2015
CONTENT MARKETING AND DATA INTELLIGENCE

A CMA Industry Report — Content Marketing and Data Intelligence

ABOUT THE CONTENT MARKETING ASSOCIATION

Today, content marketing is worth over £4bn, and represents about £1 in every £4 spent on marketing. Budgets allocated to content marketing are increasing at around 25% a year.

The role of the Content Marketing Association is to promote content as an effective marketing tool to client-side marketers, and to showcase best practice insight, strategy and creative.

We do this through proprietary research, events, training, awards and conferences.

For clients, we run an intermediary service that allows them to explore the market and find the right agency for their needs. The CMA hosts an annual international summit, and runs the largest international awards event for content marketing.

The diversity of our membership demonstrates just how content marketing has developed.

As well as clients, it includes specialist content agencies, media agencies, media owners, companies with a background in TV and video production, and digital and social agencies.

You can find out more at www.the-cma.com or by e-mailing our managing director, Clare Hill, at clare.hill@the-cma.com

It's an exciting time to be in content marketing – and a pretty satisfying one too. For years, we've been telling clients that content works harder for their money, goes deeper and drives longer-lasting change than anything else. Now the spread of data – not just the tools and the literacy, but in terms of clients' willingness to enter the space between POS and customer too – has shown we were right.

In a way, none of this is that new. Unlike a lot of broadcast or pure play media, content marketers have always dug deep for information. It's never been enough to rely on eyeballs in numbers: we've always had to prove what those people did next, and why.

But more than even measuring effectiveness, the avenues opened up by data allow marketers to start thinking pro-actively about what content itself means. From driving strategy as insight to harvesting and productising data itself, the possibilities are wide open.

The very existence of a report like this one shows just how far the content marketing industry's long-held ideas – the value of deep insight and the customer as a complex being – have penetrated into the mainstream. There are some great insights here, too.

I hope you enjoy them.

Andrew Hirsch, Chairman, The CMA

DATA AND CONTENT ARE A POTENT FORCE

Welcome to the CMA Report on the impact of data on content marketing.

This is the first of four reports produced by the CMA on issues driving innovation and development in our industry.

At the CMA we recognise that intelligent harnessing of data's potential is as big a topic as big data itself. In a recent poll of our members more than 90% said that they were using customer data to inform their content marketing strategies, whilst 83% revealed they were planning to use data more in shaping their content marketing strategies in the coming year.

It goes without saying that providing highly personalised, targeted and effective content marketing strategies that achieve greater customer engagement and increased ROI is the holy grail of the modern marketer. But the greatest strength of data in this quest is also its weakness. Today there's so much data being generated, in so many channels, every second of the day, that it's hard to focus on what's important in terms of insight and measurement.

We are fortunate in that two of our members, MEC and iProspect, have been carrying out research to answer two of the most frequently asked questions about data by content marketers. In its Citation Audit research, MEC aims to discover what sort of content creates reach and engagement. In its analysis of almost 1 billion Facebook posts, iProspect considers how format and the devices used to access content impacted customer actions and results. Find out more about their findings on pages 6-7 and 8-11 of this report.

The data we gather and the potential impact of what we can do with it are also considered by Chris Rayment, Insight and Planning Director at Cedar Communications, and Michael Reeves, Business Development Director of Red Bee Media. Headstream's Steven Sponder reveals how using customer data intelligently can turn a 'just looking' web prospect into a purchasing customer.

But it's not just provided data that can shape our industry. Content creation is at the heart of what we do: John Brown Media's Head of Content, Matt Potter, and Simon Baker, Head of Branded Content at ITN, explore its use as a data source. The stories published and news generated have long been seen as the key source of ROI. Both Potter and Baker challenge this view and ask us to look at how the data and research used to create stories can be an additional asset to our balance sheets and bottom lines.

We'd like to thank all the CMA members who provided contributions to this report and welcome your contributions and views on this exciting ever-developing area of marketing.

Clare Hill, Managing Director, The CMA

HOW DATA IS IMPACTING CONTENT MARKETING

DATA SOURCES AND STRATEGIES

92%
of CMA members use customer data as part of their content marketing strategy. 40% of members source data from clients
(Source: CMA Audit)

83%
of CMA members aim to use more data to inform their CM strategies in 2015
(Source CMA Audit)

Fewer than
1 in 20
companies have life-event information on their customers that can help improve sales and reduce churn
(Source: Royal Mail/Data iQ)

VISUAL AND PRACTICAL CONTENT PACKS A PUNCH

33%
... photo imagery and memes top the poll in most shared content.
Videos run a close second at 25%
(Source: MEC Citation Audit)

Add a video to your website and you can drive an additional 2 minutes of dwell time to your websites. Add 'video' to the subject line of your email and you'll increase open rates by 19%
(Source: HighQ)

How-to's and practical content that answers a question top the polls for why content is shared at 35% but personal branding also has a part to play at
31%
(Source: MEC)

... WITH DATA INSIGHT + BRAND NARRATIVE YOU CAN MAKE A BIG IMPACT

In 2003 new car buyers made 4 visits to a dealership. In
2013
it was just 1.5

In 2003 only 1% of buyers researched car models online. In 2013
92%
did
(Source: BMW Annual Report and Google)

40%
of car buyers purchased a brand that was not their initial favourite option and 21% a brand they didn't have in mind at all
(Source: Google Gearshift)

IGNORE MOBILE AT YOUR PERIL

By 2017 87% of connected devices will be either tablets or smartphone, with a continued decline in desktop
(Source: IDC)

In terms of engagement, complete video view on mobile is twice as high (0.49%) as that on a desktop (0.24%)
(Source: iProspect)

50%
of all mobile traffic is video
(Source: High Q)

How different formats and devices impact view and sales conversion rates

Nearly 1 billion Facebook impressions over three months were analysed by iProspect's Head of Research and Development, Angus Wood, to explore the impact that social content formats and device had on a brand's marketing objectives. Read on to find out what they revealed

Angus Wood
Head of Research and Development
iProspect UK

Are all social formats created equal? On a platform where upwards of 6 billion content pieces are shared globally each day, brands and marketers are constantly looking for the most effective ways to enter the conversation and be heard. With UK advertisers predicted to spend over £750m on Facebook in 2015, the need to understand which types of ad content drive particular business objectives is more pressing than ever. The old marketing 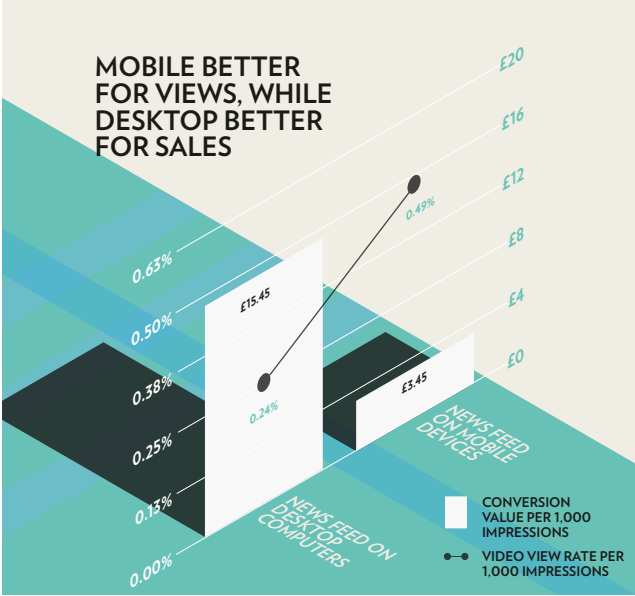holy grail – reaching the right person, with the right message, at the right time – is more achievable than ever with Facebook's suite of audience targeting options. But social content marketing also introduces a new set of complexities: the format of a piece of content is clearly part of its 'message', while the device on which it's viewed is a key part of its context. To be effective, smart marketers must unpick how all of these different variables interact for the most impact.

iProspect's R&D team, the Ideas Institute, has analysed an aggregated and anonymised data set of almost 1 billion Facebook ad impressions from November 2014 to February 2015 for the CMA, to put scientific rigour behind this creative process. We looked at two key ways to cut the data: first, which Facebook formats perform most effectively for particular objectives, such as video views or sales; and second, how users' propensity to complete these objectives is affected by the device on which they saw the content.

