
Radar

The emergence of media platforms that produce, showcase, and curate brand content through digital storytelling



Oscar Maldonado
Paralelo, Ecuador
oscar.martin.maldonado@gmail.com

post(s)
vol. 2, p. 120 - 143, 2016
Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador
ISSN: 1390-9797
ISSN-E: 2631-2670
Periodicity: Anual
posts@usfq.edu.ec

Received: 10 February 2016
Accepted: 05 May 2016

URL: <http://portal.amelica.org/ameli/journal/271/2715028005/>

Abstract: Merging the strengths of media and advertising through digital platforms has opened up opportunities for brands to establish more intimate relationships with their customers while exploring the right pitch for narratives targeted for diverse business goals. For that, this paper explores the emergence of digital publishing platforms that produce, showcase, and/or curate brand content messages, looking at their benefits based on some aspects of digital storytelling.

Keywords: digital platforms, brand content, narratives, advertising, storytelling.

Resumen: La combinación de las fortalezas de la publicidad y de los medios de comunicación a través de plataformas digitales ha abierto oportunidades para que las marcas establezcan relaciones más íntimas con sus clientes mientras buscan el tono adecuado para sus narrativas. Este ensayo explora el surgimiento de plataformas que producen y publican contenido de marca, analizando potenciales beneficios sobre la base de algunas técnicas de storytelling digital.

Palabras clave: plataformas digitales, contenido de marca, narrativas, publicidad, storytelling.

Introduction



In the 1970s, writer and freelance journalist of Rolling Stone magazine Hunter S. Thompson, took it upon himself to deliver compelling stories to his audiences through provoking and engaging journalistic pieces that blended fact and fiction. At the time, that particular narrative style was at the height of its popularity, not without its share of criticism. In the same decade and on similar grounds, the advertising industry began struggling to leave behind practices from the 1950s and 1960s when advertisements focused on the product as part of a positioning strategy in people's minds (Ad Age, 2003). For both, the media and the advertising industries, the 1970s was a decade of developing new strategies to increase their impact on people's minds and behaviour; hence, it meant a rediscovery of story-telling as a form of engaging communication. Now, some 40 years later, brands are struggling to find the right pitch for their relevant content promoted in digital platforms.

Engaging narratives are at the heart of people's minds. Many media companies are essentially storytelling collectives trying to connect with their audiences in the same way advertising agencies create campaigns to get selected messages across to audiences to have lasting impacts on their behaviour and choices. For that reason, a growing trend of merging the narrative strengths of media and advertising through digital publishing platforms is worth reviewing. In this essay, I set out to explore the emergence of digital platforms that produce, showcase, and/or curate brand content messages, looking at their narrative proposition based on some aspects of digital storytelling. For that, we will start by exploring some important elements about advertising (mainly digital), the web as content distribution space and notions of what constitutes brand content. We

will continue addressing the possibilities of content marketing and explore some trending practices online before we can establish some conclusions.

Understanding about advertising and marketing

Before we start, it is important to explore some basic notions regarding advertising. According to Fletcher (2010, p. 2), an advertisement is pay-ment for communication intended to inform and/or persuade one or more people. Furthermore, the author proposes that ad campaigns are mainly intended to do one of the following: “launch a completely new brand or a new product into an existing brand – a ‘line extension’, promote an improvement to an existing brand, or make people who have not heard of a brand become aware of it”. When addressing this matter it is not uncommon to unevenly utilize terms like ‘advertising’, ‘promotion’ and ‘campaign’ —among others— to refer to the construction of strategies to sell products or services, with ‘marketing’ often serving as a terminology umbrella covering a range of activities that incorporates execution techniques, media strategies and channels, along with intangible elements like creativity and imagination. As Hackley (2010, p. 138) puts it, mediums, techniques and strategies like mass media, television, press, direct mail, database marketing, sponsorship, product placement, endorsement, etc. all constitute parts of the fixture of marketing, the first ones often called traditional (above the line) with the second one referred to as and non-traditional (below the line).

To have a better understanding, McStay (2010, p. 7) proposes an interesting view by stating that traditionally marketing had more to do with purchase related activities and retail environment; in contrast, advertising had more to do with the media. The author adds that in digital, as we will see, this distinction is far less clear. Hackley (2010, p. 9) also adds that activities like public relations, personal selling and corporate communications, etc. all constitute forms of communication that have an intricate relationship with marketing. Furthermore, he asserts that marketing itself is broken down into sub-categories based on the communication channel: print, broadcast media (TV, radio, cinema) and digital. In that sense, media planning refers to the task of placing finished ads in appropriate media channels for maximum target group exposure, media strategy refers to the judgements made concerning the fit between media channels, creative executions and the brand personality.

Finding an ultimate way to define marketing could be slippery business. Moreover, the question regarding what entails good marketing has end-less answers and various points of view. Percolate,

a technology company providing software solutions for marketing purposes observes a clear definition by stating that great marketing is aimed at an audience, matched to a platform, triggered by an event, aligned with a business objective, and represents a brand. These five elements are the building blocks of marketing. According to Hackley (2010, p. 139), good marketing has to ensure that there is coherence between media, brand and creative execution.

