



CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER

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CONTENT MARKETING COMICS

INSIDE PIXAR'S CREATIVE CULTURE



THE CREATIVITY ISSUE

# STOP FOLLOWING & START EXPLORING

ALSO INSIDE: MEET THE 2018 CONTENT MARKETER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

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# Creativity is the Name of the Game

**I**n your quest to become a better content creator are you willing to take risks? Are you willing to fail? Are you willing to pick yourself up off the mat and try again if you do?

R.A. Montgomery, creator of the popular Choose Your Own Adventure gamebook series in the late 1970s, would say these are essential skills in the business of life.

Along with other popular gamebooks like Steve Jackson's Fighting Fantasy series (which upped the jeopardy with random die rolls), the Choose Your Own Adventure books invited readers to decide what happened next at the bottom of each page, leading to one of a variety of endings. It's creative genius if you ask me.

This issue of Chief Content Officer celebrates creativity, which is also a theme at Content Marketing World 2018. We hope to inspire ideas, spark action and make creativity part of your corporate culture.

Andrew Gordon, longtime Pixar animator, advises brands, "You want to stay scrappy, hungry for the next thing, feeling that it's OK to try things and fail as a way to arrive at a better idea."

Some of the most creative storytelling is about people trying to drive action and effect change, which is why we speak with real-life adventurer Paolo Mottola about his work with the REI content team. REI has taken on important diversity and gender issues while educating hard-core and novice adventurers about a variety of topics, believing that a "life outdoors is a life well lived."

REI effectively uses content in multiple formats—text, video and audio. Experimenting with formats helps brands keep ideas fresh and innovative, which is why we take a look at another medium that can be highly effective in getting your message across but is often overlooked by marketers—comics.

Jonathan Crossfield, longtime CMI contributor and now chief consulting editor of CCO, collaborates with Buddy Scalera to showcase how brands can use comics to tell a powerful story. You'll also learn how some brands are working with top comics creators and publishers such as Marvel Comics.

I'll leave you with a quote from Choose Your Own Adventure's Montgomery: "There is never a day in which you are not confronted with choice ... CYOA gave me a vehicle for examining all the impacts of choice."

However you choose to make your content more creative and whatever medium you choose for your storytelling, make sure your audience enjoys the adventure.

Where do you want to go next? It's time for you to decide.



Join me and many of the marketers you'll read about in this issue at Content Marketing World!  
[contentmarketingworld.com](http://contentmarketingworld.com)



*Stephanie Stahl*

Stephanie Stahl  
General Manager, Content Marketing Institute

## CHOOSE YOUR OWN CONTENT MARKETING ADVENTURE



*If you think your content needs more creative thinking, turn to page 48.*

*If you want to read why Paolo Mottola won 2017 Content Marketer of the Year, turn to page 12.*

*If you would rather explore an alternative storytelling medium, turn to page 36.*





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AUGUST 2018

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**EDITOR’S NOTE** We regret that, on page 3 of the last issue (May 2018), the Google VR filmmaker interviewed by John Bucher for his book was incorrectly named as Lisa Brillstone. Google’s principal filmmaker for VR, and the source of the quote mentioned in the column, is Jessica Brillhart.



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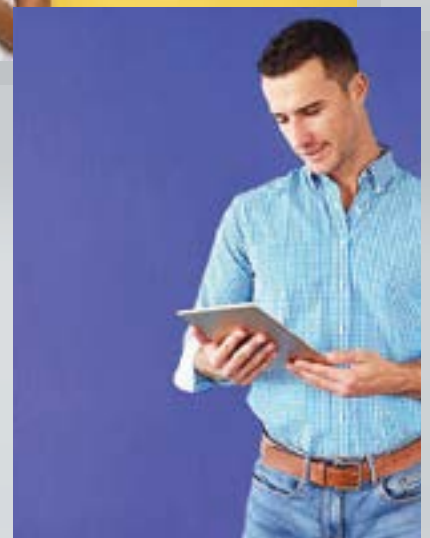
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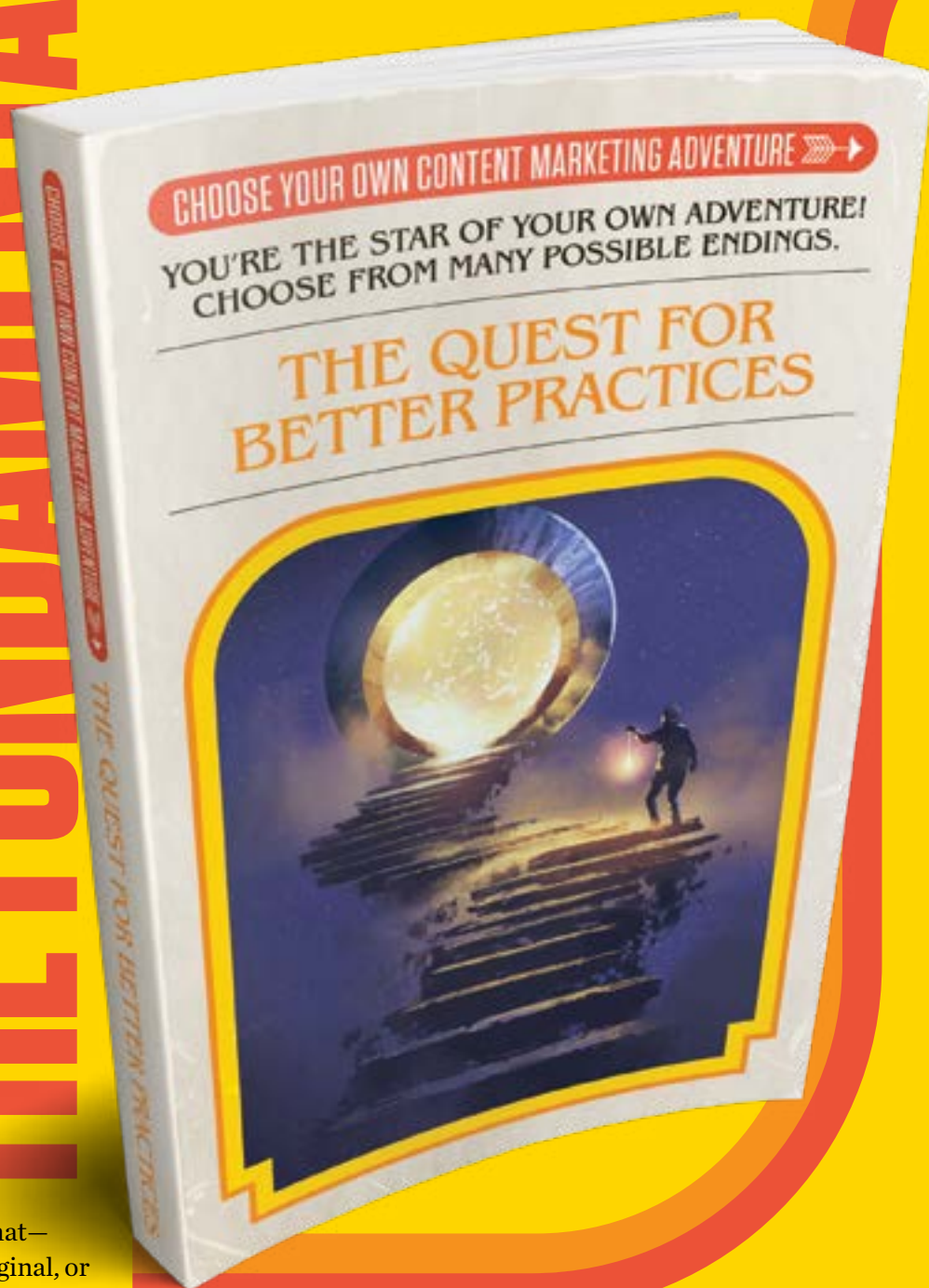


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# REDISCOVERING THE FUNDAMENTALS

## THE CREATIVITY ISSUE



Conventional wisdom is just that—conventional: “not natural, original, or spontaneous” as Webster’s puts it. But can a marketer ever truly stand out by being conventional?

*Jay Acunzo*



“**T**hat guy is gonna kill us.” I was 19, just starting to find my rhythm—as a man and, more importantly to my ego, as a basketball player. I watched as a 6-foot-2-inch chiseled dude strode onto the court

at Trinity College in Hartford. We were playing pickup like we always did after classes, just around 4. Nine of us had been casually shooting and Muscles McGee made it a perfect 10.

“That guy is gonna kill us,” I thought. “Just look at him.”

Tall, strong and with all the right gear: a jersey made of some new-age material, an arm sleeve like LeBron James wears during games, and, come to think of it, LeBron’s latest shoes too. The guy just plain looked like a great player.

Then the game started and we realized: He was awful. He looked the part but when it was time to ball he couldn’t even play.

I still don’t know his name. Today, I just call him Average Content Marketer.

See, average content marketers are far too concerned with looking like they can do the job. They endlessly research all the tech, tactics and tools. They obsess over the latest gurus and experts, retweeting and repurposing the thinking. They know all the growth hacks and sound so very smart when presenting their ideas to their teams or boards.

But then the game starts and it’s obvious: They can’t play. They’ve forgotten what this work is all about, focusing more on the incremental stuff instead of the fundamentals. Average content marketers love the tips and tricks, the cheats and hacks, the gurus and the get-there-quick schemes. They obsess over gaming the system and laud the new trends. (Quick: What was 2017 the “year of” again? Did it even matter, like, at all?)

We need to reset this industry to first principles—and fast. First principles are best principles and best principles are simply more important best practices.

### Reasoning from first principles

There’s a way of thinking popularized by the great Elon Musk of Tesla and SpaceX fame: reasoning from first principles. The idea is simple to understand, hard to execute: Rather than rely on conventional wisdom to inform your logic, distill something to its fundamental truths—i.e., “first principles”—to develop your own thinking. The concept of “first principles” comes from physics, referring to the basic but hard-to-reach truths about the world.

Ol’ Muscles McGee had all the right gear and looked pretty darn professional as a basketball player, but then the game started and he couldn’t play. But *playing* basketball is what basketball *is*. Similarly, when content marketers, say, launch a podcast, most will ask experts about the right technology, the right distribution techniques or the right way to measure the success of a show. But when it’s time to record, how many are any good on a microphone? How many even think about it? But being *good* on a microphone is what podcasting *is*.

I’ve watched companies build expensive in-house studios before launching their podcasts. Why in the world would you do this before ensuring a podcast was worth your or

your audience’s time? Why not invest that same money into training your host to be the world’s greatest or researching your audience to know them more intimately? That studio is incremental, not fundamental.

As an industry, we’re losing our way in content marketing. We’re losing touch with what all this stuff is actually about, drowning in tips and tricks and how-to guides. We have to clear away the conventional wisdom and trendy new tactics that clutter our view.

What if we focused on the fundamentals instead? What if we paid more attention and clung more tightly to best principles instead of best practices?

Luckily, we’re surrounded by examples of those who have done exactly that. They can inspire us and empower us to break from our obsession with a nice, neat, packaged list of tips.

### B2C: Queen of the porcelain throne

To more bashful crowds, Suzy Batiz introduces herself as the CEO. To her team, however, she’s the PEO. “I’m the poo executive officer,” she told me in an interview on my podcast, “Unthinkable.”

Batiz is the founder and C-slash-PEO of Poo-Pourri, one of the most hilarious and successful consumer brands and content marketing powerhouses that we rarely cite inside our echo chamber. From its comical viral videos taking the piss out of everybody’s poo problems to its recent book “The Woo of Poo” (I can’t make this stuff up), the marketers at Poo-Pourri are masters of steering into the skid. (Too much?)

All of this started when Batiz made a simple observation about one very smelly problem. Her brother-in-law had just emerged from the bathroom during a party and lamented to Batiz, “Why can’t we figure out how to deal with odor properly?” Being a lifelong entrepreneur, Batiz couldn’t stop wondering if there was a better way to solve this problem. But to solve the problem she first had to understand it. She had to reach the first principle of the matter.

She realized, “(Odor) is airborne. Once the odor is created, it’s going out into the air. So I was curious to figure out if we could address the problem before it starts.”

Over the next few months, she formulated a new type of spray. It wasn’t an odor-masking spray, like Febreze, but an odor-trapping spray. You simply spray the product onto the water before you go and the oily film it creates then traps odors below the surface. They never even reach the air. She cut through the conventional wisdom used by her competitors to examine the details of her world in a more foundational way. She found the first principle insight and, by addressing it, has created raving fans and generated more than \$300 million in sales to date.

“It’s kind of all ridiculous,” Batiz said. “It’s like, ‘Oh my gosh, I’ve made millions of dollars selling poo spray.’ It’s like some cosmic joke.”

And the punchline? Build your company—and your content—around the first principle of the problem you aim to solve and you’ll resonate more deeply with customers. By publishing content that explores this first principle—particularly how your customers relate to this central truth—you demonstrate not only that you understand the problem better than anyone else but also understand them.

But best principles don’t merely apply to direct-to-consumer companies. They can be transformative in even the most competitive B2B niches.