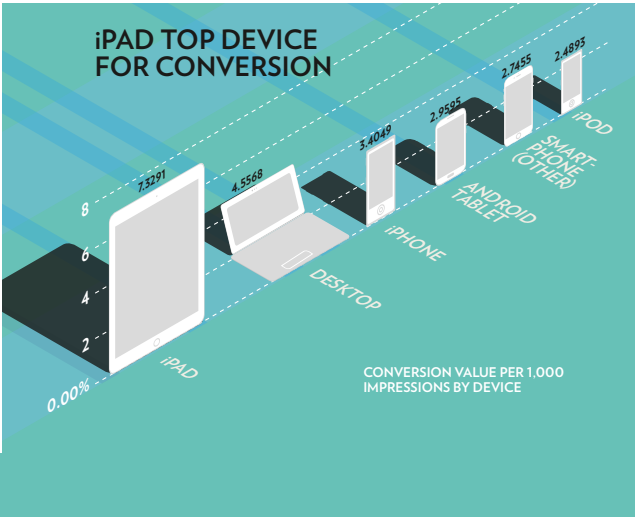## Is there a magic formula for format and content?

We began by considering which format works most effectively for particular content types and objectives – video views, page likes, clicks-to-site. Facebook offers advertisers a range of different ad formats, optimised for these different objectives. Unsurprisingly, our data showed that the specialist formats are very good at specialist jobs. Link page posts drove far and away the highest revenue, while the video ad format generates the highest number of views for a given video, making it the obvious choice for promoting a brand video.

But where a user sees an ad also affects their likelihood to respond. Mobile was the video engagement platform of choice: the completed video view rate on mobile (0.49%) was twice as high as that on desktop (0.24%). But conversely, users who had seen ads (of whatever format) on a desktop were over five times more likely to go on to make an online purchase than those who had seen ads on a mobile device, generating £15.45 of revenue per 1,000 impressions versus £3.45 on mobile.

MOBILE BETTER FOR VIEWS, WHILE DESKTOP BETTER FOR SALES

£20, £16, £12, £8, £4, £0

0.63%, 0.50%, 0.38%, 0.25%, 0.15%, 0.00%

£15.45 — 0.24% — NEWS FEED ON DESKTOP COMPUTERS

0.49% — £3.45 — NEWS FEED ON MOBILE DEVICES

■ CONVERSION VALUE PER 1,000 IMPRESSIONS
● VIDEO VIEW RATE PER 1,000 IMPRESSIONS

Returning to the formats, the halo effect post-view on conversion is more intriguing. Our data set pointed up that users who had engaged with a video post spent 42% more, on average, than an image-based ad alone. Neither format is intended specifically to drive conversion (and both were dwarfed by the more DR–focused link posts driving users direct to site). But it was clear on our evidence that Facebook video represented a much more attractive option for marketers who want to get an additional DR output for their brand spend.

Perhaps the most striking pattern emerged when we compared revenue

iPAD TOP DEVICE FOR CONVERSION

8, 6, 4, 2, 0.00%

7.3291 — iPAD
4.5568 — DESKTOP
3.4049 — iPHONE
2.9585 — ANDROID TABLET
2.7455 — SMART-PHONE (OTHER)
2.4895 — iPOD

CONVERSION VALUE PER 1,000 IMPRESSIONS BY DEVICE

FIVE WAYS TO GET GREAT RESULTS FROM YOUR CONTENT MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

1. Invest in video
Video viewers spend more than photo viewers at the checkout

2. Think mobile
Consumption of content is broadly stronger on mobile

3. Stay nuanced
E-commerce revenue is still driven by desktop exposure

4. Think about hardware
The choices people make as to where, and on what device, they consume content means they behave differently when they encounter it

5. Think scientifically
Data analysis and artistic endeavour are complementary in modern content marketing, and need to support one another

generated across different operating devices.

Those who viewed Facebook ads on iOS were markedly more likely to buy than Android users – though desktop platforms came second overall. There is of course a balance to be struck between ROI and volume: while iPad users are the most 'valuable', they account for only a little over 12% of total spend value, while desktop made up 40%. The desktop audience still remains the biggest revenue driver, then, even if less efficient.

Clearly the picture is nuanced: we aren't going to advise our clients to allocate all of their Facebook spend towards iPad users. But there are some hard insights into which tactics, formats and platforms will be most efficient for particular objectives and should be prioritised. Mobile video is growing powerfully, and is more likely to get both view starts and completes – so if you're only making one edit, make it for mobile first, and desktop second. Better yet, invest in multiple creative executions, where more sales focused messaging in video is targeted to desktop users. But perhaps most important of all is that this kind of data-heavy, aggregated approach gives hard results for creative choices. ✿

Repeating success: creating the context and content to drive shares

Can content marketers find the common denominators that will ensure audiences will share their content? Ben McKay, Managing Director of MEC Organic Performance, thinks they can – and he's ready to share the results of MEC's Citation Audit to prove it

Ben McKay
MD
MEC Organic Performance

There's one area of content marketing that continues to fascinate the industry and that's the 'black box' element of it. Put simply, it's understanding why people share.

This organic component of marketing has dozens of variables, but with growing investments in content and marketers (quite rightfully) needing greater confidence in its success, this black box needs a light shining into it.

So rather than pretending the silver bullet to creating viral content can be known, we instead focus the analysis on common and linked attributes of popular content as part of what MEC calls a Citation Audit.

With the input of a PhD researcher, MEC created a robust research structure to collate and measure data around this (pretty subjective) topic. First, we identified the top 50 most shared pages for a range of sectors (entertainment, industrial B2B, travel, ecommerce, finance and insurance). Using a range of social/search tools along with manual review of content, MEC then analysed the pages by page type; on-page content formats; and motivations for sharing. We then analysed the correlations among the data-set.

KEY QUESTIONS THE CITATION AUDIT LOOKED TO ANSWER

1. How did the content perform? Social shares, linking sites to the content, interactions, time-on-site, comments…

2. How and where was the content hosted?

3. How was the content initially shared?

4. Who was the content shared with? What are their interests and how do they spend their time?
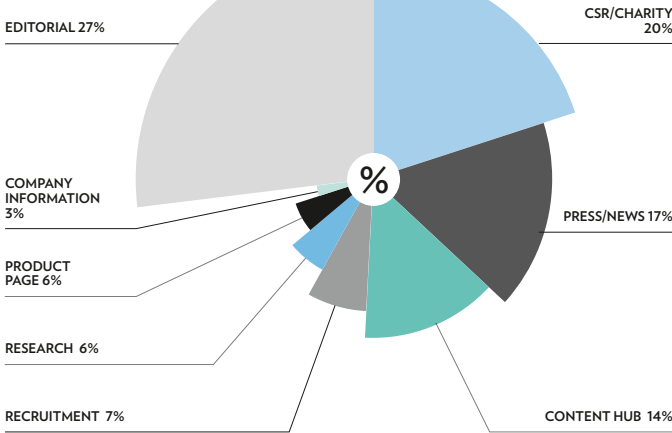
5. What were the likely motivations for someone sharing that content?

6. What creative format(s) was the content delivered in?

**7. What messages were used in the content?**

What content is shared?

Unsurprisingly the most shared content is editorial (typically how-to content or guides), news and CSR or charitable content – all forms of content that typically serve a larger audience online and a particular need. This is key to many of the assertions content marketers make

MOST-SHARED PAGE TYPE

EDITORIAL 27%
CSR/CHARITY 20%
PRESS/NEWS 17%
CONTENT HUB 14%
COMPANY INFORMATION 3%
PRODUCT PAGE 6%
RESEARCH 6%
RECRUITMENT 7%

– *e.g.* developing an audience-first strategy.

It has been said that editorial content is making a revival and this could be a case in point. In the chart (right), 37% of content that was most shared featured editorial as the dominant format type. The shelf-life of this content is a major contributor towards this statistic, where much of the most shared content could be regarded as 'evergreen'. It also raises the question as to whether brands are measuring this sort of ROI around their evergreen content investments.

Memes, infographics and photos feature among the most popular imagery and make up 33% of the most shared content, with video next at 25%. Video content tends to be linked to a broader-reaching digital campaigns. This prompts the question: why do people share such content?

Why do people share content?

Inspired by research referred to in Jonah Berger's book *Contagious*, we have created buckets that implicitly explain why people have shared the content.

Notably, the most correlating factor for why content is shared is because it has practical value. Again, as with editorial, this typically tends to be because of the length of time the content has been live on the web.

After practical value, our research found that the next reason people share content is because it reflects well on their 'personal brand' (31%). That is, how you want to represent yourself online – funny, adventurous, smart, helpful, and so on. This feels like a very powerful area for brands to influence.

