



WHITE PAPER

Maximizing Content Marketing: A Six-Step Plan for Agile Engagement

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Maximizing Content Marketing: A Six-Step Plan for Agile Engagement

A veteran communications professional shares a six-step process combining marketing and PR techniques – using content marketing and social media to launch a “virtuous cycle” of agile engagement.

Communications professionals looking to harness the combined forces of content marketing and social networking – also known as owned and earned media – are in for some good news and some bad news.

The bad news first: The sheer momentum with which the two phenomena are evolving today is swamping many marketing departments. It turns out that generating enough high-value content in ways that are meaningful to multiple social audiences is a monumental challenge in today’s always-on media world.¹

The good news? Owned and earned media were born to leverage off one another – and their combined impact often proves to be far greater than the sum of their parts. Successful PR professionals work toward a self-renewing “virtuous cycle” in which owned media is published by a brand, audiences play it forward as earned media, and the amplification continues as these ripples spread throughout the social sphere.

And there’s even more good news: owned media is not limited solely to the videos, white papers, tweets and other content you produce; it also includes the multimedia platforms you’ve creatively designed to host that stream of brand messaging, as well as the communities you’ve built and diligently maintained around your messaging. With these multiple manifestations of owned media comes a greater resulting opportunity for earning media.

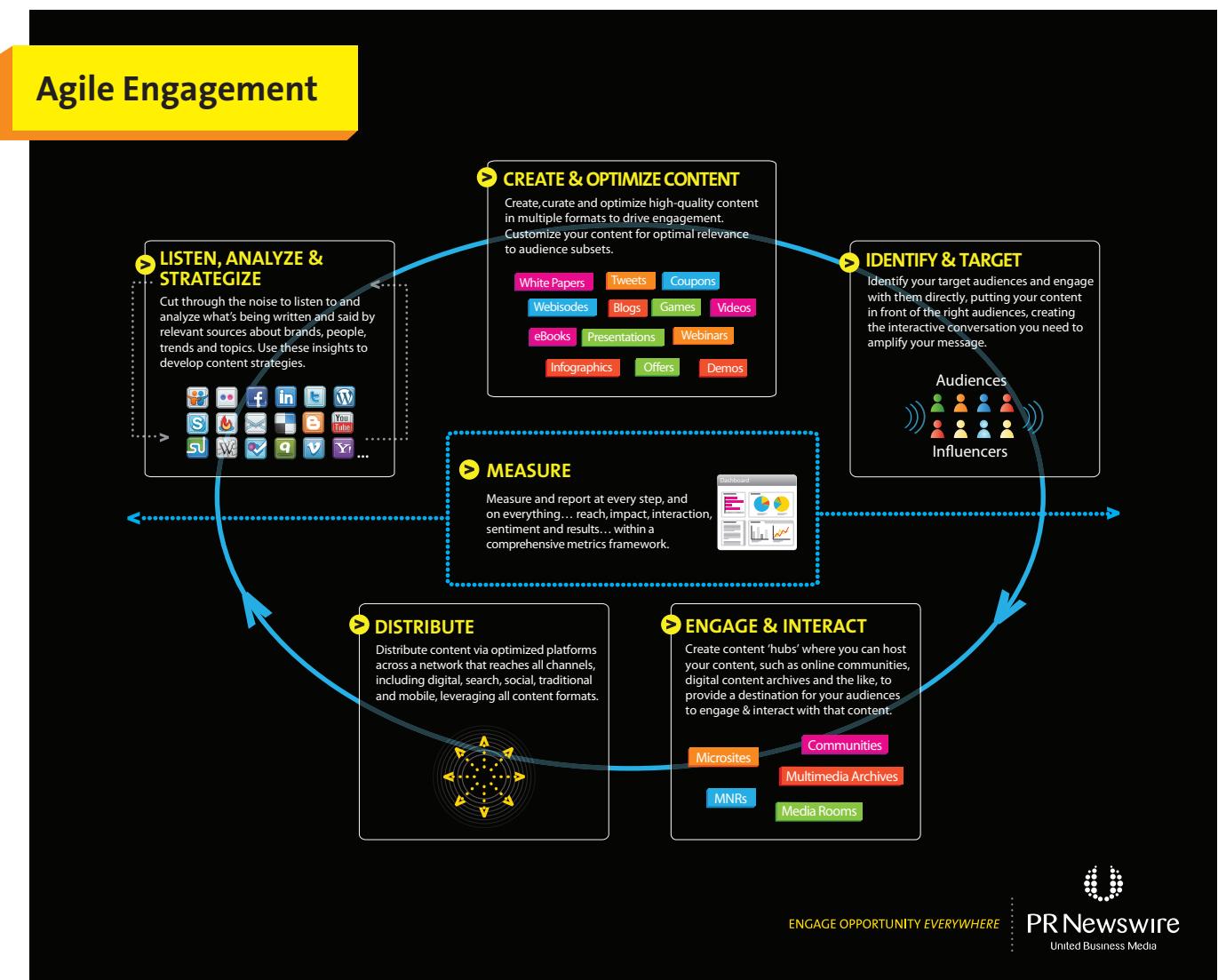
Of course, it’s tough to get the virtuous cycle started – but that’s where the combined competencies of marketing and public relations departments become vitally important.