Literature available on marketing and advertising is arguably as vast as that of medicine and law, especially in present days when new forms of getting carefully crafted messages across to selected audiences through specific channels is key for advertisers to succeed and in times when social media is shaping and reshaping all sorts of mediated relationships. Hence, we will try to centre our focus on digital advertising and on one of the main components in it: brand content, that is, products, services, or experiences being offered and its potential consumption, its target market (Fletcher, 2010, p. 8). According to the author, the brand and its target market are inextricable intertwined. As the Percolate approach states, platforms are key elements in marketing. Therefore, on our path towards online brand content, we will continue by exploring the significance of online media, the specific form in which digital brand content can be created, distributed, and consumed and the singularities of the Internet to do so.

The web as content distribution space

‘The New Economy’, that is the way in which Castells (2001, p. 147) describes the state of social and cultural affairs supported in part by the rise of the Internet. This expression covers some concepts and theories that according to the author can be described as a wave of new processes and new products, spurring productivity growth, and stimulating economic competition. The Internet is asserting its specificity as a communication medium with its own logic and language. It is not confined to one particular area of cultural expression: it cuts across all of them; its communication is usually embedded in social practice (Castells, 2001, p. 2001). When addressing the uses of Internet in a multimedia creative landscape, the author explains that the wonderful thing about technology is that people end up doing with it something different from what was originally intended (Castells, 2001, p. 195). Music delivery, video distribution, social media consumption, and book purchasing are some examples of how the Internet serves as an almost endless platform for the expansion of creativity and commerce within various industries. It is used for purposes as varied as posting political messages, communicating by email, conveying ideas and searching for

information (Castells, 2001, p. 200). The ubiquity of the web, the creativity it sponsors, and the possibility of massive storage are all producing mind-boggling figures. By the year 2020, our 'digital universe', i.e., all data created by consumers and businesses on Earth including video, audio, documents, etc., will be 44 times bigger than it was in 2009 (i.e., it will expand from 800 billion gigabytes to 35 trillion gigabytes) (Van 'T Hof, Van Est, Daemen, 2011, p. 7)

According to Curran, Fenton & Freedman (2012, p. 69) there are constant claims that the Internet facilitates a media economy based on niches and not mass markets, on flexibility and not on standardization, on abundance and not scarcity, and on entrepreneurial start-ups and not on the industrial corporation that dominated the twentieth century. The views of cyberspace as an endless space for new ventures, opportunities, creativity, empowerment, etc. are abundant. The possibility of creating new and exciting content, bringing to the surface new players and fostering the share culture is real. In fact, and according to Curran, Fenton & Freedman (2012, p. 74), the Internet is stubbornly, or perhaps fundamentally, social in its wiring and thus invites its users to aggregate their skills and knowledge in the interest of all. As Leadbeater (2009, p. 19) explains, the web's underlying culture of sharing, decentralization and democracy has led to a revolution in how we think, play, work and create together, in mass.

Certainly there is money to be made on and through the World Wide Web. However, the opportunities that the online world gives to those willing to look into it as a space for power relocation, creativity fostering and profit are at times not as idyllic as it may seem, according to some authors and researchers. The matter of concentration on the digital media economy is an issue that must not be overlooked. As Curran, Fenton & Freedman (2012, p. 88) note, Google dominates search in countries like Australia and the United Kingdom. Regarding online advertising concentration, in 2007, four companies (Google, MSN, Yahoo! and AOL) attracted 85% of gross revenue in the USA. Curran, Fenton & Freedman (2012, p. 92) add that many of the factors that were symptomatic of the 'mass' media economy —especially propensity towards monopolization, commodification and accumulation— are central to the dynamics of a new media economy shaped by the contradictory forces of the Internet that promises dispersion but reward concentration and that fetishize openness but encourage proprietary behaviour.

These figures and appreciations seem to put two sides within the same industry in a battlefield. Curran, Fenton & Freedman (2012, p. 92) note that the digital sphere is not a parallel economy but one that accentuates the tensions between the creativity and collaboration of a generative system and the hierarchies and polarization prioritized by a

system that rests, above all else, on the pursuit of profit. On one side big media conglomerates responding to their own profit driven logic and control management techniques occupying more spaces online; and on the other side digital tribes, creatives and entrepreneurs taking what the information technologies offer to various fields and industries in smaller scales. Nonetheless and trying to find a balance between optimistic and bleaker visions of the new information economy and the ways in which power and profit are distributed, the Internet stands mainly as an opportunity. According to Castells (2010, p. 166) Internet-mediated communications have guaranteed a step from mass production to flexible production. Moreover, it has produced a trilogy of actions that are shaping media consumption, from editorial to advertising: decentralization, diversification and customization of contents (Castells, 2010, p. 368). Finally, it is also used as a way of expanding and remodelling industries like advertising incorporating concepts like digital brand content.

Whether or not digital life brings added value to people's lives when it intersects with the advertising industry drives us to balance two positions. On one hand, we see a commercial approach that rules out an enhancement of consumer education and behaviour with the use of digital tools within advertising (such as social media indeed) due to its instant and ever present influence on people. On the other hand, the choice approach, by which digital life and greater access to information makes us better equipped to deal with market pressures. The merge of digital culture, advertising and branding is a broad subject that involves a variety of players and scenarios. As with many other industries, advertisement has been deeply influenced by the Internet and it has enabled creation and experimentation with new ideas, products and narratives —among them— brand content as an advertising strategy.

