriptions, contributions, pledges or event tickets.

Next step: Give something back to the people creating content for you.

People can distribute their content anywhere online today, from Twitter to Medium to self-publishing ebooks. If they create content on your platform or for your publication, they're also hoping to get something out of their effort: recognition, feedback, or

action. They're going to want and expect some sort of engagement, not just from readers, but from you – the publisher – that other third-party applications provide. The feeling you get from someone retweeting you? You can replicate that by offering them access to audience feedback to their work.

The Times concluded their report with a call for an internal group that would oversee these digital initiatives. Hopefully, that group, along with teams throughout publishing companies will be quick to recognize that the future of digital media isn't going to be measured by analytics, it's going to be created by the insights we get out of them. We're excited to see what happens!

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VIDEO PRODUCTION IS ON

THE RISE - BUT WHO'S WATCHING?

There's significant momentum for publishers toward increasing the production of video content, on account of both the strength of video as a medium for storytelling and high video CPMs as advertisers begin to move their TV spends online (see the Chicago Tribune's coverage for one example). An increase in video content across the board, of course, means that it's all the more important that we have a sense of which parts of our audience we can hope to reach with video. To that end, below is a brief survey of the state of online audiences and their consumption of video.

JOSH SCHWARTZ Chief Data Scientist, Chartbeat · @joshuadschwartz

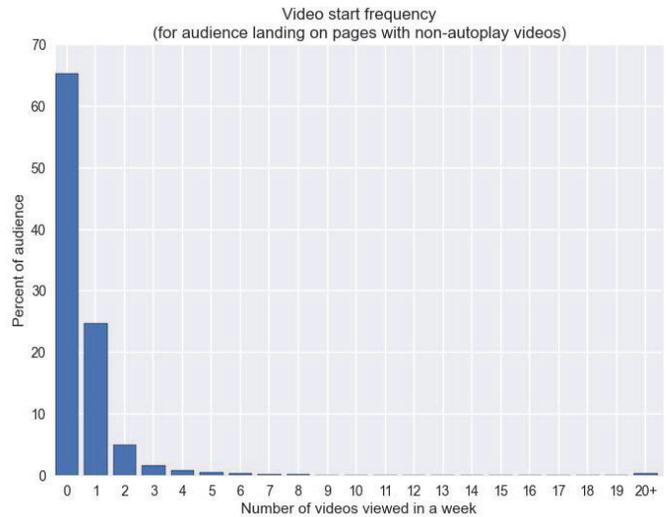


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When a visitor lands on a text-based article, in almost all circumstances they read some portion of the article's content. The questions we ask about optimizing article consumption, then, are about how deeply we can get visitors to read the content they land on and about their navigation – how we can improve the odds they'll go on to read a second page.

With video consumption, though, the situation is entirely different: excepting sites that automatically start videos when a visitor lands on the page (we'll discuss them later), there's massive attrition between the act of visiting a page with video on it and the act of actually pressing play. Of course, if someone doesn't even play a video, the quality of the content is moot – we can't possibly hope to win them over with a video that isn't watched – so our first goal must be to identify and understand who the best candidates are for pressing play.

Does video content have a defined audience? We might suspect that video is simply a means to an end for content delivery – some stories have videos attached, some don't, and viewers will consume content as it's laid in front of them. Or, conversely, we might guess that video consumption is split at the consumer level, that some visitors will watch videos and others simply won't. The answer, it turns out, is more the latter than the former.



Above is a graph showing the breakdown audience size by video consumption. The first thing that stands out is the steep drop off on the left side of the graph. The majority of people who land on pages with video don't press play: only 35 percent of visitors who land on pages with video will press play anytime in a week. And, even amongst those who do press play, the volume of video each person plays is typically quite low: nearly 90 percent of those who do play videos only watch one or two videos per week.

VARIATIONS IN VIDEO CONSUMPTION BY DEVICE ARE COMPOUNDED BY DEVICE USAGE PATTERNS THROUGHOUT THE DAY.