MOST-SHARED CONTENT FORMAT

EDITORIAL 37%
IMAGES 33%
VIDEO 25%
DOWNLOAD 2%
TOOLS/WIDGETS 3%
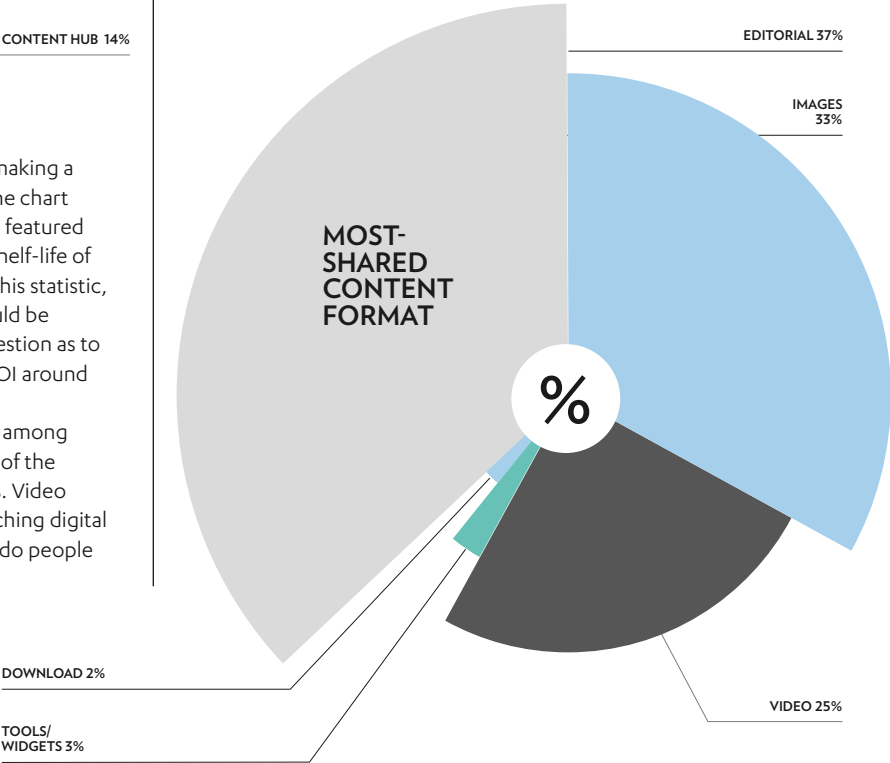
> # "PEOPLE SHARE CONTENT BECAUSE IT HAS A PRACTICAL VALUE… AND BECAUSE IT REFLECTS WELL ON THEIR PERSONAL BRAND. THIS IS A POWERFUL AREA FOR BRANDS TO INFLUENCE"
>
> **BEN MCKAY, MANAGING DIRECTOR,**
> **MEC ORGANIC PERFORMANCE**

Content that is seeded to reflect the audience's interests and mood of that moment comes third in the most shared rankings with high-profile content (*i.e.* content that you're confident to share because it comes from a source you know to be popular and trusted).
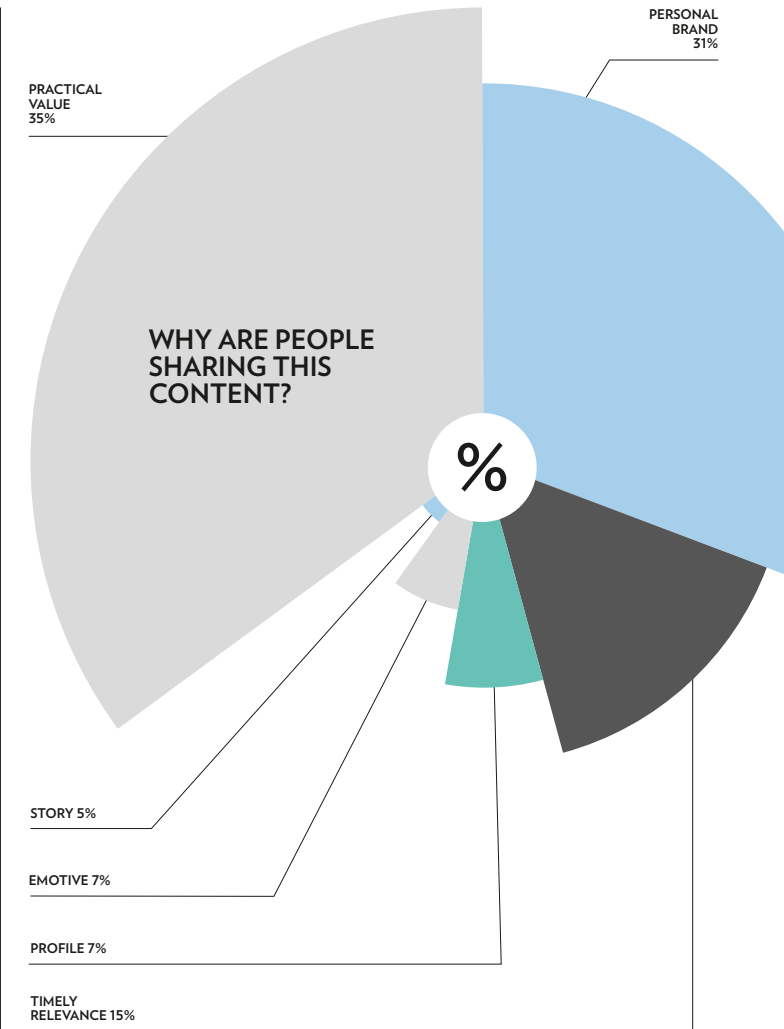
Brand 'stories' feature lowest in this study. However, when looking more closely at other metrics such as the number of websites that reference this content by linking back to it, we see that stories feature more prominently at 7%. Further analysis tells us that stories act as a sort of glue, giving you purpose to create content – it's almost always there, but not always so easily identified in such research projects.

So what can we conclude?

Time and time again, MEC has seen that you can increase your chances of successfully earning reach for your content by undertaking observational studies to inform the content that brands produce and distribute – hence the reason we developed the Citation Audit as a pillar for informing content strategy. It does not remove the need for paid media to support content, but it can help draw more long-term value from a growing expense to the average business.

So taking the insight literally, would MEC suggest every brand should invest in developing every widget feasible and create loads of editorial which provides practical value to its audience? Not at all. We do believe, however, that a comprehensive Citation Audit should be applied to content planning decisions.

MEC uses insights like these to layer in to both performance and branded content campaigns. The phrase 'layering' is important here. Alone, it's not the complete answer to a content strategy. Being too literal with just one pool of insight will never help win a marketing or content war. But if you can begin to understand that black box of why people share content, you can research and understand anything. ✿

PERSONAL BRAND 31%

PRACTICAL VALUE 35%

WHY ARE PEOPLE SHARING THIS CONTENT?

%

STORY 5%

EMOTIVE 7%

PROFILE 7%

TIMELY RELEVANCE 15%

> # "INSTEAD OF ASKING PEOPLE TO PAY FOR THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG THAT MAKES THE HEADLINES, WHAT ABOUT ASKING THEM TO PAY FOR WHAT JOURNALISTS DO"
>
> **MATT POTTER, HEAD OF CONTENT**
> **JOHN BROWN MEDIA GROUP**

Is your sawdust set to become your bestseller?

We all know the research and data that goes into producing a story, and we content marketers often discard it like a carpenter does his sawdust. But, argues Matt Potter, Head of Content for John Brown Media, we may be missing the trick that will add value to our bottom lines

Matt Potter
Head of Content,
John Brown Media Group

It's a curious thought that the chief product of many content programmes isn't content at all. It is the most visible product, of course: the thing that everyone focuses on, mocks up, signs off, distributes, all down the line. But as any journalist, creative or strategist will tell you, in terms of what gets produced, content is just the tip of the iceberg.

The rest of the process – from input relationships to raw, proprietary data often generated during the process – gets treated like sawdust. And failure to recognise and monetise that part of the process has led brands and media owners alike into a fatally flawed idea of ROI.

For a prime example of what happens when data generated is treated like sawdust, look no further than the newsstand media's troubles. For every report in a newspaper there are often hours of interviews,

recordings, numbers crunched, files scanned, documents sifted, models generated, reactions sought, raw data, raw copy. All to generate the one shock figure and the one killer quote that will be read on the commute. Except in a few isolated cases, all that information sits on a thousand hard drives – never seen, much less monetised. No wonder the time and resource devoted to producing the final 500-word article feels like a lot. No wonder Rupert Murdoch can't figure the idea of ROI without a paywall.

The Economist – an exception to the rule
There are exceptions. The Economist Intelligence Unit informs all content; but it also monetises data directly. In its latest annual report (2014), the Economist Group shows its data generation arm the EIU contributing a whacking £47m to group turnover – a figure almost 20% of that generated across the entire portfolio of The Economist-branded businesses.