### B2B: Design disruptors

InVision—one of dozens of companies that sells prototyping and project collaboration tools to software designers—has somehow separated from the pack. It didn’t do it by buying some advanced technology. It didn’t do

it by studying the sneakiest tricks or smartest best practices. InVision is beating the competition because of a first principle insight about its customers.

It began when marketing manager Clair Byrd was busy creating case studies for the company. In almost every interview she conducted, she noticed a strange trend: InVision's customers got defensive. While they clearly loved their jobs, they kept justifying at length why product design was so crucial to modern tech companies. It was clear that something deeper was happening and so Byrd investigated this problem further. By spending more time with InVision customers, as well as asking them why they get so defensive, she realized that "product designer" simply wasn't a common title. Whereas InVision wanted its customers to talk about how they created their designs (the action InVision's product enables), the customers wanted to talk about something else: the need for product design to create an identity in the business world.

Byrd had reached the first principle insight, using it to inform all her work in marketing. She knew she couldn't create another average case study. And so, to rally an entire industry around the brand and to help provide an identity to a career path, Byrd and her team created *Design Disruptors*, an hour-long documentary film featuring some of the world's best design thinkers from companies like Google, Facebook, MailChimp, Airbnb, Salesforce, Zendesk, HubSpot, Spotify, Dropbox and more. But here's the thing: InVision never released this film publicly. Instead, through both the work of its team and volunteers in its audience, InVision premiered the documentary in offline community meetups—over 1,000 across more than 450 cities worldwide. In total, the documentary generated 70,000 highly qualified leads from some of the hardest-to-reach companies in the world, all of whom now look to InVision to lead their industry. In one year, InVision doubled its total product users and, to date, has raised over \$155 million in venture capital funding, making it the most well-capitalized company in its crowded space.

*Design Disruptors* was a large and expensive project. It might seem crazy to film a documentary instead of a series of case studies, but that view is the product of conventional wisdom—that content marketing is about selling tools; marketing features and benefits; and creating PDFs and how-to articles. That's what I call "last-mile marketing" and, too often, marketers focus on only those moments immediately before someone decides to buy. Instead, if marketers ran with them every step of

the way, that last mile would seem like a no brainer for them to take with the brand or product in mind.

In other words, Byrd knew she had to solve the fundamental problem (product designers needed an identity) before InVision's marketing team could address the incremental problem (product designers need tools). It's a logical argument, not an innovative idea: If product design lacks an identity, companies won't understand its value. If companies don't understand its value, they won't prioritize product design. If companies don't prioritize product design, they won't provide budget or buy tools. To get to that last part and make it more likely to happen, InVision had to address the first principle.

What if we did the same in our industries too?

### You see, but do you observe?

Sherlock Holmes would tsk-tsk the entire content marketing community right now if he could only see the way it behaves—or, yanno, if he was a real person. His famous quote cuts to the core of the issue: "You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear."


As an industry, we see things and collect data and create and promote content all the time, but do we stop and think critically? Do we ask why? Do we ask anything—like anything at all? Or do we cling to the best practices and latest trends, acting without understanding?

Do we see or do we observe? That is the content marketing conundrum today. We experience it all the time. When we applaud each other for saying things like, "Focus on the audience," or "Write blog posts for people, not search engines," we're tipping our hand. We're revealing we're so focused on the incremental stuff that the fundamentals now seem brilliant. But they shouldn't. They should be table stakes. And knowing the root of the problem we set out to solve—both with the product or service and the content we produce—should also be table stakes, as should knowing the real reason the audience would read or listen or watch or share or, of course, purchase.

Nobody buys a poo spray. They buy confidence that they won't be embarrassed. Nobody buys design software. They buy the certainty that their work matters in the business world. The self- and situational awareness that comes with finding first principle insights in our work far outstrips anything that can be listed in a blog post, ultimate guide or tutorial video.

Know your customers, know your craft and, most importantly, know yourself. These are the foundations of good work and these can't be hacked or gamed. There is no shortcut, no app for that. First principles are found through investigation, through daily detective work into your environments. Experts know absolutes, but investigators use evidence and, in doing so, find better ideas than any best practices can provide.

Sure, throw on a headband and lace up those sweet new LeBron shoes. Buy some drinks built by science and some protein bars too. Do everything you need to do to look like you can do this stuff. But when the game starts, just remember: You better know how to play.

Game on. 

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**Jay Acunzo** is the founder of Unthinkable Media and an award-winning podcaster, as well as a keynote speaker, content marketer and creator.

### CHOOSE YOUR OWN CONTENT MARKETING ADVENTURE



*If you're not sure your content is genuinely engaging, turn to page 20.*

*If you decide to attend Jay Acunzo's session on being better than best practices, register for Content Marketing World at <http://cmi.media/cmw>.*





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# HOW REI OPENS MINDS TO THE OUTDOORS



2017 Content Marketer of the Year **Paolo Mottola**, managing editor at **REI Co-op**, demonstrates again and again how content can drive more than interest and engagement—it can drive action.

*Stephanie Stahl*





If you #OptOutside, you probably already believe REI's brand promise that a "life outdoors is a life well lived." But even occasional hikers and those whose adventures are limited to chaperoning obligatory Girl Scout campouts find REI's content inviting, approachable, educational, creative and bold.

That's the result of a deliberate strategy designed "to get more people understanding that the outdoors is accessible for all," says Paolo Mottola, who leads the company's content team.

And it explains why you won't see models or stock photos dressing up REI's content. "We express that through our members and we shine a light on their real stories," Mottola says. This kind of authenticity is palpable to experienced and amateur recreational lovers. Not everyone's ready for How to Run 100 Miles and not everyone needs a tutorial on How to Build a Fire. But Mottola and team make sure they're offering information for both groups and everyone in between.

REI's content mix includes everything from blog posts to video how-tos, from short films to, more recently, podcasts. The brand launched two shows this year, Wild Ideas Worth Living and Take It From Me.

"There's a 'share of ear' we want to be a part of, and the intimacy of long-form audio creates a lot of different opportunities, more than we have with video or the written word," Mottola says. Wild Ideas is a traditional interview format with REI's host Shelby Stanger, talking with "outstanding outdoorspeople."

Take It from Me also uses an interview format, but with a creative twist. Mottola describes it as "relay race" where the interviewee in one episode becomes the interviewer in the following episode.

While much of REI's content resonates with a wide audience of adventurers, some of its boldest initiatives have been designed to expose—and celebrate—specific audiences taking part in outdoor experiences.

### #OptOutside

You need look no further than social media to see both newbies and pros proudly tagging their content with #OptOutside. The hashtag started on Black Friday 2015 when REI invited people to reconnect with their

families and friends instead of shopping for holiday deals. REI closed its store doors and paid employees not to work but to enjoy the day outside.

It wasn't a one-time publicity stunt. The company has shut its doors every Black Friday since. In 2017, an estimated 8 million people took part, according to the company's 2017 Stewardship Report, which details REI's sustainability efforts, political activism, gender equality strategies and nonprofit support.

In early 2017, REI's film about Brothers of Climbing documented the organization's mission to increase diversity in outdoor adventures. As BOC co-founder Mikhail Martin says in an interview in REI's Co-Op Journal, "We want to bring the community together. We want to see people of color experience a higher level of comfort in the outdoors. We want to hear more children saying they want to be rock climbers instead of the typical basketball or football player."

### #ForceofNature

More recently, REI tackled how women are represented outdoors, through an initiative called Force of Nature, which, as REI CEO Jerry Stritzke wrote in an April 2017 post, "claims the outdoors as a place to opt out of

## TRAIL CREW

Though the Content Marketing Institute honored Paolo Mottola as 2017 Content Marketer of the Year, he's quick to point out that his team does "kick-ass work" and deserves credit for the high-quality, creative content REI produces. Here's what he looks for in a team member—and some leadership advice for his peers:

### Brand and journalism skills

Most people on the REI content marketing team have journalism degrees and many come with experience with other brands, including Starbucks, Razorfish and Uber.

"We look for people who have the skills and mindset of journalists because we have to deliver content at a standard set by publishers and in service of our members," he says. "Our teams know how to identify a story and report on it with fact-checking and a multi-source approach at pace."

At the same time, the team understands what it means to work for a retail brand. "We know—and want our readers to know—we're serving a different kind of purpose than a traditional publisher.

"Sometimes we're part of the story itself. What's most important is that we're transparent with readers in our role and the stories we cover," Mottola says.

### Decide to lead

While he sees a lot of content marketing peers working hard to enhance their skills, he'd like to encourage more to progress in their careers. "Content is a leading channel for marketing. Do emerging content leaders want to accelerate their program's authority? Affect the way to engage with customers? The opportunity is now," Mottola says. "It's time to rise to the challenge."

Who is rising to the challenge? Find out who are the finalists for this year's Content Marketer of the Year on page 16. Know someone we should be considering for next year? Let us know! Drop a note to Kim Moutsos, VP of Editorial, at [kim.moutsos@ubm.com](mailto:kim.moutsos@ubm.com).

cultural pressures to conform—the ‘supposed-tos’ and ‘shoulds’ that underpin outdated stereotypes—especially for women.”

The initiative grew out of a survey REI commissioned in early 2017. The results were predictable in one sense: 85 percent of all women surveyed said they “believe the outdoors positively affects mental health, physical health, happiness and overall well-being,” and 70 percent reported that being outdoors is liberating.

But it also revealed that most of the women who responded lacked a female outdoor role model—and most believed men’s outdoor interests are taken more seriously.

To “create real change right now,” as Stritzke put it, the company pledged to put “women—of all ages, races, sizes, gender expressions—front and center in all we do.” REI also created a \$1 million grant to support nonprofit organizations that create outdoor opportunities for women.

Mottola’s team’s job was to mine for women’s stories—and women storytellers—to bring more balance to the content showing up in outdoor media. “It wasn’t a challenge to make that shift given all the amazing work women are doing in the outdoors,” he says.

The initiative resulted in films (see sidebar) and blog articles shining a spotlight on women’s outdoor experiences, as well as a steady stream of social media content. For those who want more interactive experiences, REI launched 1,000 classes and events for women.

Although increased sales weren’t the main goal, the company’s been rewarded for its efforts: After the Force of Nature launch, its women’s business grew 20 percent year over year.

Even before the research study, REI had an internal team working for a year to prepare and to evaluate the company’s gender equality practices. In 2015, the REI Foundation made a \$1.5 million gift to the Outdoor Industries Women Coalition (today called Camber Outdoors) and REI Co-op led a CEO pledge to bring more women into the outdoor industry. “At every step of the creative process we became more and more excited about what we were putting out into the world. And we saw people respond—from selfies with our catalog to seeing orange Force of Nature bandanas out on the trail to this day,” Mottola says. “We are really proud of the work.” ∞



*The Mirnavator*

## OUTSIDE VOICES

As part of its Forces of Nature initiative, REI produced several notable films showcasing women adventurers and the challenges they overcome.

### The Mirnavator

Ultra-runners everywhere are faced with challenges on the trails. But Mirna Valerio combats them on and off. In this REI film, Valerio shows how she overcomes the negative voices from those who don’t believe running is the sport for someone her size. Her bio reads: “Running is life. I’m a Spanish teacher, choral director, diversity practitioner, cross country running coach, blogger and avid trail runner who believes that many of life’s lessons can be learned by simply engaging oneself in the pursuit of wisdom gained through simply moving your body in nature.”



### A Steelhead Quest: Portrait of a Rivered Life

In this film, REI follows steelhead advocate and long-time angler Terry Myers in her quest to catch a wild steelhead each month on a different river. According to REI, “The film explores the experience of an unassuming but determined woman on this two-year quest. Watch as she tries to unlock the mysteries of catching wild steelhead through the changing seasons. With her husband Jerry in tow, we see the challenges they face with depleting runs, while still enjoying every aspect of being on the river together—rain or shine, fish or no fish.”



### Follow Through

Caroline Gleich is an inspirational role model to some, a mountaineer wannabe to others. She’s also been called a “silver-spoon spoiled bitch with an awesome Instagram feed” due to her social media fan base. In this film, REI follows Gleich’s desire to ski challenging lines in Utah’s Wasatch Mountains. REI describes Follow Through as “a story of loss, belonging and desire for respect. In this age of hyper-connectivity, which voices do we choose to hear and which do we ignore?”

CHOOSE YOUR OWN CONTENT MARKETING ADVENTURE ➡

*If you want to meet the finalists for Content Marketer of the Year 2018, turn to page 16.*

*If you would rather be inspired by other great content marketing ideas, turn to page 52.*



# **GREAT CONTENT STARTS WITH YOU AND AI**

**CONCURED** CONTENT STRATEGY PLATFORM (CSP)

Come meet us at the CONCURED lounge at the center of the Content Marketing World expo in Cleveland this September!



# CONTENT MARKETER OF THE YEAR

Every year, the Content Marketing Institute recognizes and celebrates the elite players in the game of content marketing—the highly skilled professionals who always seem to know the best play no matter how the dice roll or the cards fall. Who will be this year’s overall winner?

## THE ALCHEMIST

... transforms and creates through a seemingly magical process ...