That implies that, for the most part, when we're talking about video consumption we're talking about flyby consumers who might happen to press play, but aren't on our sites for the purpose of watching videos. For these visitors, context seems to be key – the video plays that do happen are on articles with high-quality, relevant videos.

There's a twist, though: a tiny minority of visitors, almost exclusively on desktops, watch a massive portion of total videos consumed. In aggregate, the

top 0.5 percent of desktop video watchers — those consuming 20 or more videos per week — account for 17 percent of all video consumption across all devices. That rate is fairly remarkable when compared to consumers of written content, where the top 0.5 percent of readers only account for a few percent of consumption. And, not only do these people consume a huge amount of content, they seem to consume the vast majority of the video content put in front of them: desktop visitors who watch over 20 videos per week hit play on over 80 percent of the videos that they see. With that high a rate of consumption, the challenge for serving this segment of the audience is simply feeding their appetite for content.

Perhaps unexpectedly, all of the above only applies to consumers visiting sites on desktops: we don't see such outsized consumption by a minority on phones or tablets.

Variations in video consumption by device are compounded by device usage patterns throughout the day. Broadly speaking: desktops are used during the workday, tablets have strong peaks during at-home hours in the morning and evening, and phone usage is roughly constant throughout the day (with a brief dip during late-night hours).

That's raw traffic, but video starts add their own dimension. On desktops, visitors are, apparently, dramatically more likely to play videos they come across during working hours (not that you would watch videos while sitting at your desk, of course):

23 percent of desktop visits to video pages result in a video start on the weekend, while weekday desktop traffic has above a 33 percent start rate. If we break down weekday traffic further and ask about the hour of day, we see more evidence of the work/home split: the desktop video start rate is over 37 percent at noon, falling to below 30 percent after 6 p.m. on weekdays.

...A VERY SPECIFIC SET OF PEOPLE, ON A SPECIFIC SET OF DEVICES AND AT A SPECIFIC SET OF TIMES, FORM OUR CORE AUDIENCE.

On mobile phones, on the other hand, the exact opposite is true: play rate is just 17 percent on weekdays, but it climbs to 23 percent on weekends. During both weekdays and weekends, time of day has a much smaller effect than what we saw on desktop. Finally, tablets exhibit yet another interaction pattern, with very low start

rates at any time of week, and essentially no difference between the weekday start rate (15 percent) and that of the weekend (16 percent).

Given all of the above, the best bang-for-buck should come from pushing a high volume videos to desktop sites during weekdays and, if possible, another set of videos to mobile visitors on weekends. With such weak numbers, tablet video experiences are likely the least useful to concentrate efforts on.

I'd be remiss if I didn't note that the above is data aggregated from dozens of sites (that opt-in to allow us to anonymously aggregate data), and consumption on sites you work with might vary radically from what I've described here. The key takeaway, though, is that video consumption is not simply spread out evenly across our audience, with a ran-



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dom set of people watching videos. Rather, a very specific set of people, on a specific set of devices and at a specific set of times, form our core audience – our goal should be to identify those people and figure out how to foster and grow that segment of our audience.

Before I finish: what about autoplaying videos, which I brushed aside above? Autoplay represents a distinct challenge to analytics because it's so

difficult to gauge user interest in the videos that are playing. There's some evidence that autoplay videos may hurt video viewability (see [this article](#) for one discussion of video viewability), and we've seen that videos that automatically play slightly increase the fraction of visitors who quickly abandon pages. On the other hand, of course autoplay radically increases video playrates. Whether the tradeoffs work in your favor is something that needs to be decided on a site-by-site basis.

JOSH SCHWARTZ is Chief Data Scientist at Chartbeat. He focuses on applications of machine learning and optimization to help media companies grow and monetize their audience. His work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Atlantic*, among others. In a prior life, he researched machine learning, optimization and computer vision at MIT, Cornell and the University of Chicago. In another prior life, he was a moderately successful coffee entrepreneur and a slightly less successful bicycle racer. He occasionally tweets as [@joshuadschwartz](#).