Some notions and numbers on online advertising

If we were to put it bluntly, online advertising is a way of persuading a targeted audience to adopt a desired attitude towards a product, brand or service through a carefully constructed message spread in digital form. As Leckenby (2005, p. 5) asserts, it's transmission in digital rather than in physical atoms. According to McStay (2010, p. 12), online advertising, alternatively called 'digital marketing', is a media and communication strategy that has been around since 1994, perhaps longer if you include spamming bulletin boards and newsgroups. But how does online advertising work different than traditional advertising? The author proposes an explanation:

Digital agencies focus on interactive and digital advertising services like strategy, consumer insight, creative, design, management, media and tracking of the consumption of advertising. Additional services include video, programming, digital development and deployment. More uniquely agencies may be involved with brand development, developing digital communication strategies, working out ways of reaching digital audiences and delivering ads to them, online video, social networks applications, emails communications, SEO and SEM, website design, data-mining and ROI assessment (McStay, 2010, p. 30)

As an advertising medium, the Internet offers all the elements of other media and more. As an example, banner ads can include not only graphics and text, but also streaming audio and video while voice and video calling have become a commonplace for everyday users. Not only does the online environment cluster traditional types of media, it has provoked staggering figures in spending and investment. Advertising is in fact an indicator of the growth of a medium, along with the penetration of the medium into the population of a society. Moneywise, the explosion has been obvious. According to Stafford & Faber (2005, p. 9), \$906 million were spent worldwide on online advertising in 1997, according to the Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB). US digital advertising spend surpassed 28 billion in 2011 and continued double digit growth year-on-year to 40.5 billion in 2014. Figures from 2013 released by the IAB UK show that online advertising claimed 25 per cent of the 16.65 billion UK pounds ad spend market last year (Ryan & Jones, 2009, p. 13). Growth figures are more impressive if we note that in 2003 the online sector held 2% of the total advertising spent across advertising media (McStay, 2010, p. 19).

Digital platform are not only coveted for money reasons. As Ryan & Jones (2009, p. 19) put it, by using digital channels you can transcend traditional constraints like geography and time zones to connect with a much wider audience (...) it allows you to hone your marketing message with laser-like precision to target very specific niche within that wider market. The matter of precision and effectiveness when delivering messages to targeted audiences is paramount; and that is one of the main reasons for the rise of digital advertising. Hackley (2010, p. 8) reminds this when stating that 'media audiences are so segmented that it is essential to identify the target market in order to advertise in the media which will reach them most cost effectively.

Growth in investment in online advertising obviously signals that the web is a prosperous place to make money and to cut ways and processes through faster and more direct pace. As we mentioned, one of the benefits of Internet-mediated communications is the speed with which interaction are executed. That speed and wider

availability of information could translate into faster consumption, not better discerning as we suggested before. Now that more digital channels are available, is advertising supposed to be crafted and reach the audience faster for decision-making to be made faster as well? Certainly faster does not mean more believable or increasingly engaging messages. Authors like McStay (2010, p. 24) state that more than 2/3 of online consumers believe that online campaigners do not tell the truth in their advertisements. If traditional online advertising is in a sense starting to show signs of wear off in terms of credibility, are there new options?

Brand content, storytelling, and digital publishers

Terms like ‘content marketing’ and ‘brand content’ are sometimes intertwined to suggest communication and marketing strategies to obtain specific business goals. In the end, what does branded content entail and how does the terminology surrounding it work? Pulizzi (2014) is adamant in his criticism regarding the informality in terminology. The author draws a line between “branded content” and “content marketing” stating that branded content is about getting the product or service out there in some way, albeit in a more entertaining way than just straight advertising while with the latter consisting of a valuable experience strategy focused on the needs and pain points of the audience first; the goal is to build a loyal audience, and then leverage that loyalty to drive a business goal. He explains that content marketing can be defined either as a process or a strategy (...) content marketing is a business process for creating and distributing valuable and compelling content to attract, acquire and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience with the objective of driving profitable customer action (Pulizzi, 2014).

Some authors are of the view that branded content does not necessarily help sell tangible products. As Fletcher (2010, p. 12) explains, in old times it was about the product and how it functioned and now it’s about end-benefits. Consumers want psychological and emotional effects as well. They want their purchases to make them feel good, they want brand image to be right for them. Leroux (2013) is more straightforward and operational in his take when stating that branded content is a portion of any marketing budget; it’s a way to engage a customer base through something that is a little more emotional than a TV ad or a plain billboard. According to Fazarinc (2001, p. 7), branding in the 1990s was thrown into the complex, confusing Internet context that proclaimed that everything has changed completely and the concept of branded content must also be rethought. The author explains that as in pre-digital days, brand management was about understanding what people thought and felt,

and what motivated them to buy and use products, services and ideas (Fazarinc, 2001, p. 8). So, if transformations still have roots in traditional principles and practices, what does the digital era bring to advertising when looking at content marketing?