**BEVERLY JACKSON**  
**VICE PRESIDENT, SOCIAL STRATEGY**  
**MGM RESORTS INTERNATIONAL**

### TALENTS

Advertising | Digital marketing | Cause marketing/entertainment | Crisis communications | Corporate social responsibility

### MISSION

Promote MGM Resorts International as a world-class entertainment company and support its digital, organizational and cultural transformation

### STRATEGY

Tell compelling stories on social channels, marquees, and in-room and mobile devices | Promote experiences that help sell tickets and hotel rooms

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS** In the last three years, the MGM Resorts International website experienced double-digit traffic growth from social channels. Jackson attributes the success to the close collaboration among her social media team of creators, strategists and community managers. “They get the party started, help people have fun and then make sure it keeps going,” she says. The team also quickly adapted messaging, content and channel strategies during the mass shooting on the Las Vegas Strip on Oct. 1, 2017. During the aftermath, social media strategists worked in real time to handle crisis communications and answer questions on appropriate channels, remembering that people were still checking into the hotel for a once-in-a-lifetime trip or a wedding.

To see Beverly Jackson’s work, see the MGM Resorts account at [http://cmi.media/MGM\\_Twitter](http://cmi.media/MGM_Twitter), [http://cmi.media/MGM\\_Instagram](http://cmi.media/MGM_Instagram) and [http://cmi.media/MGM\\_Snapchat](http://cmi.media/MGM_Snapchat).

**WISDOM** “It doesn’t matter how big Facebook is, when a crisis happens it’s zero value. We use Twitter because it’s dynamic and fast. You have situations in which people are looking for loved ones and trying to figure out what’s going on. They go to Twitter to see what you’re saying, where to find people or where to give blood.”



## THE RALLIER

... gathers, organizes and inspires anew ...



**EVAN PARKER**  
**MANAGING DIRECTOR OF CONTENT STRATEGY**  
 NASCAR

### TALENTS

Content strategy | Storytelling | Sports and entertainment marketing | Digital and social media | Revenue generation

### MISSION

Grow the sport of NASCAR and its fan base, while driving NASCAR digital media revenue

### TACTICS

Create a 24/7 dialogue with fans via storytelling and innovative content projects | Repurpose driver/partner stories on NASCAR channels | Use data and analytics to develop content in real time

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS** In March 2018, Parker flipped the switch on the long-awaited NASCAR Content Studio, built for digital and social distribution. The dedicated space—outfitted for easy production of everything from GIFs to livestreaming to long-form video—makes storytelling a breeze. Instead of the content team chasing stories, drivers now say, “I have a story to tell. I want to come by, hang out and work with the team on it.” Parker’s team sold Facebook an eight-part docu-series about the first African-American driver in the Daytona 500 since 1969. Behind the Wall: Bubba Wallace, produced in the studio, attracted more than 12 million views. The team is now working with Facebook on concepts for a potential season two.

To see Evan Parker’s work, go to <http://cmi.media/Parker>.

**WISDOM** “In the span of roughly a year, we’ve created a full-service, in-house content company, packed with writers, shooters, editors, designers and creatives tasked with telling stories about NASCAR and our partners. The silos are gone, and the team can focus on what they do better than anyone on earth: creating engaging content around this heart-pounding, viscerally overwhelming sport.”

## THE MAXIMIZER

... tests, learns and optimizes to make as great as possible ...



**VENETTA LINAS PARIS**  
**SENIOR MANAGER, CONTENT - GLOBAL MARKETING**  
 AON

### TALENTS

Brand journalism | Channel marketing | Digital and social media strategy

### MISSION

Craft compelling content | Demonstrate Aon’s ability to solve complex client challenges | Position Aon as a strategic business partner

### STRATEGY

Develop stories about large-scale macroeconomic issues | Centralize content creation for consistency, cost efficiency and unified storytelling | Maximize content across channels

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS** Global brand journalism platform The One Brief features perspectives and insights from across Aon, focusing on topics that matter to the business leaders at client and prospect companies. To measure The One Brief’s impact, Linas Paris and team developed a unique-to-Aon scorecard that analyzes content performance across a series of criteria including editorial direction and content performance across email, social media and other channels. The site has attracted over 230,000 unique visitors from launch in the third quarter of 2015 to first quarter of 2018.

To see Venetta Linas Paris’s work, go to <http://cmi.media/Paris>.

**WISDOM** “Embrace the bigger picture. Think like a journalist and find the story. Pursuing broad storylines can help create new perspectives in the marketplace while building new credibility by focusing on a specific area of expertise. The One Brief was designed to drive understanding of our firm. By investing in content that tackles broad issues and connects to our specific perspective, we are able to shift the audience from general awareness—who Aon is—to understanding the breadth of what Aon does.”



### THE HUMANIZER

... one who gives things a human character ...



**GLENN LAFOLLETTE**  
**SENIOR MANAGER OF BRAND STRATEGY,**  
**CORPORATE MARKETING**  
**JLL**

**TALENTS**  
Brand and content strategy |  
Corporate communications |  
Journalism | Public relations | Social  
media strategy

**MISSION**  
Tell JLL's story: Achieve Ambitions |  
Emphasize company's vision to  
reimagine the world of real estate,  
create amazing spaces and build  
a better tomorrow for clients,  
employees and communities.

**STRATEGY**  
Tell human-interest stories through  
compelling copy, images | Showcase  
JLL's expertise through trends,  
insights and analysis stories

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS** Working across JLL teams, LaFollette launched Ambitions as an annual publication with a companion online site in 2017. Ambitions focuses on stories, trends and topics relevant to JLL's clients and the larger real estate industry. The most recent issue explored how JLL turned an abandoned building into a beautiful and functional space for the Detroit Institute of Music Education. Videos on the website expand the print stories. "We're telling the right story in the right place, deciding what type of content fits that story best. We've created the magazine, digital, social and video layers to reach our audiences in tailored and impactful ways," LaFollette says. The magazine expanded to two issues a year in 2018.

To see Glenn LaFollette's work, go to <http://cmi.media/LaFollette>.

**WISDOM** "JLL differentiates itself by being human and personal, but that doesn't mean we're going to start tweeting out memes. You have to be authentic to who you are. For us, that means producing quality stories. We'll write about people who want to engage a community in Detroit or shape the future of buildings with MIT. That's how you reach people on an emotional level. When you do that, they want to work with you."

### THE PROVISIONER

... takes measures beforehand to  
deal with a need or contingency ...



**RANDI BARTELMIE**  
**DIRECTOR OF CONTENT MARKETING**  
**SYMANTEC CORPORATION, CONSUMER BUSINESS UNIT**

**TALENTS**  
Sales | Marketing | Advertising  
campaigns | Brand and content  
development

**MISSION**  
Educate consumers about digital  
security | Support smart digital  
security decisions

**STRATEGY**  
Create content to answer consumers'  
questions | Push rapid-response  
email content when personal  
information is at risk | Capitalize on  
seasonal events (such as tax time or  
holiday shopping)

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS** After proving content's impact on sales with an agency-produced e-book, Bartelmie adopted an internal team of blog writers working for Symantec's Norton brand to transform the low-traffic blog into a robust consumer information center. Shortly after launch, Bartelmie's team responded to a high-profile data breach by producing content on what steps people should take to protect their personal information. One set of emails reassured customers their data was safe. Another set went to the rest of the database, explaining the breach and how Norton products protect data. The impressive response attracted the attention (and funding support) of other groups within Symantec. Since the Norton Internet Security Center launched, time on Norton's site increased 40 percent, unique visitors increased 100 percent and article views increased 300 percent.

To see Randi Bartelmie's work, go to <http://cmi.media/Bartelmie>.

**WISDOM** "The first time we decided to put some money behind content, it did really well. Not only did it spark people to say that we needed to create more content, they saw it needed to be a top priority."

## THE PUNK EVANGELIST

... seeks to take control of the story and convert others ...



**JASON MILLER**  
**HEAD OF CONTENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING**  
**LINKEDIN SALES & MARKETING SOLUTIONS EMEA**

TALENTS

B2B marketing | Photography | Digital storytelling | Rock 'n' Roll

MISSION

Educate marketers on how to leverage the LinkedIn platform to tell their stories.

TACTICS

Create definitive "big rock" assets owning key topics | Remix content for different formats | Share strong, well-argued opinions | Tap pop culture inspiration for podcasts, magazines, video, and more

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS** The first Sophisticated Marketer's Guide to LinkedIn launched in 2013 and has been revised every year since, resulting in more than a million downloads. Miller built a global content team to expand the Sophisticated Marketer brand across regions, subjects and content formats. There are now Sophisticated Marketer guides to content marketing, metrics and analytics, global content strategies and more. The Sophisticated Marketers Podcast has run for six seasons, while the print lifestyle magazine, Sophisticated Marketer's Quarterly, launched in Europe, the Middle East and Africa in 2017, and expanded with North America and global editions in 2018. As part of his role as global LinkedIn evangelist and "front man," Miller spoke at 41 events in 2017.

To see Jason Miller's work, go to <http://cmi.media/Miller>.

**WISDOM** "Engaging an audience is now a form of transaction in itself. As a marketer you need to decide how someone giving you their attention is going to pay off for them—otherwise, you'll simply prime them not to pay attention to you in the future."

## THE ORCHESTRATOR

... arranges by means of clever planning or maneuvering ...



**BERTRAND CERISIER**  
**VICE PRESIDENT, GLOBAL MARKETING**  
**WORKPLACE SOLUTIONS BUSINESS GROUP**  
**XEROX CORP.**

TALENTS

Direct sales | Channel operations | Strategy | Marketing | Mergers and acquisitions

MISSION

Drive awareness, adoption and sales of Xerox ConnectKey | Reestablish Xerox as an innovator | Increase employee enthusiasm for Xerox's future

STRATEGY

Tell an audience-centered story through multiple channels, including on-site experiences, press, analyst and influencer content, social channel and Xerox-owned channels

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS** Cerisier orchestrated an experiential, media and content blitz to create awareness and advocacy around the multi-function printer ecosystem. The program kicked off a New York Stock Exchange bell-ringing event, followed by interviews of Xerox CEO Jeff Jacobson with six national broadcast outlets. A similar event took place the following week in London. Two Future of Work Partner Forums educated channel partners about efficient workplaces and included a hands-on look at the new ConnectKey portfolio. A 14-city tour of Europe and North America followed, targeting partners, resellers, agents and customers. Supported by influencer outreach, the program ultimately generated 518 pieces of global coverage in more than 40 countries, leading to more than 400 million impressions.

To see Bertrand Cerisier's work, go to <http://cmi.media/Cerisier>.

**WISDOM** "The Future of Work messaging platform allowed Xerox to communicate and demonstrate in a compelling way how the fundamental nature of work is evolving and why office technology must stay ahead of the curve to meet the changing needs of today's modern workforce. Attendees got it."

CHOOSE YOUR OWN CONTENT MARKETING ADVENTURE



*If you choose to explore each Content Marketer of the Year finalist's achievements, go to <http://cmi.media/CMOY>.*

*If you decide to attend the announcement of Content Marketer of the Year 2018, register for Content Marketing World at <http://cmi.media/cmw>.*

*If you would rather be inspired by some wildly creative content marketing ideas, turn to page 52.*




THE CREATIVITY ISSUE

# CAPTURE AND KEEP YOUR AUDIENCE'S ATTENTION

Great content isn't about being more clickable, more "like"-able, more sharable. Like a good book, truly great content is unputdownable.

*Andrew Davis*





***“You keep using that word.  
I do not think it means  
what you think it means.”***

**- Inigo Montoya, The Princess Bride**

**F**or marketers, “that” word is engagement. And we use it a lot. We use it in strategy meetings, tweets, videos and blog posts. We rank “create more engaging content” as one of our top priorities in the annual Content Marketing Institute benchmark survey every year. We list “engagement” as one of our most important content marketing goals in the very same survey. At a recent content marketing event, one speaker used the E word 335,000 times in a 45-minute breakout session. (OK, I didn’t keep count but she used the word A LOT.)

But what exactly do YOU mean when you say the E word?

Some consider engagement to be the number of shares a piece of content receives. Others believe engagement is the number of visitors to a blog post or the number of views a video receives. Still others claim they measure engagement by tracking the number of comments or conversations that result from a single piece of content. Some count “likes” and “favorites” as proof that their content is engaging.

Chances are your definition of engagement is different from mine, which is different from theirs.

We use the E word so often that, within a marketing context, the word has lost all meaning.

It’s time to fix this.

### **What is engagement?**

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “engage” means to “occupy or attract (someone’s interest or attention),” while “interest” is the state of “wanting to know or learn about something” and “attention” is “regarding something as interesting or important.”

Marketing engagement is the act of occupying your audience’s desire to know or learn over time. Therefore, if you’re going to measure engagement with your content, you must focus on time-based metrics like time on page or duration of website visit. However, mediums like audio and video have an even better metric for understanding engagement.

Once you hit the play button on a video you’re barreling toward its end with a limited number of options along the way: pause, rewind, fast-forward, stop and play. As a viewer, you can also bail on the video at any time. Because video is a linear medium, measuring audience engagement is simple: how many people make it to the end?