STAKEHOLDERS ARE IN CHARGE,

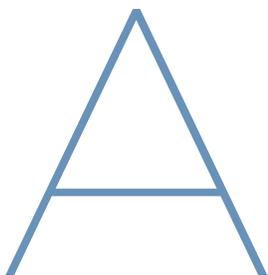
SO ORGANIZATIONS COUNT ON

DATA ANALYTICS AND INSIGHTS

Public relations and communication management professionals are juggling with the reality that their stakeholders are taking charge of cyberspace's conversations and creating their own communities. They are influencing each other.

JUAN-CARLOS MOLLEDA Chair, Department of Public Relations
University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications · @GlobalPRMolleda





At the same time, they seem to choose when and how to engage with brands, causes, and movements. (Millennials, fortunately, appear to have a [more cordial cyber-cohabitation with brands](#)).

Organizations, in turn, are losing control over digital communication exchanges and are being forced to engage with stakeholders on their own terms and spaces. Empowered stakeholders are setting their own issue agendas.

Organizations' control over interactions and exchanges, however, could reach a balance through the effective use of data analytics that are translated into insights to inform decisions and actions. This requires constant assessment of stakeholders and consumers and a relevant and authentic voice that would likely be heard. It also requires that organizations become active actors in fluid conversations and communities. At the same time, organizations must be true to themselves.

Data without insights are irrelevant. Significantly, translating data into insights is becoming a critical challenge for public relations and communication professionals. This is also true for marketers. [Forbes Insights explained](#), "The holy grail is to be able to understand how to act on this data, how to make the metrics predictive for future business growth." Business and organizational growth and legitimacy depends on effective stakeholder and consumer engagement and acceptance. Growth, like success,

should be precisely targeted through performance indicators and metrics.

Managing the decision-making process solely based on intuition and experience is considered suspicious today. Therefore, training professionals is needed because data amplification is here to stay and data application is something they must master. As Capgemini CEO Paul Thorley [explained](#): "With more data important to an organization's activities being generated - and not necessarily in structured form - outside an organization, these organizations have started to take an interest in big data." This phenomenon gets more complex when

client organizations are demanding not only "likes," "fans" with insightful comments, and "retweets", but also measurable results as evidence of the effectiveness of their communication investment.

Public relations and communication professionals should move from counting "likes," "retweets," and conducting glorified content analyses of comments, conversations, blogs, and media coverage, to assess strategic outcomes and results. The meaning of success would have to constantly be redefined as communities of stakeholders and consumers form and change.

University of Oklahoma Associate Professor Michael L. Kent and University of North Carolina Assistant Professor Adam Saffer, in a [2014 study](#), stated that "The relevance of public relations is threatened, as communication professionals become minions of new technology, rather than masters. They concluded, "[s]ocial media research needs to move beyond simply counting tweets, and

MANAGING THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS SOLELY BASED ON INTUITION AND EXPERIENCE IS CONSIDERED SUSPICIOUS TODAY.

examining blog posts and move into prediction understanding what our communication tools can tell us about strategy decision making.”

Social media and web analytics join organizational data and primary research to provide a holistic picture of stakeholders’ concerns, expectations, priorities, and drivers that activate them. This requires an understanding of data analytics and, most importantly, the identification of insights that inform decision making and actions. Moreover, the decisions and actions should be aligned to stakeholders’ expectations and acceptance levels.

Ongoing training is essential to deal with big data, analytics, insights, and informed actions. Matt Shaw, director of communications at the Council of Public Relations Firms, in [summarizing the views of agency professionals](#), said that the industry requires employees who “must know the client’s busi-

ness, be able to mentally visualize the meaning of sets of data, be able to manipulate data, and be able to tell the story of the data.” Creative and consistent storytelling across all platforms would allow organizations to be “social” and embrace stakeholders in their own turfs.

**CREATIVE AND
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The communication industry needs a roadmap for effective use of data and analytics in communication; that is, an overview that summarizes trends in public relations use of data analytics and how it is likely to evolve. Data analytics is a subset of business intelligence, and public relations and communication professionals must use that data to make

business and communication decisions. How do they draw insights from data? How do they transform data into decisions and actions? How do they predict stakeholders’ reactions? Finally, how they learn to be a relevant and distinctive community member should be on top of the priority list.