Put that against the £0 most brands leverage theirs directly for, and look at the wafer-thin profit margins UK-wide, and you have quite a persuasive argument for leveraging areas of authority in terms of proprietary data.

THE ECONOMIST BUSINESSES 233

GC ROLL CALL 48

THE ECONOMIST INTELLIGENCE UNIT 47

OTHER 4

£M

ECONOMIST GROUP TURNOVER BY BUSINESS 2014
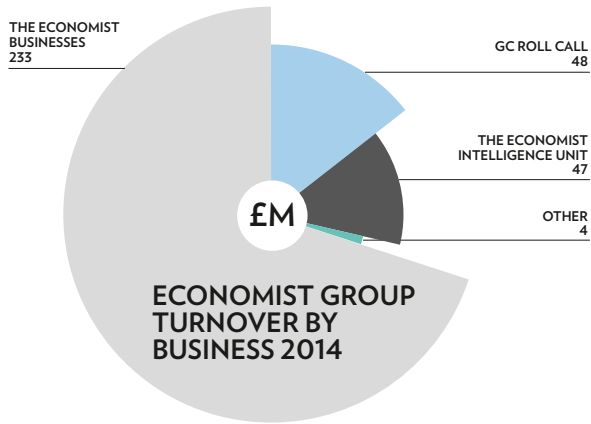
The Guardian newspaper's Membership programme is a way of monetising team investigations, sources and data, rather than the team's output as media content – as well as providing data services.

Instead of asking people to pay for the tip of the iceberg that makes the headlines, what about asking them to pay for what journalists do, 99% of the time: that intelligence; that data; those sources; the raw material. Instead of being a cost, the production process becomes part of the product.

For brand marketers, most of whom are blessed with the kinds of insight into their customers that media organisations dream of, the challenges posed by the need to demonstrate ROI surely involve monetising all these 'by-products': raw media; insight; customer and prospect contact and feedback; data sets – the sawdust of the content generation process.

So why aren't more brands doing it? Part of the answer lies in the way companies silo their functions. This is a world lived by consumers as omnichannel, but served by brands with separate PR, social media and marketing divisions and budgets. And when each silo is challenged to demonstrate ROI for its function alone, the internal conversation about where speculative data harvest and interrogation should sit simply isn't an easy one for clients to have.

Still, until it is had, the effect is a bit like a chef dishing up the sirloin and throwing the rest of the cow away.

### Finding secrets in the sawdust

At John Brown, we've been working on models in which the sawdust becomes part of the brand's marketing output.

Our expertise in fashion, and the proprietary data we gather, not only informs our approach to client content for brands like John Lewis, Monsoon Accessorize and F&F, but has turned us into a standalone fashion and retail insight shop. The futurology this drives not only places our clients ahead of the game; it's won us the 2014

Association of Qualitative Research/Prosper Riley-Smith Qualitative Excellence Award. All before a single piece of traditional collateral is created.

Our latest social media programme for RBS Invoice Finance (RBSIF) may have culminated with published content; but as with *The Guardian*, the process of crowdsourcing that content through real-time customer events, information-sharing seminars and ongoing consultation began affecting outcomes – driving loyalty and advocacy – before a word of what most marketers would recognise as 'content' was even written. Across the programme, customers said they felt more positive about RBS and RBSIF as a result of their contact with, and consultation with, John Brown.

So while data on what you've already done is vital – and there's no shortage of tools telling us what content works and what doesn't – think hard about your own data, and how you can use it to benefit your brand. There are secrets in the sawdust. ✿
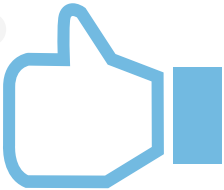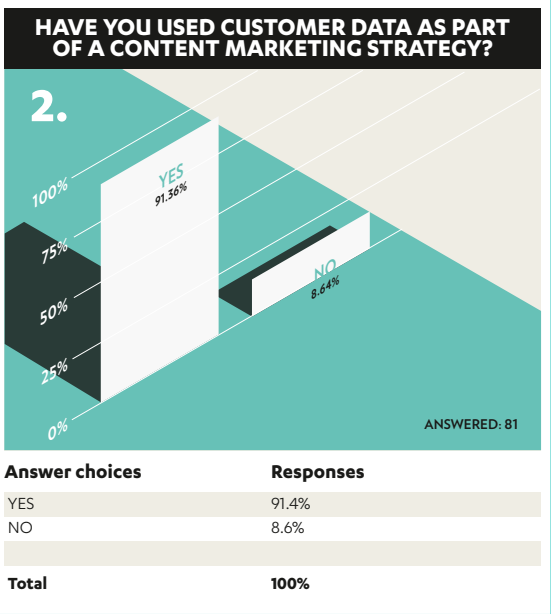
"THE CHALLENGE INVOLVES MONETISING THE 'BY-PRODUCTS' OF CONTENT: RAW MEDIA; INSIGHT; AND CUSTOMER AND PROSPECT CONTACT"

CMA MEMBER SURVEY

10
KEY QUESTIONS, 10 ANSWERS YOU NEED TO KNOW

DO YOU WORK IN B2B, B2C OR B2B & B2C?

1.

Answer choices	Responses
B2B	22.5%
B2C	25.0%
B2B & B2C	52.5%
Total	**100%**

ANSWERED: 80

HAVE YOU USED CUSTOMER DATA AS PART OF A CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY?

2.

Answer choices	Responses
YES	91.4%
NO	8.6%
Total	**100%**

ANSWERED: 81

HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU FEEL DATA IS TO YOUR CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY?

3.

ANSWERED: 81
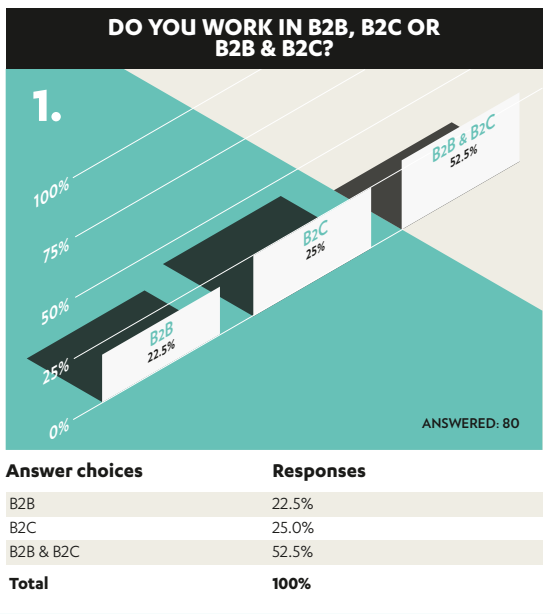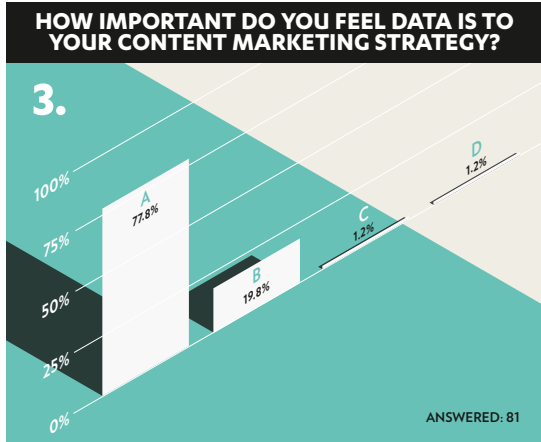
Answer choices	Responses
a. Very Important	77.8%
b. Important	19.8%
c. Undecided	1.2%
d. Not important at all	1.2%
Total	**100%**

NEXT YEAR, WILL YOU USE DATA MORE IN YOUR CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY?

5.

ANSWERED: 81

Answer choices	Responses
Yes	82.7%
Maybe	17.3%
No	0%
Total	**100%**

DO YOU BELIEVE BRANDS ARE GENERALLY OPEN ENOUGH WITH THEIR DATA?

7.

ANSWERED: 78

Answer choices	Responses
Yes	14.1%
Sometimes	52.6%
No	33.3%
Total	**100%**

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT DATA REGULATION WOULD AFFECT CONTENT MARKETING?

9.

ANSWERED: 81

Answer choices	Responses
a. Yes it would positively affect it	25.9%
b. Yes it would negatively affect it	42%
c. No it wouldn't affect it	32.1%
Total	**100%**

WHAT % OF YOUR CLIENTS GIVE YOU ACCESS TO DATA?

4.

ANSWERED: 81

Answer choices	Responses
0%	6.2%
1-30%	27.2%
31-61%	34.6%
61%+	32%
Total	**100%**

HOW IMPORTANT IS REAL-TIME DATA TO AN EFFECTIVE CONTENT STRATEGY?