Getting to the end of a video is essential as this is where you most often place the call to action. If your “learn more,” “download now” or “buy now” buttons are the destination and your content consumers never make it to the end of the video, how can you expect them to take action?

YouTube provides one of the most significant engagement metrics of any social platform. Buried in YouTube’s analytics is a simple chart called “audience retention,” comparing the number of views at the beginning of the video with the number of views at the end (or any point in between).

For example, a video with an average audience retention rate of 25 percent means most viewers watch only 25 percent of it. A content creator’s ultimate goal is to produce video content with 100-percent audience retention (meaning the average viewer watches the entire video). That would be a genuinely engaging video. Why? Because, remember, engagement is defined in marketing as occupying your audience’s desire to know something over time. The longer you retain your viewers, the more engaging your content.

### **Videos with the highest audience engagement**

After researching hundreds of videos over the last two years, I’ve learned one type of video typically has the highest audience retention rates: how-to videos. For example, the world’s most consumed bow-tie tutorial video has millions of views and most of those viewers make it all the way to the end. By definition it’s engaging.

But why do good how-to videos have such high audience retention rates? The viewer has a question, “How do I tie a bow tie?” and the video has the answer. However, if you want to tie a bow tie successfully you can’t bail on the how-to video halfway through. You can’t skip a step. You have to watch the entire tutorial.

How-to videos occupy their audience’s desire to know the answer to a question over time. That’s engagement.

So, engaging content should keep the audience chasing answers.

But what about all the other content you create? How do you make it engaging?

**Keep them curious**

There are two compelling psychological phenomena at work when we consume any piece of content. Not only do these mental events explain why how-to videos are so engaging, but they also uncover the secret behind successful clickbait.

Humans are curious creatures. We love to fill the gap between what we already know and what we want to know (or even need to know.) Psychologists call this void the curiosity gap. When you create how-to content the curiosity gap is obvious: the audience is consciously asking the first question, such as, “How do I tie a bow tie?” The video maintains the viewer’s attention by ensuring that the end of each step invites the viewer to ask, “What’s next?”

To maintain your audience’s attention, you must manufacture curiosity gaps. How? I’ll get to that after I tell you about the second psychological phenomena you can employ to maintain your audience’s attention.

(See what I did there? I manufactured a curiosity gap.)

Anytime you create a curiosity gap in the minds of your viewers you’re also leveraging another unbelievably powerful psychological state. Human beings have an innate need for closure: a sincere desire for a firm answer to a question and a natural aversion toward ambiguity. Our need for closure creates tension that compels us to take action even when we know it may cause us pain or make us uncomfortable. Our need for closure explains why clickbait works.

Take this headline: Man Tries to Hug a Lion. You Won’t Believe What Happens Next. We’ve been trained to spot clickbait and that headline is a classic of the form. We all know that whatever is behind the click won’t measure up to the expectation the headline sets. But our emotional need for closure overwhelms our ability to reason. We must know what happens next. We need the answer and we must avoid ambiguity. We click the bait.

Want proof? You’re probably still wondering what happened to the man who tried to hug a lion. Guess what? The lion hugs him back. (Not that unbelievable, really.)

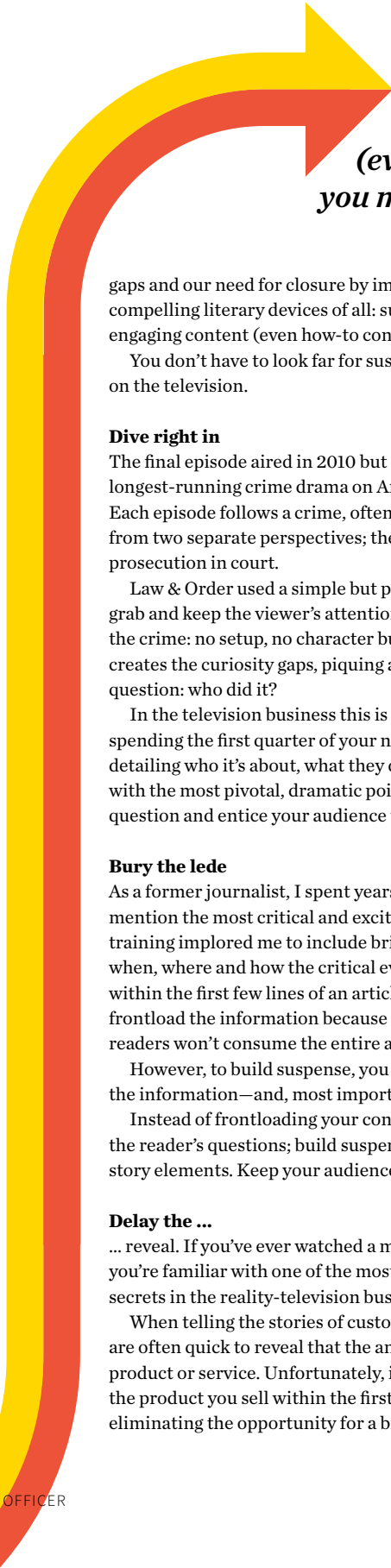
Herein lies the problem with clickbait: The payoff must be proportional to the curiosity gap. Otherwise, your content erodes your target audience’s trust over time.

Create content momentum by manufacturing curiosity gaps that tickle the deep-seated need for closure. This is how you encourage your audience to stick with you to the very end of your content. The greater the tension, the longer you engage the audience. And the bigger the payoff, the more likely you are to inspire your audience to act.

**3 simple ways to manufacture gaps**

Scottish playwright and literary critic William Archer describes drama as “anticipation mingled with uncertainty.” Your content needs drama.

Storytellers routinely employ the power of curiosity



***If you are to create  
engaging content  
(even how-to content),  
you must build suspense.***

gaps and our need for closure by implementing one of the most compelling literary devices of all: suspense. If you are to create engaging content (even how-to content), you must build suspense.

You don’t have to look far for suspenseful inspiration—just turn on the television.

**Dive right in**

The final episode aired in 2010 but *Law & Order* remains the longest-running crime drama on American prime time television. Each episode follows a crime, often ripped from real-life headlines, from two separate perspectives; the police investigation and the prosecution in court.

*Law & Order* used a simple but powerful technique to immediately grab and keep the viewer’s attention. Every episode begins with the crime: no setup, no character building, no preamble. The crime creates the curiosity gaps, piquing a need for closure with one central question: who did it?

In the television business this is called a “cold open.” Instead of spending the first quarter of your next case study or testimonial detailing who it’s about, what they do or the problem they have, start with the most pivotal, dramatic point in the story. Raise a central question and entice your audience to chase the answer.

**Bury the lede**

As a former journalist, I spent years writing ledes designed to mention the most critical and exciting elements of a story. My training implored me to include brief answers to who, what, why, when, where and how the critical event in the story took place, all within the first few lines of an article. Journalists are trained to frontload the information because newspaper editors assume most readers won’t consume the entire article.

However, to build suspense, you must remember that you control the information—and, most importantly, when you divulge it.

Instead of frontloading your content with answers to every one of the reader’s questions; build suspense by excluding some essential story elements. Keep your audience curious.

**Delay the ...**

... reveal. If you’ve ever watched a makeover marathon on HGTV, you’re familiar with one of the most potent suspense-building secrets in the reality-television business: the big reveal.

When telling the stories of customers and clients, marketers are often quick to reveal that the answer to each problem is their product or service. Unfortunately, if you mention your company or the product you sell within the first 85 percent of your content you’re eliminating the opportunity for a big reveal.

*Continued on page 24*

# **IQPC DIGITAL IS A UNIQUE, TARGETED PLATFORM FOR B2B CONTENT CREATION AND DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT**

## **Our content distribution channels**



**White papers  
& Ebooks**



**Email  
Marketing**



**Webinars**



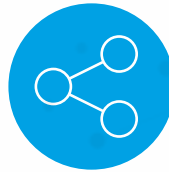
**Online  
Events**



**Retargeting**



**Podcasts**



**Social  
Media**



**Online  
Branding**

## **Amplification of content**



**Global Events Database  
9,630,579 emails**



**Community  
Members 1.1 million**



**Quarterly Web traffic  
607,129 visitors**



**Social Media  
Followers 340,900**



**1200  
Annual Events**



**40  
Industries**



**18 Online  
communities**



**6  
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Continued from page 22

Delaying any mention of your brand and the outcome of your story until the last 15 percent of your case studies and testimonials increases the tension and enhances the story. Too many reveal the clients' outcome even in the title of the video. Remember, there's no reason to watch the entire story unless the viewer is chasing the answer to a central question such as "how did they solve these problems?" The longer you delay the reveal the bigger the catharsis when the solution is revealed.

### The hard truth about engagement

Remember, your goal is to create genuinely engaging content, which maintains the interest or attention of your audience over time.

Unfortunately, when someone says, "Your content is too long," what they're really saying is, "I ran out of questions before you ran out of content."

Keep your audience curious and you'll keep them engaged—no matter the length. ∞

**Andrew Davis** is the author of *Brandscaping: Unleashing the Power of Partnerships*. Follow him at @DrewDavisHere.

When someone says,  
"Your content is  
too long," what they're  
really saying is,  
"I ran out of questions  
before you ran out of content."

### CHOOSE YOUR OWN CONTENT MARKETING ADVENTURE



If you want to learn how one social media image hooked an audience of millions, turn to page 34.

If you would rather read about interactive content, go to <http://cmi.media/interactive>.

If you decide to attend Andrew Davis's keynote, workshop or industry lab at Content Marketing World, register at <http://cmi.media/cmw>.



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# Sgt. Pepper's Online Art Joke's Boom

Social media marketers can learn a lot from one of the most viral images of the last few years.

*Jonathan Crossfield*

Graphic designer Chris Barker has twice won cover of the year at the British Society of Magazine Editors and recently won art director of the year. Yet he is probably best-known for an image he created for his own amusement at 2 a.m. one Nov. 9 while watching the rolling U.S. election coverage.

For Barker, the election result was more evidence that, in his words, things were going “a bit 2016.”

“I started thinking about the year as a whole and how unusual it had been,” he tells me. “At the time, it seemed like a big monumental shift. (Rank outsiders) Leicester City were running away with the English Premier League (football championship). Brexit had happened. I thought I needed to get my thoughts down on paper. It was a cathartic thing, really. It was for me. It wasn’t with any kind of shareability in mind.”

Being a graphic designer, Barker’s main tool of expression is Adobe Photoshop. By 3 a.m., he had finished the image and posted it on digital arts community B3ta as well as Twitter. He also uploaded it to Facebook as his profile image. “The response to it was surprisingly instant. There was an immediate flurry of likes and shares,” he says.

Barker’s cathartic “photoshoppery” resulted in an image eventually seen by millions of people around the world—an homage to the cover of the Beatles album Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band, reinvented as a collage of the many celebrity deaths and other events that made an impact on him throughout the year.

But on that cold November morning in 2016 Barker was taken aback by the response. Within hours even his profile image was attracting a huge number of likes and shares. “I remember chatting to Rob Manuel of B3ta about it, saying, ‘Why are they sharing my profile picture? What’s going on?’ He said, ‘They like it and they want other people to know that they’ve seen it. They don’t care if it’s your personal image. They just want to share it.’”

I’m the first to argue that there is no formula to creating viral

social media content. However, we can draw some lessons from Barker’s hugely successful image—and how he followed it up.

## I read the news today, oh boy

Barker believes his image worked primarily on an emotional level, tapping into how many people felt about 2016. As he explains, “People were feeling slightly fragile and confused. They wanted to share something that expressed how they felt, but they didn’t particularly want to share something about what had happened. They wanted to share something that expressed the emotion.

“It’s like saying, ‘This badge represents how I feel about this situation. They’ve summed it up, so I don’t need to.’”

Plus, there’s an immediateness about an image—particularly in the rapid-fire world of social media—that can express complex emotions and ideas while being extremely sharable. “Once you’ve seen an image, you can’t unsee it. They’re so instant and they’re so memorable,” Barker says. “They linger a lot more than a great writer writing a fantastic think piece about the event.”

**Lesson: Social media and visual content can help people express complex ideas or emotions in a concise, relatable and sharable way.**

## We can work it out

Barker’s image isn’t only packed with emotion. Having captured attention, it rewards closer scrutiny. It is the ultimate Where’s Waldo, inviting people to seek and identify the various faces, with that little kick of satisfaction every time a piece of the puzzle is solved.

This deeper engagement with the image also fostered more interaction around it. If one person pleaded with Twitter to identify the bloke over Muhammad Ali's left shoulder, someone else might respond with the answer. (It's Frank Kelly, who played Father Jack Hackett in the British sitcom *Father Ted*.)

**Lesson: Instead of treating your followers as passive consumers, use your content to invite more interaction or even foster a more communal experience.**

#### **Send me a postcard, drop me a line, Stating point of view**

As more famous people died in the weeks that followed, Barker was inundated with requests for additions and found himself in debates about who should or shouldn't be included.

Plus, not everyone responded to the image in the same way. He says, "I realized quite early on that there was going to be some negative reaction to it, particularly with having the contentious Brexit and Trump issues on there. Plus, the fact that it was about dead people, and is that insensitive?"