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MILLENNIALS AND ENGAGEMENT



ON MILLENNIALS: AGILE CONTENT MARKETING

WILL REPLACE SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Marketers are often pegged with questions related to the future of social media such as: Is Facebook still relevant? **What's the next social platform?** Which is more powerful: a like, share, re-tweet, favorite? While these are all fair questions, attempting to grade the social landscape in this manner is counterproductive and missing the greater point.

JEFF FROMM President, FutureCast · @JeffFromm



IN A MILLENNIAL-INSPIRED PARTICIPATION ECONOMY, SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IS DEAD.

Now, I didn't say social media is dead- just the idea that social media as the primary marketing strategy is no longer an effective way to connect with and engage Millennial consumers.

While it is true that Millennials are the heaviest users of social media and are 2.5 times more likely to be early adopters of new digital, social and mobile tools, they are using social media in a different way than their Boomer and Gen X predecessors. However, what drives brand engagement for Millennials is not just having a presence in the digital environment, but rather the content that informs, inspires and engages them through different channels. Your approach to content is what will make or break your marketing communication efforts in the future. Social Media is simply one way to activate your content strategy.

RE-IMAGINE CREATIVE EXCELLENCE WITHIN A CONTENT EXCELLENCE™ FRAMEWORK

For the past 40 plus years, the great brands of yesterday were focused on creative excellence. They "heated, beated and treated" their communications to craft the perfect message then pushed those messages out via various shotgun methodologies, hoping to build brand awareness and regard for their cherished product. This method was developed specifically for the boomer generation.

Boomers, unlike their Millennial children, are more inclined to react positively to traditional advertising - newspaper ads, TV and radio spots and the

like. While these methods may still build awareness within the millennial demographic, they are rarely interactive or engaging enough to inspire true Millennial brand love. Ultimately, awareness alone will not correlate in any way to extra-ordinary and sustainable financial performance.

What may accomplish those goals, however, is a strong content driven campaign. The phrase "content marketing" has recently been making headlines

but very few marketers really understand the true definition of content and how to utilize it in order to engage the Millennial audience. Content is essentially the communication consumers choose to spend time with.

**THINK OF
CONTENT AS AN
OPPORTUNITY
FOR YOUR BRAND
VOICE TO LIVE
EVERYWHERE
YOU ARE NOT.**

Think of content as an opportunity for your brand voice to live everywhere you are not. We used to think of advertising as a means of communicating a message to a target audience. In this way, traditional advertising messages were limited to their specific medium. Millennials, however, are the first generation to be considered digital natives and they have transformed the market so that consumers experience brands in a fluid way. Advertising is no longer limited to just one medium. If I am a Millennial, I may be doing work on my computer, while checking Facebook on my phone, all while I am listening to my premium Spotify account. This means that as a brand, there are constantly multiple channels to reach a consumer at any given moment. Content is about the message, the context, the opportunity to share it and my sense of how your brand helps me connect to something more than your product (does your content inspire a sense of purpose?).

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Your content strategy should be about activating and engaging your digital community in ways that traditional advertising never could.

WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF AGILE CONTENT AND IT FUELS ENGAGEMENT

The brands that consistently create the most agile content will experience the most positive millennial responses. Agile content brings the real-time communication piece into the content marketing game. This type of content allows brands to be nimble and up-to-date with current trends and conversations. Brands that incorporate agile content into their marketing plans are constantly checking and reevaluating their progress and success.

In order to better understand how agile content works, let's explore this concept through the lens of a standup comedian.

First, the comedian writes their jokes. S/he typically knows what gets laughs and what doesn't, but with new material he never knows for sure so he books smaller venues in order to test his new sketch.

During the first performance, his main joke does not get the response he thought it would. Immediately, the comedian altered the joke and the second time he told it the crowd could not stop laughing. His agility and ability to reevaluate his performance based on audience reaction ultimately lead to a successful performance.