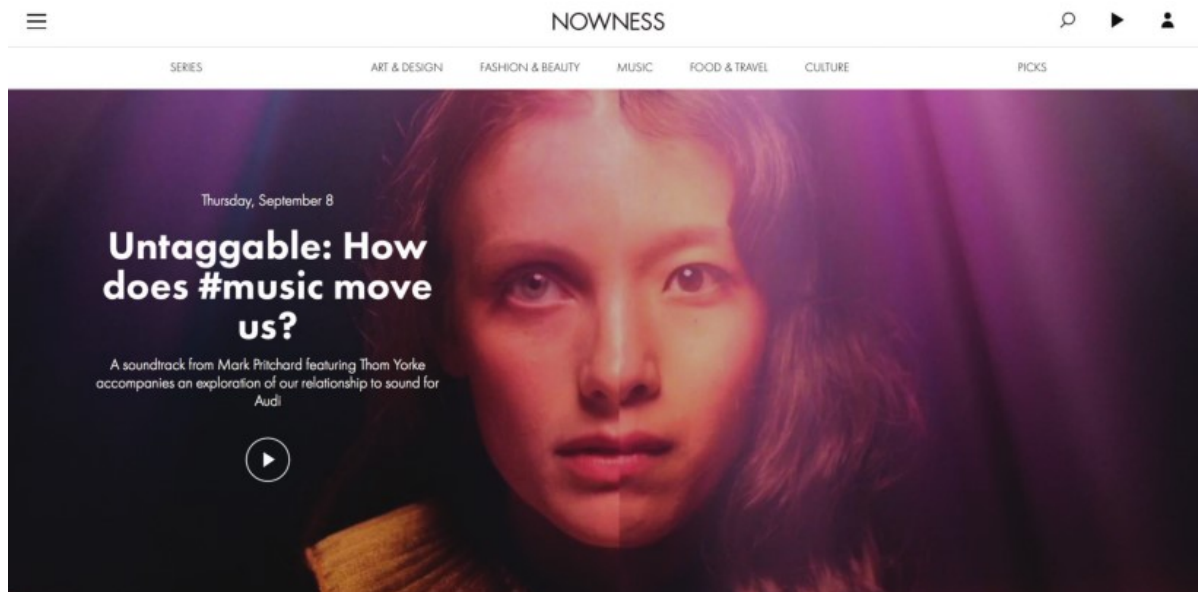
Before we attempt to answer and for the purposes of this essay, we shall utilize the term “brand content” and disregard “content marketing” or “branded content” to address the development of brand value through storytelling strategies. Brand content constitutes any content (print or digital) developed or curated by a brand or a business to provide added value (Seven Elm, 2014). Furthermore, according to the agency, brand content is designed to build brand consideration and affinity, not sell a product or service. It is not a paid ad, sponsorship or product placement. Like many other forms of media, content production and creativity, brand content has been influenced by the malleability and ubiquity of the Internet. Pulizzi (2014) mentions that brand content strategies can leverage all channels, including online. Certainly the web expanded the ways in which people engage socially and it has expanded the way in which customers get in touch with their brands.

The most important changes that have taken place due to the widespread use of the Internet suppose an attitude remodelling in the minds of people and consumers rather than a violent shift in branding practices. As Fazarinc (2001, p. 17) explains, the Internet enabled and accelerated another evolution of branding, because the brand experience that spanned the period between a customer’s awareness and purchase of a new product is increasingly the beginning of a new relationship that includes an array of after market loyalty services that may overshadow the physical product. This means that the digital era actually enabled branding to act as a more advanced persuasion and stimulation technique than traditional advertising strategies from the past. Also, and as we mentioned earlier, the persuasion and stimulation is obtained at a far quicker pace than before. It’s no longer only a matter of product purchase, but also a matter of product relevance —material or immaterial— that can have a longer lasting effect on businesses and customers. For Fletcher (2010, p. 12), brand image is the halo of feeling and emotions that brands inspire. Consumers want their brand image to make them feel more feminine, healthy, smarter, better parents, etc. Moreover, and due to the advent of social media, readers and consumers of brand content are more eager to share brand content from publishing sites than from the company website (AdWeek, 2013).

Hackley (2010, p. 20) explains that the multiplication of media channels through new technology has meant that most aspects of brand marketing have become tinged with a concern for the

potential impact of brand communication and the integrity of the brand personality. For the author, personality is key when thinking about brand content campaigns. However, personality or identity means more 'how a logo works' whereas branding is 'not only the way company presents itself, it's the way it behaves' (Evening Standard, 2014). And when there are products and sales at stake, measurement is key. According to authors like Hackley (2010, p. 20), measuring online brand engagement has become a priority for brand managers keen to leverage their brand's web presence to best effect, while much effort is devoted to garnering the impact of digital communications for advertisers. There is still some disagreement on how to measure the effectiveness of online advertising. This is true to an extent, as digital campaigns are evaluated with performance indicators that track reach or engagement per channel among others to meet agreed goals.