Barker found himself having to moderate threads and discussions that flared up. "If something got out of hand, I was moderating it in quite a personal way. I would step in politely and engage them, asking why they wanted this," he says. "Saying sorry a lot helped, even though I didn't really have anything to apologize for. 'I'm sorry I didn't include Juan Gabriel or Kimbo Slice.' These names are burnt into my memory now.

"The trick was to have a look at the people commenting. Some of them you can't speak to because they're dyed-in-the-wool trolls. They're just going to fight back. But if you have a quick look at their timelines, you can see the ones who can manage a bit of dialogue about the topic they have a beef with. I was picking and choosing one in 10 and engaging them. Then the other people could see that I was playing the game and wouldn't give

me such a hard time."

**Lesson: If your content attracts a large audience, your job isn't done. The conversation that follows can be just as important as the content itself.**

#### **You say goodbye and I say hello, hello, hello**

A single piece of content or image in a single tweet or update is incredibly ephemeral. The audience will quickly move on if you don't keep coming back to capture their attention anew. However, regularly reposting the same thing over and over in the hope of kickstarting a snowball of engagement can look desperate, if not a bit spammy. Yet Barker had unwittingly created a content series as he began posting updated versions following each new celebrity death.

The constant reinvention and reposting of the image meant it reached more people and gained more attention with each new version. Barker says, "When the media started talking about it, it blew up even more. It became self-perpetuating. Would it have been as big if I'd just done one and left it? I don't think so."

This rapid turnover of versions—and, sadly, major celebrities—did take its toll and mistakes could creep in. Barker explains, "I noticed I'd left a random bit of Photoshop on one version after it had been shared widely—an extra arm or something. I was desperate for someone else to die so I could correct it on the next version! Hence (BBC weatherman) Ian McCaskill getting an update so soon after he passed away!"

Even Barker isn't certain how many versions he produced between Nov. 9 and the final (to include Debbie Reynolds) on Dec. 28. It's also hard to say how many people saw or interacted with the image, with so many people sharing and reposting so many versions across so many channels. What isn't in doubt is that whenever Barker posted a new update the numbers snowballed exponentially. Just after Christmas, Barker's tweet containing the penultimate version

(to include Carrie Fisher) attracted 5.5 million impressions alone.

"When Carrie Fisher died, I remember tweeting, 'Is this actually happening?' I honestly thought the queen was going to die. I had a plan for if the queen died."

**Lesson: Consider how you might build upon a content idea to justify multiple repostings; maybe with a themed series or through regular updates.**

#### **There's nothing you can do that can't be done**

Barker soon realized that meme culture threatened to seize control of his content once it entered the badlands of social media—something many brands also struggle with. It wasn't long before other social media users began to create and share their own updates. "There were a lot of Harambes (the gorilla shot by a Cincinnati Zoo worker in May 2016). That wasn't really my thing. I wasn't really aware of it as a phenomenon. My younger colleague was very aware of it and kept needling me to do it. I think that encouraged me not to do it even more," he says.

Because he didn't want others to "make a hash of it," Barker committed himself to getting each update out quickly. "I felt that, to preserve the sanctity of it, I had to do the updates. As soon as someone died, I thought, 'I've got to do this before somebody else does,' which became a problem when I was away for a couple of days over Christmas. I said, 'Right, I'm going to leave the laptop at home. No one important will die.'

"Well, we were with the family. We had two cottages next door to each other and my mother-in-law had just gone off to bed. Then she came back, knocking on the window, with a pale face like she'd seen a ghost. She just mouthed, 'George Michael's died.' My mother said, 'Oh, for \*\*\*\*'s sake.'"

**Lesson: Social media audiences quickly take your content into their own hands if you don't respond or adapt quickly enough.**

#### **We hope you have enjoyed the show**

Barker did produce a 2017 edition, which also spawned multiple versions and attracted an impressive number of interactions. However, he hasn't decided yet whether there will be a 2018 edition.

Despite the extremely public nature of the image, the Sgt. Pepper's project remained personal. "I did include a French horn as a tribute to my friend Jim who died in 2016 and was a great French horn player. It was really nice to be able to include a little personal tribute in the middle of something that had become so public." ☺

### **CHOOSE YOUR OWN CONTENT MARKETING ADVENTURE**



*If you decide you investigate other ways to distribute your content, turn to page 46.*  
*If you choose to explore the mysterious realms of artificial intelligence, turn to page 42.*  
*If you want to read more by Jonathan Crossfield, go to <http://cmi.media/crossfield>.*

### **DEPARTMENT EDITOR**



**Jonathan Crossfield** is the chief consulting editor for CCO, and a writer, journalist and content marketing consultant. Follow him at @Kimota.



# COMICS: THE MOST POWERFUL MEDIUM YOU'RE NOT USING

Comics aren't just SMASH, WHAM, KAPOW! One of the oldest mediums is also one of the most powerful—and one of the most overlooked in content marketing. Yet some brands are working with top comics creators and publishers such as Marvel Comics.

*Jonathan Crossfield*

PAGE ONE -----

PANEL 1: Jonathan sits at an untidy desk, littered with marketing books and comics. On his Mac monitor is the head of Buddy Scalera. Buddy is having an animated Skype conversation, but Jonathan is addressing the reader.

1. BUDDY: There's something about comics that touches us on a very deep level. And I think that's because comics are such a participatory medium. When you read Wolverine, you read it with your voice. And when you read the sound effect, you make the sound effect. That's huge!
2. JONATHAN: By day, Buddy Scalera is a mild-mannered freelance content marketing consultant specializing in the pharmaceuticals industry.

PANEL 2: A surprised Buddy is now at his writing desk, transformed into an exaggerated vision of what people assume a comic book writer might look like.

3. CAPTION: But at night he switches to his other guise, no mask required, as a writer of comic books—from Deadpool to Richie Rich.
4. BUDDY: Wait, what just happened?

PANEL 3: Jonathan enters the left of the frame, holding up one of Buddy's books. Buddy looks even more frustrated and confused, getting up from the desk to leave.

6. JONATHAN: Buddy has also written six books on visual storytelling, so it's not surprising he sees comics as a massively underused format for content marketers.
7. BUDDY: If you're going to go all meta on me, I'm off!

OK, maybe writing this article as a comic script isn't such a great idea, even if prose is at a disadvantage when discussing such a visual medium. Buddy, you can come back now.

"The thing about comics is that it's a different medium and has different sticking power," he says.

Darren Sanchez, editor and project manager for Marvel Custom Solutions, agrees. "Comics are great because you can tell any kind of story to deliver a message or theme, and I believe content is best absorbed through story. In comics, you're limited only by your imagination. An effects-heavy space opera costs the same to produce as two people talking in a life raft. You can tell the story of a kid bitten by a radioactive spider or educate the public on what it's like to have inflammatory bowel disorder. The uses are endless and we enjoy the challenge of coming up with new ideas."

Yet the medium has become almost inextricably associated with a tiny handful of genres, perpetuating the idea that comics are merely escapist entertainment and definitely not something to be taken seriously, never mind professionally.

"Letting go of this idea that comics are the genre of superheroes is really important. Comics are a medium independent of the genre," says Scalera. "It's the people who are not familiar with comics who try to push them into a corner and say, 'Well, that's for kids,' or 'That's only superheroes.' But they're missing the point, which is: There is a richness to this type of visual storytelling that transcends cultures and time and can really get that call to action that you're looking for."

While these genres can help brands and marketers reach



## BRANDS HAVE USED COMICS IN A VARIETY OF WAYS OVER THE DECADES.



### The Google Chrome Comic (2008)

Rather than publicize the launch of Chrome with a traditional press release, Google opted to send a printed comic book to journalists and bloggers. Written and illustrated by Scott McCloud, based on interviews conducted with 20 Google engineers, the comic demystified the browser by explaining the technological concepts and features in a more digestible and engaging format.

(Because of its limited print run, the comic immediately became highly collectable and still commands high prices. In April 2018, a copy sold on eBay for \$1,100.)



### Arrow (1963-66)

In 1923, U.K. soap and toothpaste manufacturer D & W Gibbs Ltd. set up The Ivory Castle League to “encourage children from the earliest possible age to take an interest in their teeth and mouths.” Between 1963 and 1966, Gibbs Ivory Castle—with its advertising agency, Lintas—published 11 issues of Arrow, a high-quality, eight-page photogravure comic book of adventure and comedy strips, articles and competitions—with some subtle oral hygiene messaging thrown in. Available free from dentists across the U.K., the comic was a hit among children, becoming an incentive to attend regular checkups to grab the latest issue.



### TAM Airlines—Social Baggage (2014-16)

Until its merger with Chilean LAN Airlines in 2016, Brazil’s TAM Airlines published an in-flight magazine—TAM Nas Nuvens (In the Clouds). In 2014, TAM wanted to highlight some of the ways it gave back to the community with a regular feature. Content agency New Content decided big blocks of text about the brand could look boring or preachy in an otherwise highly visual magazine, so instead it used comics to tell the stories in a more engaging format. The two-page comic Bagagem Social (Social Baggage) ran in 21 issues of TAM Nas Nuvens, with tales such as how the airline once transported a heart to save a life or carried an athlete to the Paralympics. In 2015, the comic won the CMI Content Marketing Award for best regular feature column or section.

specific audiences or convey certain messages (read about pharmaceutical company Takeda's partnership with Marvel Custom on the right), comics are far more powerful and flexible than many people suspect.

But just because someone can write or draw reasonably well doesn't necessarily mean they can create a comic. "You don't want to leave a project like this to a person in the art department who has never produced a comic," says Scalera. "Why risk the reputation of your brand with poor quality work for some marginal savings? You wouldn't do that with any of your other content."

As Sanchez says, "Most of our clients encounter a learning curve of how comics are made. We work with them to get them up to speed pretty quickly.

"That being said, it is possible for smaller publishers to approach storytelling for a client in this way. It's a fantastic method to reach new consumers that wouldn't otherwise be susceptible to your message—if you can hit all the right beats!"

### Understanding Comics

In one of the few books to analyze comics as a medium and not as a genre, comics legend Will Eisner defined it as "sequential art." As Scott McCloud writes in his book *Understanding Comics*, probably the only other major work on the medium, single panel cartoons are "no more comics than (a) still of Humphrey Bogart is a film."

Comics aren't defined by a particular art style either, cartoony or otherwise. There are many examples of comics that use photographs, fully painted artwork, digital imaging or even collage. It's the sequence that matters—how one image follows the other to form a narrative in the mind of the reader.

Even text is optional, meaning comics can transcend language as well as literacy levels—which is why IKEA assembly instructions can guide anyone, anywhere through the process of putting together a bedside cabinet. "We are visual learners," says Scalera. "A picture can help somebody to understand what you want them to do, whereas prose requires an abstract to concrete translation that not everybody's going to be able to do. A prose novel will sometimes go on for pages and pages on setup that would take us a single splash page."

Instead of dismissing comics as not worthy or challenging enough for an adult readership, we marketers should embrace their ease and speed of comprehension as a strength. When we're tasked with getting our information, our message, our stories into someone else's imagination, surely the easiest route shouldn't be overlooked? [👉](#)

### CHOOSE YOUR OWN CONTENT MARKETING ADVENTURE ➡

*If you think your stories aren't "animated" enough for comics, turn to page 48.*

*If you want your content to hook your audience to the final frame, turn to page 20.*



## The Unbeatables

A superhero comic on the topic of inflammatory bowel disorder or IBD might seem an odd pairing, but *The Unbeatables* graphic novel and comic book series sprang naturally from in-depth interviews and focus groups with people living with and caring for those with IBD. "In these conversations, we noticed patterns emerging," explains Elissa Johnsen, head of global product and pipeline communications for Takeda Pharmaceuticals International Inc. "Patients saw the disease as a villain but didn't consider themselves victims. They admitted to feelings of helplessness and vulnerability but often didn't know where to turn. They wanted to connect with others going through similar experiences but didn't know them. They wanted an escape that could make them invincible."

Takeda partnered with Marvel Custom Solutions to create a graphic novel that reimagined the experiences of people living with IBD as a tale of heroism and empowerment. "The literature around this topic is not very interesting and the subject is difficult to talk about," says Darren Sanchez, editor and project manager for Marvel Custom Solutions. "We created a superhero team for them, all of whom either have the disease or are a part of the IBD community in some way. We featured characters that faced the same problems that real-life patients face every day and did it in a way that made them feel normalized and empowered."

Buddy Scalera, who scripted the first graphic novel, says, "They really wanted a character who was early 20s and just starting a career because, for a lot of people, this is when the flareups really become particularly noticeable."

Of course, *The Unbeatables* had to do more than simply entertain the right audience. "What (Takeda) wanted to do is communicate a few key messages," says Scalera. "Stay on treatment, communicate with your health care professional, participate in a community. Because, like a lot of health conditions, if you don't treat IBD, it will get progressively worse. People take drug holidays all the time."

Johnsen agrees. "Using superheroes and the world of graphic illustration allowed Takeda to help empower people living with IBD to overcome the unpredictability, anxiety and stigma around the disease and, in the process, raise disease awareness within the large audience interested in comics.