Like the comedian, brands must be able to think rapidly and constantly revise the content they push out. The key is to utilize data in order to create actionable content strategies.

Traditionally, brands analyzed what consumers did in the past to predict the future. Now, agile data combines consumer, product and social data that allows brands to study Millennial actions and behaviors in real time in order to gain insights that can be utilized to create content that is even more engaging than it was two hours ago.

FOCUS ON CREATING CONTENT THAT IS "SHAREWORTHY" AND MEANINGFUL

Millennials have a major peer affirmation theme and they share what interests and inspires them not simply what big companies want them to share.

Think about how agile content is constantly being recreated based on consumer responses. The goal is to ultimately create content that Millennials want to share.

The idea of content being "shareworthy" is nothing new. Marketers used to encourage sharing by word-of-mouth. This trend is strong with Boomers and Gen Xers but is taken to a whole new level when we bring in the digital native millennial generation. As a result, today we talk about "word of mouse" rather than word of mouth. The "share" is no anomaly; we've just shifted environments where people are sharing. Remember, I said social media marketing is dead not social media. Millennials especially are sharing their opinions on their personal pages and have no qualms

THE GREAT BRANDS OF TOMORROW WILL CREATE DIRECT AND MEANINGFUL CONTENT BECAUSE IF THE CONTENT CREATED DOES NOT HAVE A PLACE IN THE MILLENNIAL'S LIFE, THEY WILL SKIP OVER IT AND MOVE ONTO CONTENT THAT DOES.

CAPTIVATE

about being brutally honest when it comes to their brand preferences.

Millennials are also more likely than other generations to share branded content if they relate to it or it somehow affects their life.

Remember the Seinfeld “Break Up” Episode? George says, “It’s not you; it’s me.” The “It’s not you; it’s me” principle is key. Sharing is rooted in peer affirmation. When a Millennial interacts with a brand’s content, they think about how they personally feel about themselves when they share that content with their friends, family and random strangers (remember this is the “selfie” generation.)

The great brands of tomorrow will create direct and meaningful content because if the content created does not have a place in the Millennial’s life, they will skip over it and move onto content that does.

The most shareworthy and meaningful brands will absolutely have the highest probability of sustained economic performance because those will be the brands people choose to interact with.

IF YOU DO IT RIGHT, THEY’LL DO IT FOR YOU

In the future, the most successful brands will leverage the relationships they have with consumers so that the consumer is essentially doing the marketing for the brand – at their own time and expense. Think about the User Generated Content that has popped up all over the Internet. Starbucks does not ask Millennials to take pictures of their [Pumpkin Spice Lattes](#) (yes, it’s that time of year again) but they are doing it anyways. Those pictures are shared, liked, retweeted and regrammed – not by Starbucks but by the Millennial’s friends. In a matter of 140 characters, that millennial has just become your top branded content curator.

Millennials are leading the pack when it comes to content engagement but with them are Boomers and Gen Xers. Although Millennials are the primary influencer when it comes to digital campaigns, other consumers are taking on a Millennial Mindset™. This means that although they are not technically a part of the millennial generation, they are consuming brand messages in the same way as Millennials. Ultimately, as Millennials come to expect content driven campaigns more and more, the rest of the population will soon follow suit.

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ON MILLENNIALS: COMMUNICATION

AND ENGAGEMENT ARE SMALLER

PARTS OF A LARGER EQUATION

As [Elite Daily](#) continues on its current trajectory of growth, we find ourselves in a unique position within the digital media industry. With our predecessors leading the way in redefining digital content, virility and brand engagement, we have noticed that most – if not the majority – of their engagement is measured in one dimension: social media.

DAVID ARABOV CEO & Co-Founder, Elite Daily · @EliteDaily



Communication and engagement strategies are ever-evolving, especially in digital media, in which trending topics shift in a matter of minutes. Digital media platforms, including Elite Daily, are currently utilizing an outdated model of

measuring engagement, which focuses on conversation rates, amplification and cost per thousand (CPMs). We have recognized that these vehicles of engagement and communication are heavily tilted to favor the advertiser.