1. *Content: The New Marketing Equation: Why Organizations Must Rebalance*, Altimeter Group, 2/16/12,
<http://www.altimetergroup.com/2012/02/rebalancing-for-content-the-new-marketing-equation.html>

Public relations has always been an exercise in listening and earning media – traditional media, in past decades, and a mix of traditional, digital and social media today. These PR strengths can deliver a multiplier effect to the marketing department's content strategy. At the same time, marketing's content is valued by PR departments as material for courting influencers, and its competence in market research is needed by PR to help target and measure their influencer strategies.

This white paper draws on the experience of Rachel Meranus, a communications professional who has embraced the blurring of marketing and PR and can report on its merits for enabling agile engagement (*see Figure A below*), delivering business results and raising brand profile. Meranus is Vice President of Marketing and Communications for PR Newswire and, as her title suggests, she embodies convergence – having focused on public relations prior to spearheading the company's marketing initiatives.

Figure A:



SIX STEPS FOR AGILE ENGAGEMENT

1. **Monitor and Listen** for audience interests, your brand's Social Echo and industry-wide sentiments that may be trending at any given time.
2. **Create and Optimize** for your audiences' preferences in content types and formats.
3. **Identify and Target** for the right mix of big and small influencers to generate a viral effect around your content.
4. **Engage and Interact** to make sure your content is easily found, triggered for audience interaction and readily shareable.
5. **Distribute and Reach** to engage with your audiences wherever they are – be it digital, search, social, traditional or mobile channels.
6. **Measure and Report** in real time to gain the insight to stay the course, make a series of incremental adjustments or switch gears rapidly.

With her view of both sides of the equation, Meranus uses this six-step agile engagement process for incorporating PR (earned media) tactics into online marketing. "Keep in mind, though, that this is not a linear process," she says. "It involves interacting cycles of listening, creating, targeting, engaging, distributing and measuring."

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Rachel Meranus
Vice President of Marketing and Communications, PR Newswire

Creating a content marketing strategy – the baseline

Even before beginning to map the elements of your content marketing strategy, the classic, necessary – and yet sometimes overlooked – first step is to align your strategy to business and marketing goals.

- *Are your marketing goals revenue-focused?* If so, focus your content marketing goals on generating leads or driving immediate revenue opportunities (e-commerce).
- *Is brand awareness your business goal?* Then your content marketing strategy should incorporate thought leadership pieces, search engine optimization strategies and the like.
- *Or are you tasked to drive alignment with your sales team?* In that case, content marketing will play a large role in retention and cross-sell strategies.

Many top-level marketing strategies touch on all of these goals, requiring a prioritized mix of content marketing tactics. The following six steps can be used effectively within the context of all of these goals.

Incorporating earned media technique – a six-step process

With the content marketing strategy mapped to business objectives, following these six steps for earning media will help deliver maximum return on your content investments.