"We want to help patients believe that they can accomplish what they set their mind to—related to their care and in their daily lives—through differentiated, creative content and conversation."

The comics attracted a hugely positive response from people living with IBD as well as significant attention from broadcast, consumer and medical media. Johnsen realized the campaign was reaching the right audience and having the desired effect when she saw a tweet from a patient: "Finally my mutation makes me an acknowledged superhero. I love this."

As Johnsen says, "We realized that our goal of touching those living with IBD—a debilitating, painful, scary disease—with engaging content and motivational messages, had hit its mark."



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# What are your favorite personalization tools?



**DEMANDBASE**

**DEMANDBASE**

We use Demandbase's Engagement solution for website personalization and AI-based content recommendations; the platform intuitively delivers relevant content based on the visitor's previous online behavior, which increases engagement and accelerates the path to conversion for Blackline.com. By utilizing Demandbase, we have seen a three- to fourfold increase in average session time for visitors and in demo requests. With Demandbase we have quantitative, statistical proof that the work we're doing in digital marketing is impactful and influencing people, from the top of funnel all the way through the pipe to sales.

BRANDEE SANDERS, BLACKLINE, @BLACKLINE



**DRIFT**

Drift is my favorite personalization tool. Its LeadBot feature lets marketing teams capture and qualify leads in a matter of minutes, meaning you can focus on delivering the right message to the right person at the right time.

SHAYLA PRICE, HOSTGATOR, @SHAYLAPRICE



**DYNAMIC YIELD**

We use Dynamic Yield to personalize email experiences and automate email A/B testing. It has great email features, like product recommendations, and allows us to set up auto-trigger emails for different actions, such as product views and cart abandonment. Our team can manage the tool or pass it to our clients to run in-house. We have a new project where we are using Dynamic Yield's on-site recommendations and A/B testing, then using the data to increase conversions through emails. It is great to have a single login from which to leverage all this data. Also, with GDPR, it's good to know Dynamic Yield is compliant.

JOSH HAY, CHAMELEON COLLECTIVE, @JOSH818



**evergage**

**EVERGAGE**

For the past five years, I've been a huge fan of Evergage. Early on, it nailed a toolset that didn't require developers, IT or CMS customizations. Its technology easily overlays an existing site. And with that overlay, Evergage offers everything from mass A/B test and target to highly personalized messages that bring together customer data, behavioral data and more

BRENT TURNER, CRAMER, @BRENTRT

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JON LARSEN, PROCORE TECHNOLOGIES, @JONLARSEN002

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*If you decide to explore the mysterious realms of artificial intelligence, turn to page 42.*

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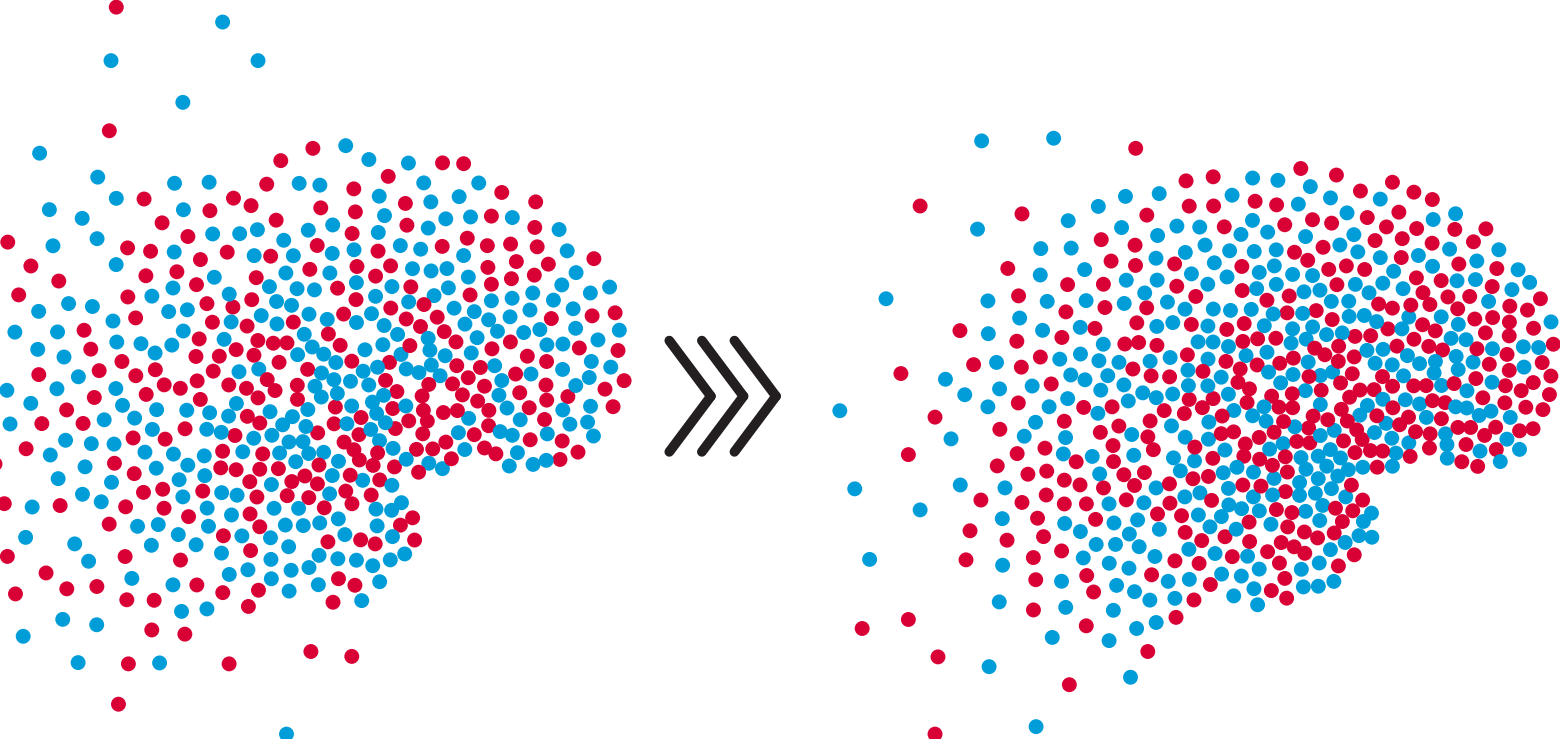
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# Artificial Intelligence Goes Mainstream

What are the most interesting, unusual and worthwhile applications of AI in marketing? Read on for a look at how machine learning and predictive analytics are reshaping the marketing landscape and what new tools marketers are piloting.

*Clare McDermott*

In its widely talked about State of Marketing Report, Salesforce reports just over half (51 percent) of marketers are using AI in one form or another, while another quarter plan to test it over the next two years. A smaller study of over 500 search, content and digital marketers by BrightEdge found just 4 percent have implemented AI (that's not a typo).

Who's right? Salesforce, which reports one in two marketers is using AI or BrightEdge, which puts the number at one in 25?

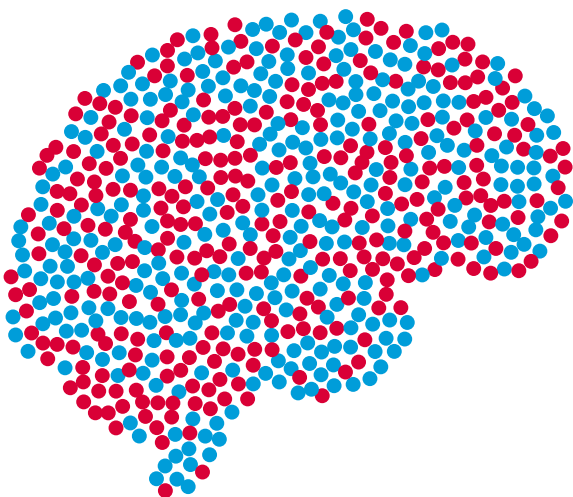
The answer may be “neither.” That's because many marketers (and business leaders as a whole) are confused about which technologies are genuinely AI-powered and which simply rely on advanced algorithms and analytics. As Luis Perez-Breva, head of MIT's Innovation Teams Program and research scientist at MIT School of Engineering, explains, “Most of what the retail industry refers to as artificial intelligence isn't AI.” He says many “confuse analyzing large amounts of data and profiling customers for artificial intelligence. Throwing data at machines doesn't make machines (or anyone) smarter.”

Rather, AI's promise is what is often called *relevance at scale*. It's the ability of machines to crunch massive datasets and data lakes—structured and unstructured data—and optimize decision-making in a way that algorithm-enabled humans cannot achieve. Perhaps most importantly, in an AI-enabled system the machine learns and improves without human input.

Rather than ask, “How many marketers are using AI?,” the more apt question may

***“Throwing data at machines doesn't make machines (or anyone) smarter.”***

**—Luis Perez-Breva, head of the MIT Innovation Teams Program and research scientist at the MIT School of Engineering**



*One study says more than half of marketers are using AI, while another claims just 4 percent have adopted it. Which is it? Possibly neither.*

be, “What are you doing with it?” Let’s examine some of the ways companies are using AI-led initiatives to make the most of its promise.

## PERSONALIZATION

Marketers have long practiced personalization in content marketing, developing over time more sophisticated ways of personalizing the customer journey—whether through marketing automation and progressive profiling or using programmatic advertising to support our content path. The idea is that as we learn more about our customer or prospect and fill in information about that person’s needs, budgets and interests, we can create unique, personalized experiences that educate and delight them.

Now we are entering the era of hyper-personalization: the ability to personalize not just by persona, profile or the trail of breadcrumbs people leave on your site but by a massive set of user details and signals, analyzed and made actionable by machines.

The retail industry is the most talked about application of AI-led personalization, but most examples you’ll read about don’t *really* fit the definition of AI ... they’re just *really good personalization*.

The examples that seem to cross over—from algorithm-driven personalization to AI-driven personalization—are those in which the AI sifts through data from multiple channels and sources, learning which signals matter in which circumstances and evolving its approach over time. The key variables that influence how one customer interacts with your brand may be completely different from the variables that define another, multiplied millions of times across each person, each channel and each step of the process—and changing constantly.

## VOICE-SEARCHABLE ENTERTAINMENT AND EDUCATION

A less common but exciting application for AI-enriched content? Virtual assistants. Alexa (Amazon) offers developers the chance to build “skills” on its platform. Alexa Skills help customers answer questions, gather information

## PERSONALIZATION: WHAT’S AI AND WHAT’S NOT?

**Really good personalization** means collecting lots of data about individual buyers—regardless of channel—knitted together in such a way that the content you serve is highly personalized to their needs (or even anticipates them). It’s based on automation and algorithms.

**AI-led personalization** is the ability to (1) find patterns and insights in massive data sets—both owned and not—in a way algorithms can’t approximate, and (2) use those insights to create customized experiences for every person and at every step of the journey—from the content seen online to the experience in the store. And AI-led personalization means the machine learns and improves over time, refining accuracy without human intervention.

and even control internet-enabled devices and appliances. (To be fair, there’s disagreement about whether Alexa is an AI technology or just an advanced natural language technology—another nod to the problem of assessing AI adoption.)

Companies far and wide are racing to launch Alexa Skills—both to inform and delight customers as well as to test out the channel’s promise. (See sidebar on page 44 for some examples.)

For content marketers, there are interesting opportunities to deliver education and entertainment via voice-enabled search. Beauty brand Wunder2 was the first in its segment to launch an Amazon Alexa Skill. The company offers a daily beauty tip via Skills, from how to thicken the appearance of your brows to how to achieve healthier looking hair. As one reviewer explained, “It’s very cool when I can get the latest beauty tips while having my hands free to apply my makeup.”

Wunder2 co-founder and CEO Michael Malinsky told Forbes, “As a business, we are fascinated with the rapid integration of AI into people’s lives. We think the level of adoption will exceed many people’s expectation and create fluid recommendation experiences using AI technology found in Google Home, Alexa and the recently launched Apple HomePod. It is something we are absolutely developing already.”

## EMAIL ON STEROIDS

For marketers, AI-enabled decision-making for customizing and delivering email (i.e. dynamic emails) could be a game-changer.

Once upon a time, marketers would ask, “What’s the best time of day to send out our email newsletter?” Through trial and error, marketers discovered that certain days and times yielded higher open rates *on average*.

AI, however, allows marketers to send out emails based on the open histories of individual users (or people like him/her in the absence of better data). And no longer will marketers send promotions to huge swaths of their audience. Instead, promotions will be designed uniquely for prospects based on a wide range of signals, from cart abandonment in retail to which

times of day an individual is most likely to sign up for a conference. Finally, AI will enable much more customized and nuanced customer journeys. That leads to our next AI application—one which is too often misunderstood.

## ROBO-WRITERS

Long decried as evidence that AI will herald in a new soulless age, machine-made content is one of the most controversial applications of AI ... but under the right circumstances, it may be the most pro-creative. Let me explain.