6.

ANSWERED: 80

Answer choices	Responses
a. Very Important	41.3%
b. Important	45%
c. Undecided	13.7%
d. Not important at all	0%
Total	**100%**

DO YOU BELIEVE REGULATION AROUND DATA PROTECTION SHOULD BE STRICTER?

8.

ANSWERED: 81

Answer choices	Responses
Yes	29.6%
Maybe	44.5%
No	25.9%
Total	**100%**

WHO DO YOU SEE AS 'OWNING' THE DATA?

10.

ANSWERED: 81

Answer choices	Responses
Client	55.6%
Agency	4.9%
Consumer	39.5%
Total	**100%**

> ## "USING POOR DATA WITH GREAT CONTENT IS JUST AS GREAT A SIN AS USING CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY TO DELIVER LAZY OR CLICHÉD CONTENT WITH BOXES LABELLED 'CONTENT 1' AND 'CONTENT 2'
>
> **ANDREW SANDERS, CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR (DIGITAL)
> TIME INC**

How to extract the right data to create the right content strategy

Once, data was our industry's new oil. Now, says Andrew Sanders, Creative Development Director at Time Inc, it's an everyday resource, but the challenges of making it work with your content are just as great.

Andrew Sanders
Creative Development Director (Digital)
Time Inc

Do you remember when data was considered the new oil? A precious new commodity with great value that was hard to extract and refine. Now data is as common as a pint of milk – and shares many of its characteristics.

How? Well, I'd argue that there is a bewildering array of it widely available, it's arguably at its best when mixed with other ingredients and, most importantly, it has a tendency to go out of date really quickly.

As a publisher, Time Inc has always relied on data to inform the direction of our content strategies for our editorial properties and advertising partnerships. This isn't a new thing; now though, we get more of the data, more quickly than we have ever had before.

Not everything that counts can be counted
The sheer amount of the stuff around means that you need to make some choices about what data you are going to listen to, and what you are going to leave in the background. As William Bruce Cameron once said, "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted" .

Deciding what counts and what doesn't is easy: you just need a clearly defined idea of what you want your campaign to do, how you are going to measure it and why that measurement means that the campaign is a success.

That means, however, that we need to rely less on nebulous phrases like "I want people to engage with this video", and be as specific as "this video will be a success if it is shared by my target audience, as that means that they are using it to define their own identity. And that is a success because it means that they have taken the first step on the road to identifying with my brand".

While data can tell you a lot of things, it can't create a tone of voice. For that you need a team of specialists to work alongside your data analysts. At Time Inc our journalists, designers or videographers are every bit as important in the application of data insight to content campaigns as analysts. You still need human beings to create the stories, without that spark of inspiration, we will all just be optimising the same homogenised content in ever-decreasing circles.

When data and creative together makes something bigger and better
Putting analytics and creative in the same room can help generate real insight. A while ago we were working on a 'Cooking with Kids' proposition for a client. There were an awful lot of differing opinions between the stakeholders about choosing the best time to dial up the activity. Our behavioural data told us that Sunday morning was the time most people were looking at our children's recipe content, something no one was expecting to see. This meant we could all view it objectively, rather than using

data as a drunk uses a lamp post – for support, but not for illumination.

While we continued arguing about timings one of the analysts also pointed out that the most popular time for our audience to fill the internet with pictures of family activities was Saturday and Sunday. Suddenly we had a whole new distribution strategy based around "sharents" that wouldn't have happened if we hadn't had analysts, journalists and marketers in the same room.

Where data currently comes to the fore is in content distribution. It is a fantastic tool for optimisation and iteration. But, before we all get beguiled by the science of "programmatically targeted sequential content marketing opportunities", we should remember that we are really talking about telling stories to people that are as relevant as possible to them. In this context, using poor quality data with great content is probably just as great a sin as using cutting edge technology to deliver lazy or clichéd content. Using shabby data sources could well have the same detrimental effect on your brand as just lifting the words from the programmatic team's presentation and hitting your audience with boxes labelled "Content 1" "Content 2" and "Content 3" (in the right order of course).

At Time Inc we are lucky in as much as we have vast data sets of consumer behaviours across a wide range of verticals that are constantly refreshing themselves. Some of these are based upon web analytics, tracking and all

FIVE WAYS TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT DATA TO CREATE THE RIGHT CONTENT

1. Clearly define your objectives and make sure you choose data sources to help shape your strategy accordingly

2. Keep your eye focused on actual user behaviour and think how you build on it. Habits are easier to exploit than they are to break

3. Spend as much time thinking about the content as you do thinking about the data. If we just optimised according to existing behaviours, we would never create anything new

4. Iterate and don't be afraid to make mistakes and correct them later

5. Use the freshest data that you can

the stuff that you can pour into a data management platform; others are based upon over a century of editorial experience and expertise. We can bring all of this to bear for our editorial, advertising and content partners, so pop in for a cup of tea if you want to chat more about it. And don't worry: we have plenty of fresh milk. ⚙

> **"WHERE DATA CURRENTLY COMES TO THE FORE IS IN CONTENT DISTRIBUTION. IT IS A FANTASTIC TOOL FOR OPTIMISATION AND ITERATION"**

The advent of hyper-relevant real-time content marketing is here

The impact of social media means brands need to be ever more reactive. Simon Baker, Head of Branded Content at ITN Productions, explains how the 20,000 content clips ITN's digital news team produces a year can be shaped to create topical video content that meets this modern need

Simon Baker
Head of Branded Content
ITN Productions

Every day, news editors compete to be the first to cover a story. Whoever claims a story first, wins. The infrastructure of news is built around this first-to-market culture, broadcasting consistent, highly responsive content. Because social news feeds are all about topical content, brands should start to think more responsively. Typically, however, brands have focused on images and copy, ignoring video content.

But this oversight is something worth reviewing. In recent research for Dotrising, the results for using video for content marketing made for compelling reading. Carried out by HighQ (*source: highq.com/2015-year-of-video-marketing*), the research revealed that 65% of video viewers watch more than three quarters of its content – food for thought in terms of brand immersion and engagement.

By simply using the word 'video' in an email subject line open rates for brand emails were boosted by 19%, and click-through rates increased by 65%. Video content was found to add two more minutes of dwell-time on average to websites that host it compared to those that don't. And 52% of marketing professionals worldwide named it as the type of content with the best ROI.

So what's stopping brands from using it?
In part it's because video production is still being driven by the campaign calendar rather than external events. This 'traditional' approach to video production, which tends to take five or more weeks, also limits opportunities to be topical.

As Head of Branded Content at ITN Productions, I see first-hand how our broadcast news (ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5) and digital news teams operate. While there is still a need for traditional marketing content, there is a huge opportunity for brands to leverage a news-making approach, which will allow them to be both reactive and proactive.

By combining the approach of a digital editorial news team and a branded content team, you can create branded content that sits legitimately alongside non-branded content. This gives brands genuine editorial video content on subjects that are core to their brand and their audience, all with the reactiveness of a news producer.

Building a consistent stream of engaging, relevant content would create ongoing brand engagement with a loyal community or subscriber base. By subscribing, these people have given you permission to market to them, so

> **"BY COMBINING THE APPROACH OF A DIGITAL EDITORIAL TEAM WITH A BRANDED CONTENT TEAM YOU CAN CREATE BRANDED CONTENT THAT SITS LEGITIMATELY ALONGSIDE NON-BRANDED CONTENT"**
>
> **SIMON BAKER, HEAD OF BRANDED CONTENT**
> **ITN PRODUCTIONS**

long as your marketing is contextual with a relevant subject matter.

How reactive is reactive?

It's fast. Five minutes is all it takes after every premiership goal is scored for ITN Productions to edit, add commentary and play it out on *The Sun* newspaper's Goals app. A single multi-skilled editorial producer can produce five voiceover clips a day using ITN footage.

To be successful, start thinking of your comms teams like a newsroom

ITN Production's approach to real-time marketing delivers planned, topical content to support a campaign calendar. To do this brand teams need to adopt a 'newsroom' mindset. By developing a structured editorial process and agreeing on their 'news' agenda, they will know immediately which types of stories to react to.

Typically, in a newsroom, reactive content is split into two approaches; 'planned reactive', where you know something is going to happen and you react to it as soon as you know the outcome; and 'fully reactive', where you don't know something is going to happen but when it happens, you react quickly.

As an example of 'planned reactive' consider a car manufacturer which has sponsored a sporting event. It might not have the rights to show the actual sports footage. However, through a 'planned reactive' approach we can create a studio discussion clip each day covering the developments in a tournament or

WHAT BRANDS GOING REAL-TIME NEED TO THINK ABOUT

1. Find the overarching story. What topics can you own that are highly relevant to your audience, and which all of your content is tied in to?