Step 1: Monitor and Listen

Before creating a single piece of content, listen. Learn what interests your audiences, how your brand currently resonates with them, what your competitors are saying and what conversations are happening in your industry.

Research shows that press releases with multimedia content are shared 3-1/2 times more than basic text.

This is a great way to identify and hone your messages and stories. And if you're a really good listener, you'll get the insights you need to craft content that combines your business objectives with the needs of your audiences without going overboard on the selling messages – a trap into which many content marketers fall. In fact, according to a recent research survey of business executives, 75% of respondents want content creators to "curb the sales messaging."² This is an area where PR-marketing collaboration can help.

Step 2: Create and Optimize

Listening also uncovers your audiences' preferences in content type and format. Align them with your marketing objectives in one of three ways:

- **Thought leadership:** content that illustrates an organization's breadth of expertise on important industry trends and subjects – infographics, articles, blog posts and short white papers offered directly to interested audiences. This is also terrific customer retention content.
- **Acquisition:** content used to acquire new contacts – white papers, video demos, eBooks or webinars, gated so that you can collect leads.
- **Nurture/cross-sell:** content used to bring a lead through the marketing funnel and into the sales funnel (once hooked with acquisition content) – original articles, infographics, blog posts, guide books, comparison grids, demos and more. This content is never gated, but it does include calls to action – to request more information or view a demo.

Use of multimedia content is essential to this step, especially when research shows that press releases with multimedia content are shared 3-1/2 times more than basic text³; 80% of

2. *The Content Preferences Survey*, DemandGen Reports, 2012:
<http://www.demandgenreport.com/archives/feature-articles/1234-exclusive-survey-report-business-executives-content-preferences-a-consumption-habits.html#.T70CABwtoY1>

3. *Beyond PR*, November 10, 2011,
<http://blog.prnewswire.com/2011/11/10/the-social-lives-of-press-releases/>

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We do a full text transcript of every podcast, and we turn that into a blog post, because some people don't want to listen to a podcast, but they'll read a blog post.

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Jay Baer
President, Convince & Convert

marketers are using video in 2012, versus only 64% in 2011⁴; and 180 million Americans watched 33 billion online videos in June 2012 alone.⁵

This step may seem daunting, with its ongoing multi-format requirements for creating and effectively “brand streaming”⁶ content, but incorporating such techniques as curating and re-purposing content in multiple media formats are earned media tactics that can lighten the workload while making their own contributions in the process.

Re-purposing content helps maximize your investment without having to reinvent the proverbial wheel – for example, atomizing a blog post into several tweets. “Sometimes you don’t even have to reimagine, you can just add dimension,” says Jay Baer, President of the Convince & Convert social and content consultancy. At the weekly Social Pros podcast, for instance, “we do a full text transcript of every podcast, and we turn that into a blog post, because some people don’t want to listen to a podcast, but they’ll read a blog post,” Baer says.⁷

As for curation, picking the best news, analysis and images that relate to your industry and align with your content strategy can make curating a powerful magnet that ultimately leads your audiences to your own content assets.

Staying on top of the latest news also provides opportunities for you to actively participate in the breaking news cycle by adding your own relevant commentary to the resulting discussion – even incorporating the keywords noted in the news coverage within your messages and landing pages. This approach is advanced by marketing strategist David Meerman Scott in his recent book *Newjacking: How to Inject Your Ideas into a Breaking News Story and Generate Tons of Media Coverage*.

Step 3: Identify and Target

There are big influencers and small influencers, and you need the right mix of both to generate a viral effect around your content. In addition to the set of influencers you speak to on a regular basis, there are likely many more who can help create buzz around your content and expertise. Identifying your target audiences – journalists, bloggers, investors and other influencers – and engaging with them directly will help get your content in front of the right audiences.