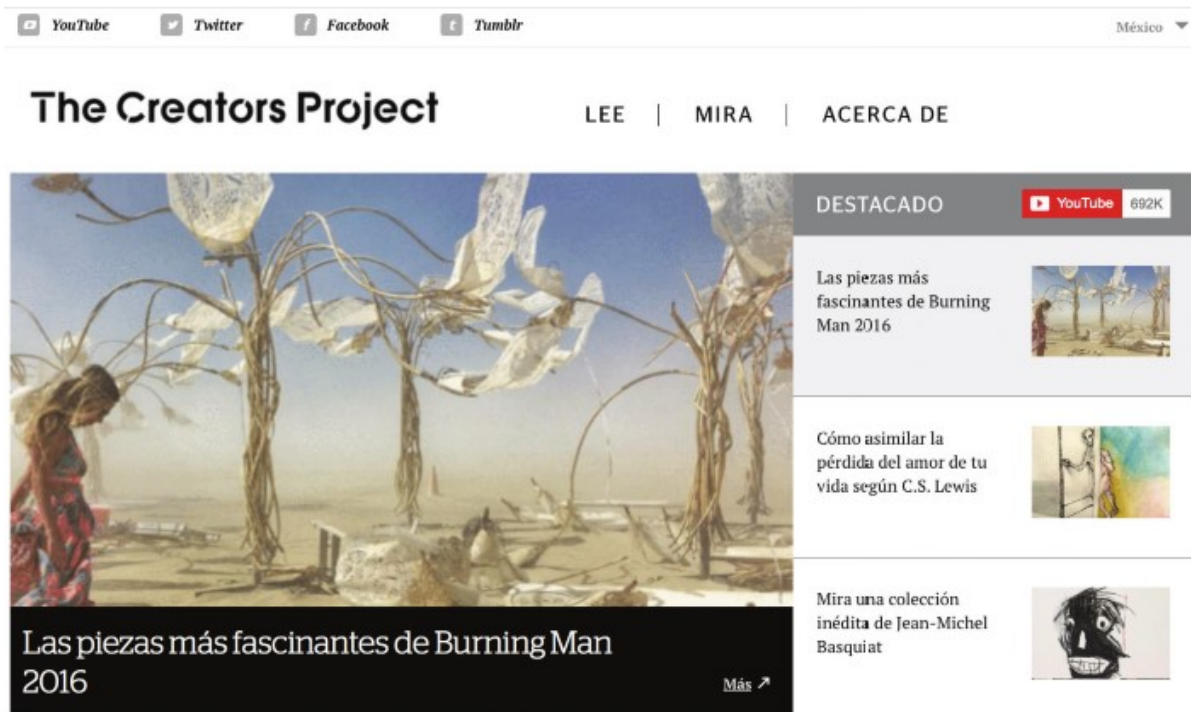
Brand content has the potential to connect brands with their desired consumers with creative narrative strategies. But what are these narratives? What makes a tale effective enough to succeed? Coca-Cola 2020 content marketing manifesto states that brand experience can be strengthened using content excellence strategies, which differs from creative excellence on the storytelling element, the 'narrative component'. This statement drops a line to the publishing industry, used to dealing with the intricacies of content excellence and engaging narrative, strategies that are starting to be explored through digital content curation. And when content production and curation are produced, a story must be told. Otherwise, there is no reason for it to be. For these digital content curators, 'storytelling' permeates across brand content so it can be used as a tool to deliver compelling material. Storytelling refers to a series of interconnected events or events relating to each other in time for a purpose. In this case, if we consider the 'digital' component of it, the series of interconnected events are related to each other using multimedia tools like video, photography and audio, along with text, among others. Hence, digital storytelling integrates narratives in non-linear sequences and there are some examples online.



Homepage of Nowness, a brand platform owned LVMH, a French conglomerate marketing high-end brands like Louis Vuitton

Prote.in, Vice, Nowness, Crane.tv... The number of online platforms conceived to act as content curation and distribution vehicles is noticeable (many of them in the UK) as they have become alternative forms of brand engagement, awareness and storytelling. These platforms represent novel editorial spaces that publish information relevant to their clients/brands, either as independent publishers curating content for brands in partnership (Prote.in) or as the brand's own media outlets (Nowness). The case of Crane.tv' is a special one: it is an online magazine devoted entirely to brand content though the production of short HD video pieces that showcase products and logos in the narrative, sometimes without direct mentions to the products. It also creates video pieces that profile people in the arts or food industry and do brief interviews. Their added value stands in video storytelling for brands. As a matter of fact, 'value through engagement' is paramount. Brand content existed before digital publishers went into the market to try to broker deals with brands and quality of information and strategy are certainly non-exclusively dependant on technology; there was good brand content before the Internet arrived. So, what is the 'value through engagement' in digital upon which some authors contribute their ideas? As we mentioned before, the ability to reach audiences instantly through digital and social content is a value and could enhance engagement with a brand or a brand experience. It's all about delivering a story and chemistry between the brand and publishers to ensure that the way in which brand content is delivered will best match the audience of the editorial platform.

The Creators Project, collaboration originally between Intel and Vice is one of the most high-profile brands-as-publishers case studies, as defined by Fast Co Create. Launched in 2009 as an initiative to support artists and performers who use technology in innovative ways to boost creativity, Intel aimed to establish itself as a brand providing emotional connections through valuable content distributed online in association with Vice. The initiative spans touch-points, a dedicated media channel featuring original videos, experiential events, mobile applications, partnerships with muse-ums and arts production studios activated globally.