2. Think back over the past year and the opportunities that you would have liked to react to that match the subject matter you would like to own

3. Trial real-time, whether via a pilot covering a period of time, or by tying it into a specific event or sponsorship activity

4. Decide how much editorial control you are happy to give to your real-time team. For opportunity spotting, look at Twitter's #OwnTheMoment calendar

competition, such as the Rugby World Cup or the Tour De France.

So what would a 'fully reactive' approach look like? Let's consider how insurers could have improved their comms response to the floods that hit Devon and Cornwall last year.

In real life, one insurer sent out a fast-response lorry, providing support to the families affected. Another sent an email to those affected saying, '"don't worry, we have you covered, make all the arrangements you need to".

It takes ITN just eight hours to produce and deliver a reactive clip from the time it's briefed in. So a morning briefing would have seen a video clip including news footage and the insurer's key brand messaging for its customers ready on the same day.

It's an argument that is proving convincing to many of ITN Branded Content's new clients, including Jamie Queen, Marketing Director of Thomas Cook. "We are moving to a real-time model because of the need for much more relevant, targeted creative content for our different types of customers," says Queen. "If you are a brand and you have access to data and understand your audience well enough to target and use that data, programmatic content enables you to target that spend much more sensibly into those digital platforms."

What will this look like for the travel brand as their peak summer months approaches? Watch this space. ✿

The 'Great British Data-Off': using content as a sweetener

Marketers using big data to provide personalised sales messaging are not only putting their customer relationship in jeopardy, they are missing the chance of finding out what content a customer wants and how they want it, argues Cedar Communications' Insight and Planning Director, Chris Rayment

Chris Rayment
Insight and Planning Director
Cedar Communications

It's highly likely that you've heard data being referred to as the 'new oil'. Perhaps, though, 'oil shale gas' is a more appropriate term. Customer data and its huge usage potential is salivated over by business and the government, but the general public is less positive about how their personal data is being held, used and shared.

According to recent Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) research, 85% of Britons are concerned about how their personal information is exploited or passed on by businesses, and 77% are concerned about its security.

Clearly there's an underlying current of distrust around personal data usage and security among consumers, most recently exacerbated by a scare story in the *Daily Mail* (Headline: "Sinister boast of data boss

who says he has 5,000 pieces of personal information on EVERY British family").

Personalised targeting is considered the Holy Grail for many marketers, but the ICO stats suggest that using customer data to 'sell stuff' via targeted ads or offers is causing huge concern. When collecting and subsequently using data it appears that too many brands are prioritising their 'business requirements' to promote themselves without also addressing their 'customer requirements'. There's no *quid pro quo*. Those brands are failing to remember the oft-quoted Bain & Co lesson that "it costs 5-10 times as much to win a customer as it does to keep a customer, and that a 5% increase in customer loyalty can translate into a 75% increase in profitability". Brands that prioritise sales over data's potential to retain customers overlook lifetime customer value and fail to optimise the potential of personalisation.

That customers are becoming wise to the value of their personal data is another area of concern. Companies such as Datacoup (datacoup.com) are readily paying out for access to it, which they then sell on to third-party companies. Increasingly, consumers will realise the potential of their data as an asset and companies are going to have to put together a very good case to get it.

So, the challenge is a big one. Company usage of data is afflicted by distrust, concern, exploitation, invasiveness, selfishness and creepiness. We need to change that, which is where content marketing comes to the rescue.

A recent Royal Mail/Data IQ study suggests that organisations are currently too focused on customer acquisition: "Tasked with growing the customer base, companies often fight shy of employing anything which might interfere with engagement and conversation, such as an extended data form." The study suggests that this approach has resulted in a "worrying data gap" within databases, recommending that records such as "life-event data" should be collected in addition to standard demographics and brand 'interactions'.

The Royal Mail/Data IQ study found that fewer

than one in 20 companies had life-event information about their customers. The fact that demographics are commonly collected and used to target is particularly interesting in light of recent comments from Netflix that demographics are "almost useless" as an indicator of behaviour, and *The Economist*'s move from targeting based on demographic to psychographic (interests, attitudes and opinions) attributes.

An increasing number of big companies have moved to a single customer view (SCV) – in other words, a central amalgamated database, into which all customer data can be fed – enabling targeted, personalised comms. Cedar advocates Royal Mail/Data IQ's suggestions to introduce extended data forms during customer sign-up and to populate SCVs with lifestage information. But we'd like to go one further. We also feel that it's important that brands introduce customer content and content distribution preferences.

It's not enough for brands to target communications based on demographics or browsing behaviours – it means you're guessing what the customer wants and delivering a message based on lifestyle assumptions or purchase behaviours. Why not ask the customer what they want to hear from the brand when they sign up for the product/service? If we can 'personalise' content so that a customer gets branded content that they care about via preferred channels/platforms, it'll go some way to addressing the looming issue of customers charging for their data. The value exchange is a customer's data in return for interesting/useful/entertaining/

FIVE WAYS DATA CAN IMPROVE YOUR CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS

1. When personalising comms, prioritise the customer benefit over the brand benefit

2. Remember data has potential to be as useful for brand engagement as it is for selling

3. Ask for more information on customers at sign-up or renewal to support more engaging communications

4. Move away from 'profiled personalisation' to 'user set' personalisation. Ask what content they are interested in hearing about from the brand and how they want it

5. Curate content based on customers wants and needs as a way to get around the 'creepiness' of personalised comms

quality content from the brand.

Our approach might seem like a step back from the ultimate aim of 'extreme' personalised communications, but giving customers content about things they have said that they want to hear about, rather than how they behave, takes away the Big Brother approach of 'You are this/did this, what about this?' We envisage that content preferences will be themed around a set number of subjects that the brand has authority to talk about, an approach that supports editorialisation and curation of content. So, less 'robot', more content marketing agency, meaning that there's a better chance of the content being valued by the end user.

Recent CMA/TNS State of the Nation research showed that content marketing is best at engaging customers and building trust in a brand. Capturing a customer's content and distribution preferences in a SCV might go some way to address the issue highlighted by the ICO about lack of trust in how a company uses and secures its data.

Building content preferences into a SCV has interesting connotations for the paid/owned/earned framework. Paid media will always be needed to drive traffic to owned media channels, but a database enabling personalised owned media content for prospects and existing customers via channels/platforms of their choice will reduce the need to spend as much money on the paid media element.

It's a simple proposition: tone down the use of data to sell, and instead focus on retaining customers with quality editorial. ✿

Putting data at the heart of your content strategy

Not so long ago data was simply used to push brands up the search rankings. Now what your customers search and share online generates data that not only helps you grow and know your customers, but also increases your ROI. Steve Sponder, Managing Director of Headstream, explains how to make data and content work together

Steve Sponder
Managing Director
Headstream

Once upon a time, in the not-so-distant past, content marketers put most of their energy into creating copy crammed with the best search keywords at the lowest possible price. However, Google found that businesses were writing pages of (often meaningless) content purely to please web crawlers, rather than human beings.

As a result, the search engine encouraged marketers to change their ways. Content now needs to be valuable, relevant and compelling – satisfying the people who are consuming it and encouraging them to take action. But is it really possible to please all of the people all of the time?

Yes, this is where data comes in. It is staggering how much data being generated online has increased over

such a relatively short time. Search interactions provide insight into intent while interests can be uncovered from social media interactions. Both generate significant volumes of data that can ultimately provide valuable insights for content marketers.

Search data
Search data is one of the best indicators of user intent online and if you understand the user's intentions, then you can adapt your content to suit their needs. It is, therefore, one of the most crucial pieces of information in helping inform a content strategy.

Essentially, then, an important aspect of search data analysis is the art of detecting a need. By looking at website analytics and investigating which keywords are driving traffic, content marketers can uncover potential opportunities to create content that the audience really wants and needs.

User intent can determine your content marketing success, but it's important to keep this customer-centric approach in mind at all times: write for the user, not for the search engine. Even though higher quality traffic comes from long-tail keywords, you should still remember to focus more on producing helpful and relevant information relating to these major keywords, than the exact keyword phrases themselves.

Social data
Data generated from people's insatiable appetite for social media over the past decade has provided a treasure trove of insights for content marketers. Social signals include: the profile of the user and their interests; what they are sharing, 'liking' and commenting on (earned media activity); hashtags, which enable marketers to track specific topics that can help with their overall social content strategy; and a user's online contacts, which can dramatically increase a brand's exposure.