4. “Social Media Usage Plateaus among Marketers,” eMarketer, July 18, 2012, <http://www.emarketer.com/Mobile/Article.aspx?R=1009197>

5. “comScore Releases June 2012 U.S. Online Video Rankings,” comScore, July 18, 2012, http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases/2012/7/comScore_Releases_June_2012_U.S._Online_Video_Rankings

6. *Earning More Media through Brand Streaming*, PR Newswire, March 2012, http://promotions.prnewswire.com/rs/prnewswire/images/wp_Earning_More_Media_through_Brand_Streaming.pdf

7. “Solving 25 Content Marketing Challenges,” 4/27/12 webcast, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7DTgloAK-0>

Microsoft, for example, when launching its new Windows Phones, “developed an aggressive initiative to reach people who influence its social graphs,” according to a case study from the Altimeter Group.⁸ Individuals with big influence scores were invited to a high-profile launch event and offered a free smartphone. This step, in combination with such other tactics as Facebook ads, was credited for “conversations reaching tens of thousands of people before, during and after the event.”

Content can only make an impact in the social sphere if it is easily found, triggered for audience interaction and readily shareable.

Step 4: Engage and Interact

Content can only make an impact in the social sphere if it is easily found, triggered for audience interaction and readily shareable. One of the best ways to drive traffic to content is to use an optimized vehicle or platform. Several are available on the market today. PR Newswire’s platforms include the press release or content advisory as a common denominator.

Press releases optimized for search, fitted with social sharing capabilities, distributed across an established online network and posted on sites such as PRNewswire.com can produce significant uptake in social channels and render high in organic search results. Press release options include:

- **Text-only**, which can drive traffic to owned content, a webinar/event landing page and toward other inbound marketing channels
- **Multimedia news releases**, featuring the integration of various content assets such as video, photos, infographics, brochures, calls to action buttons and more, with multiple sharing capabilities
- **Engagement platforms** (including [PR Newswire’s ARC™ engagement platform](#)), which take multimedia and multidirectional sharing to a new level by assigning each content asset its own multi-channel distribution network, enabling embedding on third party sites, dynamic updating and more

Multimedia releases and engagement platforms supply a multiplier effect to help make the most of your content. One example is State Farm’s 2011 viral video of actor William Shatner, humorously warning about the annual Thanksgiving spate of deep-fried turkey injuries.

Despite the star power involved, “Eat, Fry Love: A Turkey Fryer Cautionary Tale” was a PR, not a marketing, initiative. It used a multimedia platform that surrounded the main video with ancillary videos, a press release, photos and other content assets. Many time-tested PR techniques assured its viral uptake, according to Heather Paul, Corporate Public Affairs Specialist, Digital/Social Media, at State Farm. Results included 500,000+ views of the YouTube video to date, but more importantly, a drop in cooking fire claims that Thanksgiving Day, Paul reports.

8. *The Rise of Digital Influence: A “how-to” guide for businesses to spark desirable effects and outcomes through social media influence*, Altimeter Group, 3/21/12,
<http://www.altimetergroup.com/research/reports/the-rise-of-digital-influence>

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Marketing research and the inherent listening and monitoring of PR come together to create a much better understanding of the audience, and that is a big help not only for determining the best content, but for figuring out the best distribution approach as well.

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Furthering interaction and engagement in the social sphere, online communities are another influential component of the owned media portfolio. Carefully nurtured and continually reinforced with investments of your time and creativity, they have wide-reaching power not only to produce earned media through comments, testimonials and even user-generated videos, but also to play forward the messages in your stream of earned, owned and paid media.

Step 5: Distribute and Reach

Choose a distribution network that reaches all channels – digital, search, social, traditional and mobile – to engage with your audiences wherever they are. Here, too, the combined talents of PR and marketing come into play, and the more concerted the effort, the greater the returns. Coordinated messaging, synchronized timing and consistent visual identity can compound the impact of marketing's banner ads, events and other activities with buzz created through PR's engagement platforms, multimedia news releases and additional initiatives.

“Marketing research and the inherent listening and monitoring of PR come together to create a much better understanding of the audience, and that is a big help not only for determining the best content, but for figuring out the best distribution approach as well. And the best way to determine this is for marketing and PR to put their heads together,” Meranus says.