Homepage of The Creators Project US as of September 2016

Happenings, installations, films, panels, music performances, workshops, among other products from The Creators Project are showcased and distributed to audiences through the project's platform. For Intel and Vice it was about putting technology in the hands of creators, documenting, publishing and distributing content driving organic collaboration between engineers from the Intel labs, performers in the program and audiences. The artists featured on the site provide insights and inspiration on the confluence of art and technology, but also, in some cases, actively advise, test, and collaborate with Intel on its products.

The Creators Project platform has rendered Intel a primary destination for arts and technology content from around the world, updated everyday with original material and editorial contributions

delivered and boosted social media platforms like Facebook. The emotional connection with audiences that the brand has fostered turns out evident and the platform (among other things) has set a communication pace for Intel and has contributed greatly to the brand's expanding content strategy.

If platforms like the mentioned ones represent 'unique spaces', how can we analyse their impact? How to craft compelling brand content storytelling? Is there a default narrative technique, whether it employs multimedia or just plain text? This has not been fully addressed and it is a strategic content fault, as many of these online narratives are still under construction drawing some elements from journalism and copywriting in the search of a unique form. Hence, we aim to explore some benefits and drawbacks. According to Robin (2010, p. 223), among the elements of digital storytelling are pacing/narrative and multimedia. We shall focus on these two to try to analyse strengths and weaknesses of storytelling when producing brand content. We choose these aspects due to the nature of the channels discussed in the essay, which are digital platforms.

The rhythm of the story and how slowly or quickly it progresses refers to the pacing of the narrative. Due to the web's lack of physical space to hold information, content has suffered some reconstruction patterns that give both the producer/curator and the consumer the ability to control pacing in different ways. An 'information mosaic' is formed online in which consumers have a say in the direction in which they will read a text or view a photographic essay. This element of digital storytelling enables publishers and content curators to distribute information in such a way that pace is either accelerated or halted. For instance, short videos of less than 30 seconds tend to accelerate consumption and be more time-efficient, while longer texts demand patience and commitment.

The management of pacing and narrative is a cornerstone of journalistic practice. Having to compress key information effectively for better text consumption lead to the creation of the inverted pyramid technique which states that key questions like 'what', 'where', 'when', 'who' and 'how' must be addressed right at the beginning of any piece of information, especially breaking news. It can be argued that digital channels have transformed set narrative techniques like the inverted pyramid, due to factors like the limitless digital support and more resourceful storytelling. Online content for brands —just as news pieces and feature journalistic stories— must engage from the very beginning. However, the advantage of online brand content is that it can control pace and narrative without focusing on products to sell or brand benefits (in the way newspapers would have to focus on quickly 'selling' their news) and recurring to a narrative that addresses intangible assets such as brand personality.

The online environment enables brands to establish narratives otherwise difficult on other formats such as newspaper ads, where space constraints and publication costs might make it harder to craft an inventive narrative that favours interaction with the brand. Moreover, access to older information stored digitally and available instantly and a 'start now, continue later' functionality are also two qualities that this online environment offers brands. Online environments incite the creation of information mosaics as we said. The ability to build a big piece of information that delivers a uniform brand experience out of smaller units could stand as a benefit for brands; not only because information can be broken down for creative reasons, but also because it can be better spread through social media, a vehicle inherently built for mosaic information, especially sites like Twitter.

The convergence and interaction of various types of media (video, audio, photography, info graphics, animation, etc.) in a single platform is called multimedia. While platforms like Serious Eats, a food-themed website, have very limited used of multimedia resources, other like Crane.tv solely produce HD video. In the middle, there are platforms like Nowness, which brings text, photography and video in the mix. Brand needs and importantly busi-ness goals will determine in part which strategy to use. In that sense, online multimedia might not always be suitable, as information noise is a risk if it is badly integrated or saturated. Multimedia production costs and time consumption is also important to consider. However, if employed accord-ingly, multimedia tools can lead to better contextual information to create a unified and coordinated brand experience. Moreover, brand imagery could be better showcased with multimedia content, which are also more likely to be shared via social media. In the Ecuadorian case, such platforms and narratives are almost non-existent. Singularities of the local market such as continued prevalence of traditional forms of digital advertising like web-site banners and a lack of innovative initiatives regarding brand content in digital environments have hindered some efforts. However, companies like Paralelo¹ have taken a step towards working with brands in thinking content strategies and digital hubs with engaging brand narratives.

The possibilities that digital platforms can offer brands and advertisers have been one of the most important factors favouring brand content to take off because of the narrative tools that multimedia offers in one single narrative. Adding the reduced cost of running a campaign on social media than on television could help to develop strategies that are not concentrated uniquely on product performance. Moreover, brand content strategies could be favourable in the case of smaller businesses that are just starting to develop brand

image without budgets for traditional advertising. Multimedia for storytelling is basic to sketch and produce a media laydown, a proposal of the assets that a publisher can offer a brand in a single digital space. One written piece, one branded video, three podcast messages/interviews and one photographic essay: the laydown of what you are going to do during that particular period of time and what's the value of that media are essential. And the times and ways in which that media can engage are also of particular interest, as a video teaser could be shown before the actual one and social media campaigning could be integrated in the laydown.