It can also help your brand's bottom line. In a recent study, social data and sharing tool ShareThis revealed that

HOW VIRGIN SETS ITS CONTENT STRATEGY

	PRE-PURCHASE		CUSTOMER		
CUSTOMER JOURNEY	AWARENESS	CONSIDERATION	ACTION	ENJOYMENT	ADVOCACY
BRAND PENETRATION	VISIBILITY	BRAND ATTRIBUTES	CHOICE	EXPERIENCE	RECOMMENDATION AND LOYALTY
BRAND STRATEGY	RICHARD BRANSON, HERITAGE, SMART DISRUPTION, DELIGHTFULLY SURPRISING, RED HOT, FAIR PLAY, INSATIABLE CURIOSITY, HEARTFELT SERVICE				
CONTENT CHANNELS	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	Pinterest / LinkedIn
INSIGHT AND RECOMMENDATIONS	WHAT GETS YOU NOTICED?	WHAT DRIVES CONSIDERATION?	WHAT DRIVES REFERRALS AND ACTIONS?	WHAT MAKES YOUR BRAND LOVED?	WHAT GETS YOUR ADVOCATES EXCITED?

products which had had positive reviews shared online saw a 9.5% lift in purchase incidence.

Social data was one of the data sets Virgin used to help inform its website's content strategy. By looking into what its users follow on social platforms together with the views and interests they express, Virgin was able to build up a picture of its audience's needs, motivations, emotions, frustrations and goals.

Further analysis around the performance of Virgin's content on social media enabled the brand to make informed decisions around the content and placement on the new virgin.com site. (Source: @beyond).

Virgin's analysis of social data to improve the user experience is smart and a fairly simple thing to do. Somewhat surprisingly, however, it's an approach used very little by brands.

Blending search and social data
In order to stay ahead of the ever-evolving game, marketers need to be able to strategically pair search and social signal data. The insights available in these data sets enable marketers to get a better understanding of their customers at different stages of the customer decision journey.

Knowing what's going on in the customer's mind at each stage helps the marketer produce relevant and valuable content designed to move the customer through the journey.

Predictive content marketing
So what does the future hold for data and content marketing? As technology and innovation evolves at an ever faster rate, this opens up more and more possibilities for marketers to tap into big marketing data in order to dial up performance.

With marketers having constant access to data, providing insight into people's digital footprints and behaviour, the next evolution will be the real-time production of personalised, targeted content. Predictive content marketing promises to use data as the raw material to ensure the right content is always being delivered to the right person in the right place at the right time.

However, there is a challenge and brands will need to tread a very thin line. Getting closer to people with valuable, relevant content should be a win-win, but people should not feel as if their personal data, or privacy, has been exploited in the process. ⚙

Data and the two-bucket theory

Data and content. It's stories or behaviour, stupid. Overwhelmed by customer data? Not sure how to use it? Michael Reeves, Business Development Director of Red Bee, has a tried-and-tested method that involves two buckets and gets results

Michael Reeves
Business Development Director
Red Bee

A lot of blah has been written about data and its domineering importance to modern marketing. So much so that the word itself has become a bit of shapeless behemoth, scaring off creative types with its impregnable bulk and unfathomable digits.

For clients, data is perhaps better characterised as a flood whose flow only ever gets bigger and faster. Data is now gushing forth from PCs, smartphones and loyalty cards in a torrent that threatens to drown any marketer who fails to sift out the gems in the digital silt.

But let's remind ourselves what data actually is. In marketing it can be any information given to you, intentionally or otherwise, by your customers. Yes, it's the number of tweets your customers have sent, but it's also what they've said about your brand. Yes, it's the number of stars they gave your product in their online review, but

it's also the recorded phone call they made to customer services about it. It's not just the numbers. It's the words too – the thoughts, opinions and experiences your customers have shared with your organisation.

To work out whether or not those words and numbers are useful to you, see if they fit into either of these high-tech analytical buckets.

1. The story bucket
Does the information help you tell a useful or entertaining story relevant to your audience and brand's expertise?

2. The customer journey bucket
Does the information tell you anything new about what your potential customers are doing, and give you any pointers on how to react to that?

Here are two examples of data-driven content initiatives from Red Bee.

1. TVL and the story bucket
A few years back one of our clients, TV Licensing (TVL), was suffering from an acute image problem online. Any YouTube searches brought up nothing but content from irate TV licence refuseniks referring to the TV licence and TVL inspectors in deeply unflattering terms. TVL wanted to do something to rebalance its online profile. But what? Directly taking on the refuseniks with a reasoned defence would have just added fuel to their fire. We needed a start point for some alternative content. Cue the data.

TVL was sitting on a mountain of recorded verbatims from customers (or evaders) who had not paid. A trawl through that data unearthed some hilarious gems – and a simple content idea was born. The excuses films, in which we dramatised the most absurd excuses given by customers, resulted in a huge positive boost to TVL's online and media profile, achieving national press and TV coverage and making TVL's excuses the most-viewed story on bbc.co.uk.

It also led to a change in the way TVL collates and processes its data. TVL now asks all its inspectors and call centre operators to submit daft excuses to a particular email address, creating a bank of potential stories to be used every year.

2. Hyundai and the the customer journey bucket
Once upon a time, if you wanted to buy a new car, you thought of about 8-10 car brands that appealed to you and that you could afford (thereby ruling out that Lamborghini). You then drove round the dealerships (assuming your old car was still working) picking up brochures, while desperately trying to avoid eye contact with any sales people. You then read the brochures, shortlisted three to five models and revisited each dealership for an awkward test drive, upon which you pretended to base your decision (which was probably made before you even read the brochures).

But the internet has torn up this old route map, and the data proves it. In 2003, on average, a new car buyer made four visits to a dealership. In 2013, it was just 1.5. In 2003, only 1% of buyers researched the models online. In 2013, 92% did. (Source: BMW Annual Report and Google).

And this average car buyer consulted an average of 18.2 sources before making a purchase (Source: Google, ZMOT 2013). That's a hell of a lot more than the paper brochure.

When consulting these sources, there's a decent chance this average customer changed his/her mind about which car to

buy. When it came to the actual purchase, 40% bought a brand that was not their favourite option at the start of the process and 21% purchased a brand that they didn't have in mind at all (Source: Google Gearshift 2014).

Looking at this data, Hyundai concluded that the showroom was no longer where the important decisions were being made. The key decisions were being made by the customer in online spaces, so that's where Hyundai needed to be more readily found.

To be discovered, shared and crucially, remembered, during the trawl of 18.2 sources, Hyundai needed an entertaining format that could also deliver the detailed rational product information that potential customers were searching for.

The result was a video content idea that achieved both of those objectives. Employing the principles of sitcoms and character-based sketch comedy, Red Bee's ongoing *Honest* series drives brand affinity whilst dropping in a wealth of information about each Hyundai model, making the brand and its benefits so much more memorable than the dull competition.

It achieved True View view-through rates of over 61% versus industry averages of 16%, a content success only achieved through Hyundai's data-led understanding of the changing customer journey.

So, there you have it. Data can help you with content in two easy ways: stories and customer journeys. But data can't do all the work. It can give you an idea of what to make, and where to put it.

But don't let it tell you how to make it. Please. ⚙

FIVE SIMPLE WAYS TO THINK ABOUT DATA AND CONTENT

1. Data is words as well as numbers. Listen to what your customers say as much as what they do

2. Divide data into two buckets: data for stories and data which throws new light on the customer journey

3. Use customer stories, experiences (or excuses) as a start point for story telling

4. Use data on the customer journey to work out where and how content best fits in

5. But don't assume data will do all the work. Data told Hyundai to do some online video content. It didn't tell them how to make it good

> **"MARGINAL GAINS CAN HELP BRANDS WIN. IT IS ACTUALLY 'SMALL DATA', IN ALL ITS FORMS, ALL THE TIME, THAT DELIVERS MARGINAL GAINS IN PERFORMANCE"**
>
> **KEVIN SUTHERLAND, STRATEGY DIRECTOR
> SEVEN**

Small data... marginal gains... big performance

"The time has come when advertising has in some hands reached the status of a science. It is based on fixed principles and is reasonably exact. The causes and effects have been analysed until they are well understood."
Claude Hopkins, Scientific Advertising

Kevin Sutherland
Strategy Director
Seven

The quote above reads like the evangelical stuff that clutters up our Linkedin feeds every day. It's the kind of hook many Big Data blog posts are hung on. It could easily have been written with programmatic in mind. But in fact it's taken from a book first published in 1923.

I was reminded of it by Paul Feldwick's excellent new book, *The Anatomy of Humbug*. It's a practical history of advertising which explores the many schools of thought about what advertising is, and how it works, and the way they developed over the last 100 years.