For the purposes of this explication, let's define engagement in its current form. Engagement, in essence, is an emotive reaction to a form of communication, whether positive or negative. In other words, when we publish a piece of content, we will consequently elicit a reaction from our audience. This reaction comes in the digital form of a comment, a tweet and/or a Facebook share.

Being the Voice of Gen-Y, with a community of 2,500+ contributors and 54 Million unique visitors[1], we carry a major obligation that is immeasurable by any metric or analytic to our community of readers. Our number one priority is communication and engagement with our audience, which, similar to our content, is always evolving.

As the media of content delivery continue to evolve, we have undertaken the responsibility to pioneer innovative ways in which our community and audience might engage with our content. We are creating new methods to fulfill the needs of our clients, while simultaneously keeping our company's commitment to put the reader first.

Through our commitment of delivering content that Millennials resonate and engage with, we have identified four "ingredients" we would recommend for media companies to adopt when trying to capture the time and attention of Millennials.

1. Be Authentic

Millennials have an uncanny ability to decipher when content is genuine or when it's selling them something beyond the thesis statement of a piece. Media

companies need to understand that the Millennial demographic thrives in transparency, whether it is with friends and family or with the content they resonate with. Authenticity is an essential part of content because it is the main driver of engagement. If a specific topic resonates with the reader, he or she, in turn, is more likely to engage with the content and share it with his or her network.

AUTHENTICITY IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF CONTENT BECAUSE IT IS THE MAIN DRIVER OF ENGAGEMENT.

2. Tell a Story, Don't Spit Out Information

It is easy to convey facts and opinions in content; the ability to tell a story about said facts and opinions is a completely different ball game. For example, raw data concerning the student loan debt are quite simple to state: 40 million Americans are responsible for 1.2 trillion dollars worth of student loan debt. If we take that information and weave in a personal narrative about how a Millennial utilized and leveraged his knowledge of congressional bills so that he was able to refinance his loans and pay them off in 24 months, we have found a story worth engaging with. Why? It's simple: It resonates with people. Readers like to engage with content that resonates with their personal stories and reinforces the notion that they are not the only ones going through specific stages in their lives.

3. Cater to the Individual

The Millennial generation is composed of millions of people who love their individual fashions, opinions and lifestyles. Never has another generation driven individualism the way Millennials do. It is important to make sure that the content media companies are producing caters to the individual as much as the masses. Yes, this is a difficult task, but not an impossible one. In order for readers to engage with content, they must first relate to it. Being vague and providing a “one size fits all” content strategy is an ineffective delivery approach if you are looking to engage with Millennials. Create content that resonates with the individual, and the masses will follow.

4. Create Value

As digital media pioneers into new and unexplored frontiers, the industry has to continue to create value for its audience. When producing content, media companies should be asking themselves:

- “How will this create value for the reader?”
- “Will the reader be more informed because of this content?”
- “What value are we providing to our reader beyond x and y?”
- “Will the reader be inclined to share this?”
- “Would I, personally, share this?”
- “Does this create value for our brand as a whole?”

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I CAN SUM UP
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COMMUNICATION/
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PUT THE
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As we pioneer digital media and content engagement, it is important to keep optimizing engagement. Communication has been a necessary part of the human condition since the dawn of time, and though its forms and tools have clearly evolved, the underlying notion has re-

mained the same.

We are not in a position to dictate how other companies should be thinking about their communication/engagement strategies; it is simply not our prerogative. Rather, we can provide some guidance in engaging Millennials through what has worked for Elite Daily.

In one sentence, I can sum up the strategy for the future of content communication/engagement: Put the reader first.

[1] August 2014 Google Analytics Report

DAVID ARABOV is CEO and Managing Editor of Elite Daily. While studying at Pace University, David started Elite Daily as an online publication that “Millennials can’t get enough of,” as Business Insider described it. Elite Daily has quickly become one of the most popular sites on the web, due to David’s understanding of the void in the marketplace for content specific to this generation, written by this generation. The site reaches over 40 million people a month and employs over 35 Millennials.