

CONTENT MARKETING BACK IN 1672

It's often argued that content marketing has come to fruition in the past decade due to the rise of different technologies. The combination of the internet, mobile technology, cloud computing and social media has made it far easier for companies to communicate with their audience like publishers. But the success of content marketing is not due to the rise of internet technology. In the Dutch Golden Age, just about 70 years after our discovery of New York, the power of content marketing was demonstrated by a Dutch inventor.

Case study from the Dutch Golden Age

In 1672, Jan van der Heyden and his brother, Nicolaes, improved the fire hose. Until then, rows of people with buckets of water were required for putting out fires. A hose was available, but pumping water wasn't yet possible. When you tried to pump water, the force of the suction would cause the flexible hose to collapse on itself. The clever Jan and his brother came up with a suction pump with a suction hose reinforced with iron rings. Via a second linen hose, the water is subsequently transported to the hose and driven out of the nozzle via a pressure pump. Now the water would flow continuous and the nozzle could be better aimed at the flames to deal with the fire hazard. Like tech start-ups in Silicon Valley today, the brothers acquired a patent for their design in 1677.

But Jan van der Heyden wasn't only a mechanical engineer; he was also a painter and clever business man. To introduce his invention to the masses, he used various modern marketing techniques, which brought him huge success. He combined the following formats in his content marketing program:

- *White paper* – A couple of years after their finding, in 1677, the brothers published a white paper about their invention. In the publication entitled “Message with regard to newly invented and patented fire hoses,” they compared their system with previous systems and demonstrated the functionality based on practical use.
- *Book* – In 1690, he wrote the standard reference work, “Description of the newly invented and patented firehose,” with his son. In this first book about the fire brigade in the world, he included detailed descriptions of fire hazards and developments in the organization and techniques of firefighting in Amsterdam. In the 21st century, Jan undoubtedly would have published an e-book version as well!
- *Visuals* – Jan van der Heyden was also an artist and presented his publications with rich print designs and even poems, which enhanced the readability significantly. Using only copy was seen by him as insufficient to engage his audience. His prints were reused well into the 18th century for material covering firefighting.
- *Social sharing* – Van der Heyden dedicated his book to one of his most important prospects, Nicolaes Witsen, who was mayor of Amsterdam 13 times between 1682 and 1706. The city was impressed and all 60 districts ordered new hoses. The price of a fire hose was 385 guilders; a fire hose on wheels would cost 435 guilders. Jackpot!
- *Demos* – “The proof of the pudding is in the eating,” Jan must have thought. He organized demonstrations at the Royal Palace on Dam Square and at the Westertoren.
- *Consultative selling* – Consultants know better than anyone that advising prospects can lead to the sale of new services and products. Based on his advice, Van der Heyden was asked to set up the volunteer fire brigade in Amsterdam. Each district had a chief, members and

volunteers on hand to put out fires in an emergency. At the helm of this city-wide organization stood the fire department general: Jan van der Heyden himself. Conflict of interest?



Results

The commercial success of Jan van der Heyden was unprecedented. Not only did the city of Amsterdam place a mega order, other municipalities got in on the act. Then the first stock listed and largest multinational in the world, the VOC (the Dutch East India Company), installed the fire hose on all its ships. In 1697, Jan van der Heyden even got a visit from Peter the Great. The Russian tsar wanted to lure him to Russia to organize the fire departments there.

Those who think the fire hose was a one-off for Jan van der Heyden's content marketing strategy are mistaken. After his fire hose invention he developed the first street lighting and presented a lighting plan to the City of Amsterdam that would provide well over 2,500 oil-based lights. He was also the inventor, and the supplier, of these lanterns. This plan was also implemented. The crowning glory to his work was that he was named Director and Superintendent of City Lighting, for which he received an annual fee of 2,000 guilders (which would now be over \$25,000).

B E S C H R Y V I N G
Der nieuwlyks uitgevonden en geötrojeerde
SLANG-BRAND-SPUITEN,
E N

Haare wyze van BRAND-BLUSSEN,

Tegenwoordig binnen Amsterdam in gebruik zijnde.

Behelzende wijders aanwijzing van 't verschil tus-
schen haare uitwerking, en die van d'oude Blus-gereedschappen
en Sputen; zo uit de Werktuigen zelve, als uit de blussing
der Branden, welke binnen deeze Stad, onder 't
gebruik van beyde, zyn voorgevallen.

*Nevens Beschrijving der Brand-ordes van
de Stad Amsterdam.*

Door der zelve Inventeur

JAN VANDER HEIDEN,

E N

JAN VANDER HEIDEN de Jonge,

Generaale Brandmeesters der Stad Amsterdam.

TWEDE DRUK.



A M S T E R D A M,

Gedrukt voor de Erfgenaamen van JAN VANDER HEIDEN.

A. 1735.