Step 6: Measure and Report

Keep track of the conversation around your content and the level of engagement with your content, in real time. This intelligence will provide you with the insight to stay the course, make a series of incremental adjustments or switch gears rapidly. Gather this strategic business intelligence at all phases – beginning, middle and end – of a campaign or long-term marketing strategy.

This step can even be internally persuasive in support of your content marketing strategy. A single eBook published by Eloqua, a provider of marketing automation platforms, generated \$2.5 million in annual contract value, reports Joe Chernov, Eloqua's Vice President of Content Marketing.⁹ “And those eBooks cost about \$2,000 each to produce. The ROI can be remarkable,” he explains.

9. “Solving 25 Content Marketing Challenges,” 4/27/12 webcast,
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7DTgloAK-0>

Collaborating for more efficient, effective engagement

Adopting PR techniques can increase your content marketing impact, but actual collaboration between your marketing and PR departments can make the integration of paid, owned and earned media even more efficient and effective. At the Chrysler Group, for instance, the PR department has a dedicated liaison with the marketing department, and “we share information constantly so that we’re working in a complementary fashion and are not at odds with each other or doing redundant work,” reports Ed Garsten, Head of Electronic Communications for the company.¹⁰

SAS, a supplier of business analytics and business intelligence software, provides an example of a company with a highly collaborative engagement strategy, internally referenced as “Digitizing the Business.” Not only do the company’s marketing and PR pros sit side-by-side in a Department of External Communications, but a council with seven task forces has been put in place to coordinate across the enterprise and move projects forward faster.¹¹

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Ed Garsten
Head of Electronic Communications, Chrysler

Of note, a recent *McKinsey Quarterly* report on digital marketing underscores the need for such collaboration. “In managing complexity within the marketing organization, you’ll require a number of specialists. You just will.”¹²

And *Newjacking* author Scott is often heard describing how the Web is affecting the convergence of marketing and PR. As he puts it, “If someone goes to Google and finds a *New York Times* article, a blog from a third party, a blog from the company and a video from an employee of the company, the average person no longer discerns from among those sources.”

Whether restructuring PR and marketing, setting up formal coordination mechanisms or working informally with PR to import their technique into your enterprise’s marketing practices, as McKinsey puts it: “Everyone will have to accept that roles are changing.”

Conclusion: Leverage PR in all six steps to enhance marketing results

Incorporating these six steps is a cost-effective way to leverage earned media efforts in your content marketing strategy. The payoff of bringing PR technique into your marketing

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10. “Business Development Institute’s Social Consumer 2012 conference, 3/22/2012, <http://www.cvent.com/events/the-social-consumer-2012-case-studies-and-roundtables/event-summary-98980411238b40519cbfd3cdd2a21710.aspx>
 11. *The Dawn of Agile Engagement*, PR Newswire, June 2012, http://promotions.prnewswire.com/rs/prnewswire/images/wp_The_Dawn_of_Agile_Engagement.pdf
 12. “Measuring Marketing’s Worth,” *McKinsey Quarterly*, May 2012, https://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/Measuring_marketing_s_worth_2971



comes in the form of a rebalanced paid-owned-earned media budget, more impactful marketing content, greater brand awareness and quantifiable business returns from inbound marketing. Real collaboration between the marketing and PR departments can make the payoff that much greater.

About PR Newswire

PR Newswire (www.prnewswire.com) is the premier global provider of multimedia platforms and solutions that enable marketers, corporate communicators, sustainability officers, public affairs and investor relations officers to leverage content to engage with all their key audiences. Having pioneered the commercial news distribution industry 58 years ago, PR Newswire today provides end-to-end solutions to produce, optimize and target content – from rich media to online video to multimedia – and then distribute content and measure results across traditional, digital, social, search and mobile channels. Combining the world's largest multi-channel, multi-cultural content distribution and optimization network with comprehensive workflow tools and platforms, PR Newswire enables the world's enterprises to engage opportunity everywhere it exists. PR Newswire serves tens of thousands of clients from offices in the Americas, Europe, Middle East, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region, and is a UBM plc company.

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