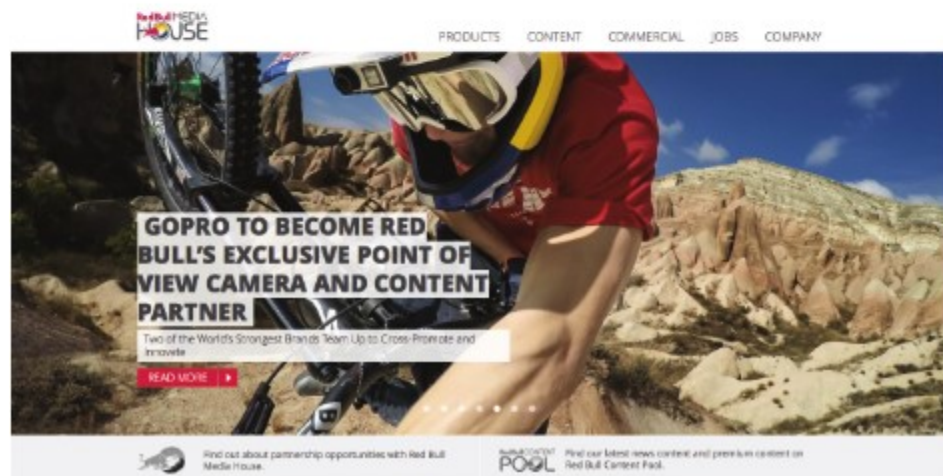
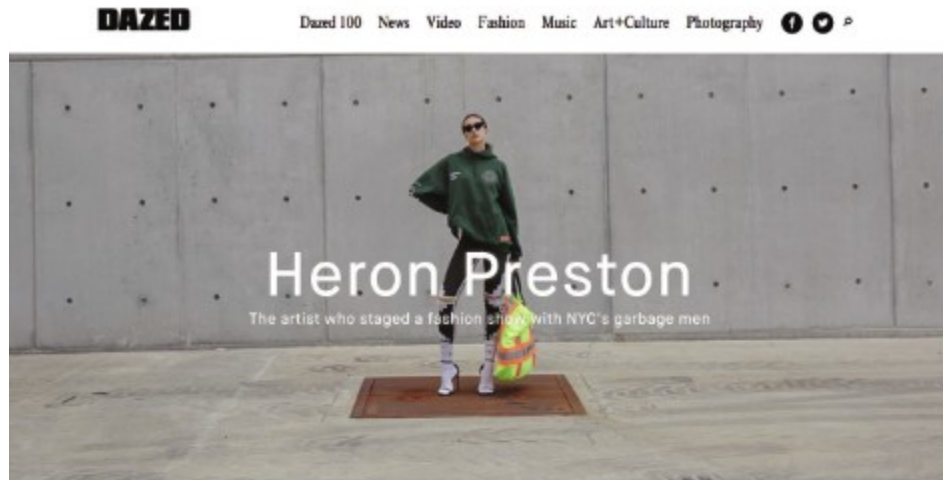
The risk of attention dispersion and missing the targeted user experience due to the over stimulus by using multimedia tools for the sake of employing them persists could be seen as the flip side to the multimedia coin. Having video production to back up a written narrative with additional information, presenting a video piece that adds new information to a written word story, or preparing a photo visual edit made out of video stills need to lead in one agreeable direction toward a specific target or goal.

The combination of multimedia tools to kick-start a narrative and deliver a message hardly has a set format. Not all brands could look on video while not all consumers might be moved by reading text, so creativity, type of strategy and visually attractive material —among others— are important when determining how to interlace media and avoid information duplicity. Moreover, the possibility of falling in contradictory grounds could be fatal for the communication of brand content messages. When misused, the digital environment could produce information overflow and overload users. While digital could be seen as dangerous grounds under some circumstances, it is also essential to remember that digital behaviour itself can be better tracked and analysed than traditional media consumption. In the case of digital publishers of brand content, marketers can perform better ROI analysis using web traffic analytics to profile digital consumers and consumption patters. This data is important for clients to decide where and how to promote their content. At the risk of falling into narrative clichés, multimedia storytelling shows advantages and drawbacks much like other forms of media production and advertising campaigning.

All in all, video as the staple component of the multimedia mix is starting to show its added value. According to Publishing Executive (2013), custom content spending on production and distribution of video rose to 43.9 billion US Dollars in 2013, the second highest amount to be recorded. All forms experienced growth; a 9.2% rise over last year's 40.2 billion, with print still claiming the lion's share of dollars spent in content marketing. Even though print still has a lead in investment, funds that were previously earmarked for print are

being shifted to video content (Publishing Executive 2013). Furthermore, video has been the fastest and most consistently growing medium for content marketing— with 62% of respondents in a recent survey now report using video in their content marketing (Publishing Executive 2013).