As machine-made content becomes better at approximating human language, there’s a clear case for its use in content marketing. Not all content generated by marketing needs to be highly creative and witty, after all. Many organizations are already using machine-generated content, such as Edmunds generating vehicle profiles based on manufacturer data and Homesnap publishing community profiles based on publicly available data. The best applications are those in which there’s a need to publish at scale and the content is somewhat “modular” or easily put together from pieces and parts.

And if you’re not convinced, perhaps this will change your tune. Even The Washington Post uses machine-generated content. According to Digiday, as of September 2017, the paper’s robot writer (a solution from Heliograph) had published 850 articles.

The key is in how you pair the robot to the writing. For The Washington Post, Heliograph generated articles about local political races, where the paper didn’t have the resources to assign reporters but had data to fill in the story. It also published short summaries about the Olympics in Rio via machine. (The paper reports four employees previously took 25 hours to collect, analyze and report on a small portion of local election results. Using Heliograph, The Washington Post created more than 500 articles generating 500,000 views.)

And therein lies the most powerful promise of AI: to release marketers from the mundane to instead focus on more creative and fulfilling efforts. Marvin Chow, vice president of global marketing at Google, writes that artificial intelligence and machine learning “will spark new ideas and push the boundaries of creativity. With new tools, what will makers, artists and musicians design? And how will that affect the marketing world we work in?” The full vision is still out of reach but early signs point to a machine-led period of creative efficiency. ☞

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**Clare McDermott** is co-founder and head of research at Mantis Research. Follow her @clare\_mcd.

## AMAZON ALEXA SKILLS: A NEW CHANNEL TO DELIVER CONTENT EXPERIENCES

Alexa is best known as the voice behind Amazon Echo (“Alexa, what’s the forecast for today?”), but Amazon is slowly building up its library of Alexa Skills—the chunks of information, education and experiences, mostly supplied by third-party developers. The most obvious applications are internet-enabled devices (“Alexa, turn on my TV”), but there are fascinating applications for content marketers as well.

**Entertainment:** Content-rich brands are delivering entertainment and information via Alexa Skills. Disney’s Character of the Day Skill introduces a new character each day from Disney, Pixar, Marvel and Star Wars. Or you could try out Cat Translator to understand the “why” behind weird cat behavior.

**Real-time news:** Media companies have been among the first to offer content snippets via Alexa Skills. If you enable the NPR News Hour Skill, for example, you’ll have access to a five-minute news summary, refreshed every hour. Big brands are quickly jumping in too. J.P. Morgan customers can access investment news: “Send me the latest research report from Joyce Chang” or “Send me the tear sheet for eBay.”

**Customer service and engagement:** Global consumer brands are enabling e-commerce, customer service and analytics using Alexa Skills. The Capital One Skill lets you ask Alexa, “How much did I spend at Target last month?” or “When is my mortgage payment due?”

## CHOOSE YOUR OWN CONTENT MARKETING ADVENTURE



*If you decide your content still needs a more ‘human’ flavor,  
turn to page 54.*

*If you want a comprehensive guide to applying AI in marketing, go to  
<http://cmi.media/AIguide>*

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# Content Distribution Inside the Box

To distribute their content, marketers typically look outside the box, focusing on how to spread the word as quickly and as far and wide as possible. But what if they're overlooking one of the most highly effective channels in their own backyard with a direct line to a primed audience—their sales teams? Time to think inside the box.

*Susan Hartman*

**I**n a recent planning meeting with a client, I was surprised to hear the sales manager complain to the marketing manager that she didn't think they were producing much in the way of good content that her sales team could use. In fact, she argued that a major focus for the new year should be producing better quality content.

I had recently worked with the marketing team on creating some amazing content in support of a product launch, designed to be distributed to target audiences, end users and prospects. Where did all those assets go? What happened to all those hours of creativity, insightful research and brilliant strategic focus? More to the point, why were the sales teams unaware these quality assets were available and waiting to be shared?

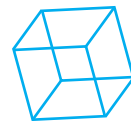
Turns out this issue is common in many organizations, potentially feeding the rift between marketing and sales. Marketing teams apply laser focus to the message, audience and buying cycle, but, when pushing content for distribution, barely consider their internal sales teams.

It reminded me of the experience I had while working on a global marketing team in a Fortune 500 company. We had fine-tuned the product message, developed dynamic examples and graphics, and published engaging new assets for the launch. Only when sales management caught wind of the new release did we realize the launch notice had not been given to their sales teams. Suddenly, we were playing catch up.

It was a hard lesson when our content survey later told us that less than half of what we developed was being utilized and distributed by the sales team.

## How did we correct this?

The biggest change we made was to throw open the doors and invite the sales team to the table during the planning and strategy of our next campaign. This became a best practice in our team and was



***Marketing teams apply laser focus to the message, audience and buying cycle, but, when pushing content for distribution, barely consider their internal sales teams.***



adopted by other marketing groups within the company. These discussions led to the realization that several process gaps impeded the alignment between our teams.

We determined three major areas should be addressed: communication between the teams; delivery of relevant, useful content sought after by customers; and ease of access for the sales team to put its hands on that content when needed.

**Communication, collaboration and consistency**

Our first order of business was to set regular meetings across teams and get them engaged.

Many teams these days are distributed across the country or the globe, so we worked with online calendaring tools and web-based conferencing to manage the ongoing discussions. We also shared information across an intranet system that notified the sales team of planned releases, updates, launches and content recently added to the central digital asset management site. These discussions kept the dialogue going and ensured the right content was being used at the right time.

**Accessibility: bringing the content closer to sales**

A 2015 report on sales productivity by Docurated noted that sales reps can spend 31 percent of their time looking for the content they need. As a director of marketing the solution was simple—content clearly communicated and easily found is content most utilized. We used the systems on hand, only adding a few new tools to link the content into the process. It kept the process inside the box and eliminated the need for retraining.

Centrally accessed systems work best—Dropbox, file shares, DAM, home-grown intranets. If there is a single location for all sourced content, then less time is spent searching and more time spent distributing.

Most CRMs also have a link to or offer a content repository, making it possible to tie content assets directly to the management of accounts, which can be even more convenient for sales teams. Working with Salesforce in my previous company, we found the connection between our content repository and the CRM made for a natural delivery of early-to mid-stage material. If you have the technology, make sure you can track the use of the content. If not, then go out and get it.

**Which content works best and why?**

For the most part, early-stage content is needed most by the sales team and should be highly engaging information that

helps the sales team differentiate the organization.

According to Mary Byrne, chief operating officer for Personal Black Box Co. in New York City: “Most important is to keep things short, sweet and very engaging. Once something is highly tangible, it goes viral in the sales team. And be sure it’s mobile friendly.” She monitors which content the salespeople gravitate to and what they are sharing to get an insight into the most effective ways to deliver their message.

In my experience, the most requested materials are e-guides (visual and interactive web-based files, less text intensive), case studies and blogs—all complemented by a set of social posts to drive traffic. My client’s metrics reveal the consumption of these assets has increased as much as a 100 percent as a result of internal distribution of content. This in part is tied to the regular cadence of publishing, but also due to the sources tapped within the organization as subject matter experts.

**Look inside the box to find content enlightenment**

As CMOs and heads of marketing are tied closely to the revenue of a business, it’s critical for marketing teams to align with sales to focus on the same. Measurements are no longer just leads and opportunities, likes and shares but also conversion rates on those leads, ROI for marketing spend and consumption rates for the content. It’s worth taking the time to investigate the inner workings of what happens to content inside your organization—in particular, how sales engage with it, making that team the first order of priority before sharing with the audience.

You may find the simple act of opening those lines of communication can develop a world of new opportunities in your marketing plans. ∞

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**Susan Hartman** is a former director of global marketing at Fortune 500 company Schneider Electric and works as a marketing consultant based in New England. Follow Susan at @SailingWoman100.

**CHOOSE YOUR OWN CONTENT MARKETING ADVENTURE** ➡➡➡

*If you think greater personalization could also help to distribute your content, turn to page 40.*

*If you decide to follow the trail of angry unsolicited letters instead, turn to page 54.*



# ‘Stay Scrappy’ and More Wisdom on Creativity From a Pixar Animator

In his closing keynote at the 2018 Intelligent Content Conference, and in our subsequent interview, animator **Andrew Gordon** encouraged marketing professionals to do what the teams at **Pixar** do: Build a culture of creativity.

*Marcia Riefer Johnston*

**W**ant to spark innovation, influence perceptions and inspire people to believe in your organization’s values and brand? Take some tips from 20-year Pixar Animation Studios animator—and recent winner of the Brand Personality Award in Animation from The Asia Pacific Brands Foundation—Andrew Gordon.

What does the co-creator of such movies as *Finding Nemo*, *Monsters Inc.*, *The Incredibles* and *Toy Story 3* have to say to marketers? Plenty. As an expert on character and story—and as a consultant to companies around the world, including Salesforce, Pinterest, Deloitte and Softbank—Gordon knows that stories matter, not just in movies but in business.

## **How do businesses unwittingly sabotage the creative process?**

If you’re building a culture of creativity, people need to speak freely. Any organization can quickly get corporate—a little stiff. People hold meetings for meetings’ sake. Candor is missing in the room. These are problems. You have to break that up.

One of the founders of IDEO, Tom Kelley, has said that innovation depends on a willingness to conquer the fear of the “messy unknown.” That’s why you’re more likely to see creativity in places that have that startup vibe.

**How do you keep that startup mentality?** You want to stay scrappy, hungry for the next thing, feeling that it’s OK to try things and fail as a way to arrive at a better idea.

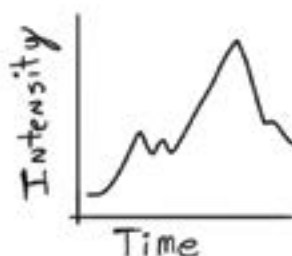
In its early days, Pixar was a ratty, grungy place. I loved it. It was what I thought a cartoon studio should be. People played pranks on each other. Everybody’s office was customized. I sat under this big top tent where we had a train going through so we could deliver cookies to each other.

When Pixar moved from its original scrappy office to the Emeryville (Calif.) offices in 2000, our workplace was suddenly a place where we were afraid to scuff up the floors. The building was very pretty. Many wanted to keep that startup feel, so we pushed on the culture.

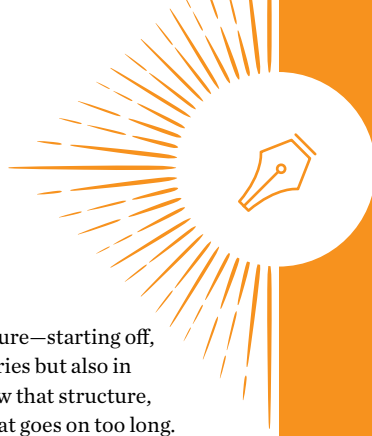
For example, I found a hatch in my office wall that led into an air-conditioning vent, which ended in a strange unused space. I decorated it and started serving drinks in there. I called it the Love Lounge and sent out invitations. I thought I might get fired, but the opposite happened: I got to meet a lot of people. Steve Jobs spoke about this space in his biography, saying that it reminded him of a place he used to hang out at Reed College, but without the acid.

When I moved into another Pixar office I built another secret space, which I called the Lucky Seven Lounge. The idea was how far could I push things. What could I get away with? That was the spirit of Pixar. It’s part of what accounted for us feeling creative and in a relaxed environment.

**What makes a story good—or bad?** Many stories have the same basic structure that has worked for thousands of years around campfires or on cave walls. (Gordon picks up a pencil and makes this sketch.)







Sometimes called a story spine, that structure—starting off, building, going down—is not only in most stories but also in most sequences and scenes. If you don't follow that structure, you may be telling a boring story or a story that goes on too long.

Tolstoy said that great literature comes down to two stories: a person goes on a journey or a stranger comes to town. What does that mean? A person going on a journey is a story of someone changing or learning. A stranger coming to town is about someone who changes the world around them.

Bad stories have predictable endings. Good stories end with a satisfying surprise. A great story ends with a satisfying surprise and conveys universal truth: Money doesn't buy happiness. Everyone wants love and acceptance. The people closest to you can hurt you the most.

But don't spell out your message. Allow people to figure it out. As (Pixar director) Andrew Stanton has said, "Don't give the audience four. Give them two plus two."

**What processes result in stories that work in business?** Creating stories is a messy process. You have to research a lot, collaborate a lot, mess up a lot. You go around foggy corners. You think you're going down one road when you discover a better one. Businesses are rarely willing to put in the effort needed to beat the heck out of the story. It's expensive.

Most businesses undervalue feedback, candor, failure and iteration. Stories are not good in the beginning. At Pixar, they know that. At some point in every project there would be a crisis—a point at which the whole thing gets stopped. You have to expect these things. They called it "trusting the process."

And you have to keep your egos out of the process. A favorite saying of the Pixar story team sums this up: "Story, no glory." I loved that saying. It means so many things on so many levels.

#### **When do you build on a story idea and when do you start over?**

At Pixar, they often ask, "How can we plus it?" You want to build on people's ideas. Plussing is a huge thing, like the "yes and" approach in improvisational theatre. It makes a mediocre idea better.