What's really interesting is that there's a strong contemporary case for many of the differing philosophies: the rational, scientific approach described by Claude Hopkins; the emotional 'school of seduction'; and even the 'advertising as fame' point of view. Indeed the results of the data analysed by Byron Sharp in *How Brands Grow*, which concludes that market penetration is achieved through (buying) mass reach and delivering distinctive and consistent, imagery and messaging shares, the same philosophy as the school of fame.

Feldwick's analysis reminds us that despite waves of enthusiastic claims to the contrary, there is no single approach to successful, effective advertising. The same is true of the phoney war between the Big Data and creativity.

Which brings us back to the quote. Of course the idea of advertising as a science is totally wrong. But it may be a little bit right. WPP group's rumoured purchase of Dunnhumby isn't simply a commercial decision to take advantage of the current beleaguered state of the Tesco business. It's a smart, strategic play. It certainly fits with Sir Martin Sorrell's view, first expressed in 2013, that we are now "maths men, not mad men". If that's true then the future of the marketing communication industry will certainly rely on data. But not necessarily big data, and certainly not data alone. And as the lines between 'advertising' and 'content' have essentially disappeared this point is highly relevant to any exploration of content marketing and data. Let me explain.

The lazy distinction between 'art and science' has been around for years. It's historically been used to describe the (usually) positive tensions between strategy and creative (and to make each feel important). But of course you need both. Of course the creative process, and the outcome, can be improved by data, in all its forms. Data, used in the right way, can provide genuine insight (def: a deep understanding), which improves performance and results.

The best example of this in the real world is the British Olympic cycling team's strategy of Marginal Gains, adopted for London 2012. On the final morning of the track events, team boss Dave Brailsford revealed to the BBC the secrets that led to seven gold medals –

won against the best in the world.

Brailsford explained it thus: "The whole principle came from the idea that if you broke down everything you could think of that goes into riding a bike, and then improved it by 1%, you will get a significant increase when you put them all together. There's fitness and conditioning, of course, but there are other things that might seem on the periphery, like sleeping in the right position, having the same pillow when you are away and training in different places. They're tiny things but if you clump them together it makes a big difference."

In a world where the audience sought by a brand is both more reachable and elusive than ever before, at a time when there have never been so many opportunities to connect with the customer, or piss them off, the idea of Marginal Gains can help brands to win too. And unlike the campaign-focused mindset and approach of traditional advertising, doing this effectively for content marketing means doing it all the time, everywhere. So our radical point of view on the big data debate is that it is actually 'Small Data' in all its forms, all the time, that delivers marginal gains in performance.

Small Data includes: statistics; search, social and owned media analytics; factual research and trend data; plus the unstructured, often weird, inputs that come from left field but often deliver true insight. All of these are data. All of these are valuable in the creative process. All of these can improve performance. We just need to identify what's useful in each case and how to apply it.

These small data tell us what's working well and what isn't so we can increase relevance and preference. They tell us who's influential and what they are talking about so we can join the right conversations and say the most, relevant, useful – or entertaining – things. They tell us the user experience people want and the things that drive them away. They tell us what people are searching for and what's coming next.

They tell us which of our quizzes on Buzzfeed have performed best so we increase our effectives over the course of a campaign. They tell us which topics and formats are best for increasing reach for a given brand and engagement. We can see which calls to action are driving the biggest reach when using Outbrain or Taboola, which combinations of headline and image are driving clicks in email and on-site, what people are interested in sharing in social. They tell us when our sponsored, native ad content is actually outperforming editorial content. They give us clues about how to get better at what we are doing, and improve our performance.

Marginal Gains didn't make the cycling team better athletes but it did enable them to perform better. Embracing data doesn't mean that big creative ideas need to be made by machines, but it can expand our inspiration and improve performance.

Of course, not everyone agrees. I started with a quote from a legendary ad man so it feels right to end with another. Speaking on a Big Data panel at AdWeek a couple of years ago Sir John Hegarty said: "I've spent my life dealing with people who've got all the data in the world and yet they can't invent anything."

Of course, 30 years ago he invented the line Vorsprung durch Technik to sell Audi to the UK. "Advancement through technology" sounds like a pretty good line to sell Small Data too. ⚙

"SMALL DATA TELL US WHAT'S WORKING WELL AND WHAT ISN'T SO WE CAN INCREASE RELEVANCE AND PREFERENCE"

Don't forget the human in the machine

The reason many content marketing campaigns fall flat is not because of ineffective data capture, it's because of terrible content. Fraser Allen, CEO of White Light Media, urges brands to win the hearts of their target audiences

Fraser Allen
CEO
White Light Media

One of the most satisfying things about being human is that we make mistakes. Mistakes are interesting – they give us personality and they make us unpredictable. But for some practitioners of content marketing, unpredictability is an inconvenience.

I've heard brands and agencies discussing content marketing campaigns as if their audience was comprised of robots rather than people. But none of us react with cool, button-pressing logic to the endless fizz of brand noise that surrounds us. Most of the time we blank it out and, when we do tune in, we don't react logically, we react emotionally.

Nathalie Nahai, a psychologist who applies her skills to online marketing, believes brands need to constantly remind themselves that they're not talking to fields of data – they are talking to humans.

"Big data is a fascinating development but it's only effective when applied alongside other contextual tools," she says. "That means knowing when a correlation is meaningful and when it's not; and combining that with psychographics – the study of personality, values, attitudes and lifestyles. We don't act as automatons in response to technological drivers, we react as humans. It's amazing how few brands think about the psychology of the individuals in their audience."

It's also amazing how many brands continue to invest huge sums in multi-channel marketing campaigns that tick all the boxes in terms of process but have one irredeemable problem. The content sucks.

It's a problem that happens when brands and agencies focus on the science of content marketing without also embracing the art. And agencies are guilty too – often because their leaders are obsessed with the latest digital innovations rather than on creating powerful content for their clients.

Andy Cowles is an exception. A former art director of *Rolling Stone* and editorial development director of EMAP, he has embraced content marketing through his agency Furthr. He argues that editors and not brand managers should be placed in charge of content marketing projects. He backs this up with a recent observation from business thinker Seth Godin: "As soon as organisations start to measure stuff and poke it into a piece of software, then we are asking people who don't care to work their way through a bunch of check-lists to make a number go up. A brand can't care, all that can care is people."

A big part of the challenge is that the definition of what constitutes content marketing has become so broad – everyone and his aunt now claims to be a content marketing agency. But without talented and experienced human writers given responsibility for winning the hearts of a target audience, an agency's data strategy is meaningless. And until robots learn to make mistakes, they'll never be as smart (or as interesting) as humans. ⚙

WHY JOIN THE CONTENT MARKETING ASSOCIATION

As more clients understand the benefits content marketing can bring to their organisation, so the industry is growing. At the same time, technology and platform development is vastly expanding the opportunities for content.

It's an increasingly complex business, and staying on top of the latest developments is hard work.

The CMA's role is to promote content as an effective marketing tool. It is the only international organisation focused solely on this area.

The benefits of joining the CMA include:

■ **RESEARCH.** The CMA regularly commissions proprietary research exploring attitudes to content marketing, market-scope, and future developments

■ **TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT.** The CMA runs monthly breakfast sessions that look at the latest digital trends and why they matter for content marketers. Recent sessions include updates on the latest Google mobile-friendly algorithm changes, and how to use social media talent as part of a content strategy. In addition, the CMA now offers bespoke training for clients and agencies

■ **EVENTS.** CMA events, including conferences and awards, are designed to showcase the latest in content marketing and best-in-breed insight, strategy and creative from around the world.

■ **FOCUS ON EFFECTIVENESS.** The CMA is highly focused on proving the efficacy of content marketing, and its annual awards is the only ceremony to recognise and celebrate effectiveness in content marketing.

■ **NETWORKING.** The CMA regularly hosts sessions where an increasingly diverse and international industry can network, exchange views and ideas, and explore ways they can co-operate together.

■ **PROMOTION.** The CMA promotes content marketing throughout the media to drive awareness of the discipline and the key role it plays in the marketing eco-system.

■ **CONFIDENTIAL INTERMEDIARY SERVICE.** The CMA's Advance service allows clients to find the best agency for their content requirements. Brand owners can, via the CMA, post a brief, conduct chemistry sessions with relevant agencies, and manage a pitch for their work. The service is free to brand owners. Recent clients to use CMA Advance include airlines, insurance companies and recruitment consultants.

Find out more at www.the-cma.com/services or contact the CMA's managing director, Clare Hill, at clare.hill@the-cma.com