Reviewing some aspects of digital storytelling for brands leads us to acknowledge that the development of these practices is mostly beneficial. The interest that these types of content have awoken are powerful enough to the point that major journalistic powerhouses like The Guardian are now experimenting with a variety of promotional content with funding from outside parties, something previously unthinkable for a traditional journalism organisation. The newspaper now produces sponsored content, advertisement features and content supported by foundations. According to The Guardian (2011), these sources of revenue allow them to explore in more depth topics of interest, while being clear about who funded and commissioned them. The mix in which brands, publishers, and advertisers find themselves does not have a stiff relationship format and as Leroux (2013, p. 21) explains, the lines between who creates, brands, curates and distributes content are blurring. Alongside traditional creators and distributors, content is now coming from individuals, entrepreneurs, and an increasing number of discerning digital publishers. Prote.in acts both as a media network connecting brands like Adidas, Nokia, Burberry, Samsung, Levi's, Intel, Land Rover with cultural influencers (readership) while some brands are also becoming content creators and media owners in their own right: Red Bull Media House and LVMH's Nowness are just two examples. There is a paradigm change, as the nature of content ownership that has traditionally been held by publishers has given a turn. Media businesses see themselves as curators of content rather than owners. These companies aggregate and package content drawn from a plethora of sources, a vertical publishing approach typified by Glam Media (The Guardian, 2011). There is the case of Serious Eats – it has built an online community of 2.5 million without spending anything on digital advertising, search engine optimisation or traditional marketing. Once, reach and scale were all that counted, now depth of engagement is what everyone – users and brand partners, alike – is looking for (The Guardian, 2011).



Conclusions

Brands want to be in passionate environments where success can come from being part of a larger community holding benefits for publishers and readers alike. The challenge is how to better integrate these spaces and increase their influence when it comes to developing reach and products on the web. Brands creating valuable assets for their customers are essential, and storytelling techniques could just be a key element to strengthen that value. Through integrated storytelling and content curation, successful media companies can build strong relationships between talent, brands, and content creators/distributors. They are also acting as storytelling facilitators, ensuring brand messages come out clearly through the content. However, a universal recipe is still in the making.

Bringing together advertising, brand narratives and media platforms has meant an exploration of the strategies through which brands and people can establish relationships. Even though the digital scaffold has been set for some time now and many different practices and deals have taken interesting products online, to find the best narrative strategy to deliver ever greater compelling and interactive content is one of the brand's main concerns when getting on board with partners that can offer exciting environments to push engaging content. For their part, audiences are in a privileged place where advertising could no longer be seen as force-fed routine but as a more interactive relationship where the enjoyment of a story goes beyond purely material goals. It is no surprise by now that the online panorama enables present and future publishers and entrepreneurs the chance to explore creativity and storytelling through profitable media-tion. Brands, publishers and digital communities talking to each other have created a very vibrant creative environment likely to be further expanded and explored in the future.

Bibliography

- Advertising Age (2003) History: 1970s. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1jnKxXO>
- AdWeek (2013) Branded content moves the needle. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1c1Zp9g>
- Castells, M. (2010) *The rise of the network society*. Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell.
- Castels, M. (2001). *The internet galaxy. Reflections on the internet, business and society*. Oxford University Press.
- Curran, J., Fenton, N., Freedman, D. (2012). *Misunderstanding the Internet*. New York, Routledge.
- Evening Standard (2014) Growth capital: Rufus Leonard – creative partners who specialize in branding “the backbone of Britain”. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1MVx02r>
- Fazarinc, Bojana (2001) Branding @ the digital age. In H. Meyers & R. Gertsman (Eds). New York, Palgrave.
- Fletcher, W. (2010) *Advertising. A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- The Guardian (2011) How ‘content curators’ are connecting consumers. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1oDtd1a>
- Hackley, C. (2010) *Advertising and promotion. An integrated communications approach*. London, Sage.
- Leadbeater, C. (2009) *We-think. Mass innovation, not mass production*. London, Profile Books.
- Leckenby, J. (2005) The interaction of traditional and new media. In Stafford, M., Faber, R. (Eds.) (2005). *Advertising, promotion and new media*. New York, M.E. Sharpe.
- Leroux, J. B. (2013) *Storytelling and curation: content partnerships in the digital age*. RP No. 3 Setting the Trends. London, MEC Access.
- McStay, A. (2010) *Digital advertising*. New York, Palgrave MacMillan.
- Publishing Executive (2013) At nearly \$44 Billion, new survey shows rise in content marketing budget. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1MICEXM>
- Pulizzi, J. (2014) *Epic content marketing. How to tell a different story, break through the clutter and win more customers by marketing less*. New York, McGraw Hill.

Robin, B. (2010) *Digital storytelling*. New York, Routledge.

Ryan, D., Jones, C. (2009) *Understanding digital marketing*. London, Kogan Page.

Seven Elm (2014) *What's branded content – And how does it work?*
Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/1kXg5Wf>

Stafford, M., Faber, R. (Eds.) (2005). *Advertising, promotion and new media*. New York, M.E. Sharpe.

Van 'T Hof, C., Van Est, R., Daemen, F. (2011). *Check in / Check out. The public space as Internet of things*. Rotterdam, NAI Publishers.

Notes

1

Accessible on www.paralelo.info



Available in:

<http://portal.amelica.org/ameli/journal/271/2715028005/2715028005.pdf>

How to cite

Complete issue

More information about this article

Journal's webpage in portal.amelica.org

Scientific Information System Redalyc
Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America and the
Caribbean, Spain and Portugal
Project academic non-profit, developed under the open
access initiative

Oscar Maldonado

**The emergence of media platforms that produce,
showcase, and curate brand content through digital
storytelling**

post(s)

vol. 2, p. 120 - 143, 2016

Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador

posts@usfq.edu.ec

ISSN: 1390-9797

ISSN-E: 2631-2670



CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 LEGAL CODE

**Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-
ShareAlike 4.0 International.**