Sometimes, though, you need to set an idea aside. (Pixar founder) Ed Catmull said that creative people sometimes hold on to an idea that they need to blow up. For example, they might want to keep a scene that got a laugh in a screening even if that scene isn't right for the story. You have to be willing to let go of something great for something that fits your story.

**Where can people find inspiration for creative work?** I get ideas when I'm out and about. I go to shows. I go to museums. I people-watch. My family inspires me. A lot of ideas happen when I'm sitting on a bus or in a plane or in the car. I'm also a diver. I like to see microcosms and pretend that I've discovered some little city where something is happening.

One of the directors at Pixar says that you have to live life to create stories. You can't just be on YouTube or your phone all the time.

In a business environment, creativity has to come from the top. You have to have somebody in place who encourages it. During my

## **START WITH A PREMISE**

Start your story-making process not with a big message but with a simple premise: a what-if. Pixar examples: What if toys were alive when you didn't see them? What if monsters needed children's screams to power their world?

## **CREATE A LOGLINE**

A logline or controlling idea is a 25-word (or so) statement that includes four major elements: the main character, the conflict, the way the character changes by overcoming something, a hint of the character's world.

For example:

- "A young woman comes into her own after surviving the affronts of her emotionally abusive boss in the superficial world of high fashion." (The Devil Wears Prada)
- "A spirited farm boy joins rebel forces to save a princess from evil forces and to save the galaxy from the planet-destroying space station." (Star Wars)

After working with Andrew Gordon, the cloud-computing company Salesforce now loglines each project, distilling the controlling idea to about 25 words.

As you develop a project, your logline helps you remember what you are after. It's brief and clear. That's important because when you create stories, you often get lost.

## **GIVE YOUR STORY A STRUCTURE**

There are many types of structures, usually following the same basic story spine (as illustrated above): the character getting into conflict, the climax of that conflict, the low point, the recovery.

You can distill those story basics to seven steps:

- Once upon a time ...
- And every day ...
- Until one day...
- And because of this ...
- And because of this ...
- Until finally ...
- And since that day ...

That's a story structure that anybody could use to hang a story on. For kids, you might add, "The moral of the story is ...," but by the end, the theme should come out naturally.

A lot of companies Gordon has worked with use this framework when plotting their stories so they know they're hitting the big beats. It might be for a pitch. It might be for the way human resources onboards people. It might be for the way call-center employees handle a call.

You don't have to include all seven steps. In marketing content you might need only three. A commercial, for example, might have a hook, a build and a resolution. There are a lot of story structures. Look for one that works for you. "These are tools, not rules," says Gordon.

time at Pixar, it was (chief creative officer) John Lasseter.


And everybody has to be working toward the same goal. At Pixar, I always felt that we shared a rebel mentality: “Let’s do something that nobody has done.”

**How do you keep ideas flowing freely?** The saying was “suck early and suck often.” The sooner you get the bad ideas out, the sooner the good ones start to emerge.

Surround yourself with A players and create the space for everyone to give honest feedback. Encourage people to speak openly and respectfully about what worked and what didn’t. Deliver criticism constructively. Ask questions. Keep it brief. Be prepared to be wrong.

At the studio I was at in London, when I was in dailies (feedback meetings), people sometimes didn’t want to give notes because I was the guy from Pixar. All they need is an invitation to talk. You have to allow for that. Then they have genius ideas.

**How do you transfer storytelling skills to new technologies?**

It’s less about the technology than about trying to answer the question of why you’re telling this story. What is it really about? Start there, with a strong theme or with a great premise. You just know by the premise if it’s a good idea, something with potential. 

**Andrew Gordon**, part of Pixar’s animation team for 20 years, has brought creativity to corporate clients around the world, including Salesforce, Pinterest, Deloitte and IDEO. He is currently a co-director on a major motion picture in Paris. Follow him @SplineDoctor.

**Marcia Riefer Johnston**, author of Word Up! How to Write Sentences and Paragraphs (And Everything You Build from Them), plays with words at Writing.Rocks and collects kindness stories from around the world at kindness-map.com.

#### CHOOSE YOUR OWN CONTENT MARKETING ADVENTURE

*If you choose to ditch the same old practices in favor of a more creative alternative, turn to page 8.*

*If you decide to improve your creative storytelling skills, go to <http://cmi.media/storytelling>.*

*If you would rather explore the power of images in social media, turn to page 34.*



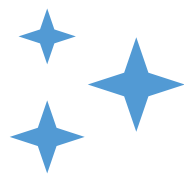
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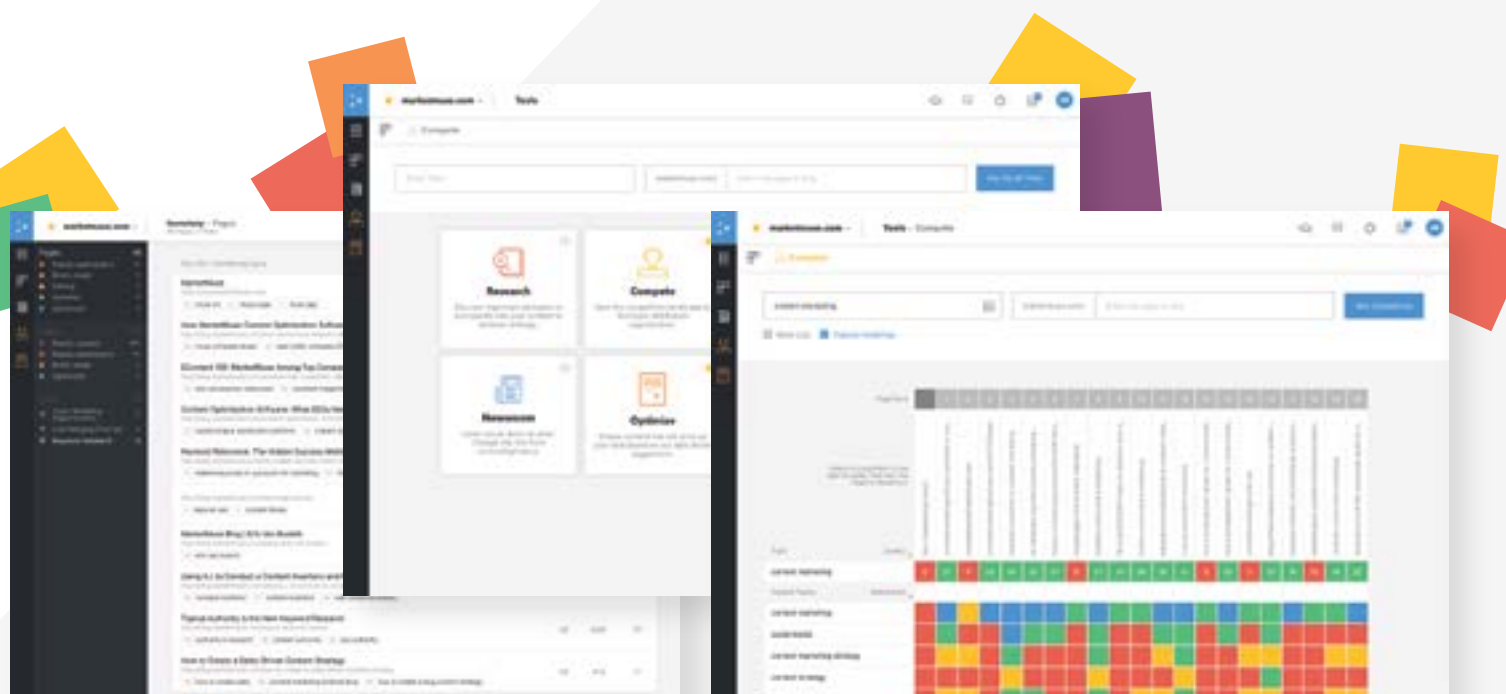
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## McDonald's Spills The Sauce

Fans of the Cartoon Network show Rick and Morty know the story: last year, an episode of the series referenced a limited-edition Szechuan sauce made by **McDonald's** in 1998 to promote the movie *Mulan*. McDonald's decided to capitalize on the moment by re-releasing limited quantities of the sauce. It was a fiasco (an intentional one, some speculate). Supplies were *too* limited and, at some stores, fans fought and rioted. Many fans took to social media to voice their anger and disappointment.

The Sauce is a three-part investigative podcast produced by **Studio@Gizmodo** and **Onion Labs** in partnership with McDonald's that tells the story of those 2017 events. According to the company, the podcast is a way to acknowledge and apologize for the mistake in a transparent and creative way.

Given the subject matter and McDonald's involvement in the production, "investigative" is a term best used loosely. The tone is lighthearted and the podcast never refers to Rick and Morty by name. The podcast was released as another 20 million packets of Szechuan sauce hit McDonald's stores. It's content about a sauce promotion designed to promote more sauce. If you're looking for a serious exploration of the dark side of fandom, look elsewhere. But if you're in the mood for a fun (albeit one-sided) take on a pop culture moment, The Sauce hits the spot.

## ALLURE & COVERGIRL INCUBATE INFLUENCERS



Beauty influencers work hard for their social media superstar status, creating elaborate makeup looks for Instagram and recording detailed YouTube tutorials. **Allure** magazine wanted to showcase these influencers and their skills—creating some captivating, instructive content in the process.

Allure Incubator is a competitive reality series produced by the beauty magazine in collaboration with cosmetics company **COVERGIRL**. Hosted by model Jasmine Sanders, Allure created the online video series to "discover the next big star of the beauty world." The winner of Allure Incubator received a contract to become a member of COVERGIRL Collective, the brand's elite group of influencers.

Five aspiring beauty influencers were brought to Los Angeles to compete in six challenges—including bold eyebrows, flawless selfie skin and a classic smoky eye—released as 12- to 14-minute episodes on the Allure website. Allure served up the episodes with related articles such as 10 Times Celebs Completely Nailed the Iconic Smoky Eye.





## BULOVA LAUNCHES TUNE OF TIME

How do some of today's most promising musicians spend their time? **Bulova's** short-form video series *Tune of Time*, created with **Universal Music Group**, explores how these artists create and perform music in pursuit of their dreams. The time theme is a natural fit for the luxury watchmakers; while, on the music front, Bulova has a history of partnering with organizations including the Recording Academy and GRAMMY Museum. The emerging artists profiled in the series include ZZ Ward, Calum Scott and Matt Hunter. GRAMMY award-winning musician Nile Rodgers, co-founder of '70s disco group Chic, serves as a mentor to guide the young artists through their creative journey.

## CHARLES SCHWAB WANTS YOU TO OWN YOUR TOMORROW

Financial services firm **Charles Schwab** is telling inspiring stories of people who have taken control of their future—reflecting a sentiment at the heart of financial planning. Told in partnership with video platform **Vimeo**, the stories are presented in several series of videos that answer a question such as *Why This Road?* and *Why Not Now?* With no mention of Charles Schwab, the stories tug at the heartstrings instead of presenting facts about the importance of financial planning. One of the videos centers on a man who treaded water for 20 hours while lost at sea on a fishing trip. Other videos introduce viewers to a woman who started to race motorcycles at age 65 and a blind woman who won 221 swimming medals after her doctor advised her to lose weight.



## GETTING CHEESY WITH CHEETOS

"Everything looks better in **Cheetos**." At least, that's the premise of Cheetos Vision, an artificial intelligence camera app launched by **PepsiCo Inc.**, the makers of the crunchy orange snacks. Take a photo or video, and Cheetos Vision transforms the image into Cheetos. Users of the app are encouraged to share their creations using the hashtag #cheetosvision. A cheesy marketing stunt? Sure, but one that's on brand for a company known for its wacky content.

### CHOOSE YOUR OWN CONTENT MARKETING ADVENTURE



*If you want to experiment with a different visual content medium, turn to page 36.*

*If you would rather ditch the same old best practices everyone else uses and find a more creative approach, turn to page 8.*

### DEPARTMENT EDITOR



**Natalya Minkovsky** is a content strategist who lives and works in Washington, D.C. Follow her at @hejhejnatalya.

*You didn't ask for it, but we're  
dishing it out anyway.*

This month, Andrew serves up unsolicited advice to **Diego Scotti** of **Verizon** on finding the human within a brand.

**Diego Scotti**  
Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer  
Verizon

Dear Mr. Scotti,

Have you considered leveraging your people to power your brand?

I love your new Humanability campaign. I get it; you're trying to show the world that you're more than just a wireless network. You're making the world a better place. I appreciate that. I do.

But have you seen what John Legere at T-Mobile is doing? Besides wooing over a million customers from Verizon, Sprint and AT&T every quarter (for 19 straight quarters), he's attached a person to the brand and is killing it. You have no idea what you're missing if you haven't tuned into John's Slow Cooker Sunday show on Facebook. (Notice how I refer to the CEO of your competition by his first name? I don't even know your CEO's name and I was a customer for 16 years.)

Look, social interaction drives social media.

A social interaction relies on an interpersonal relationship between two or more people that may range from fleeting to enduring. It's not possible to have a social interaction with a brand. It's incredibly inauthentic. No matter how much I love Verizon, the notion that I can have a meaningful "interpersonal relationship" with a brand is idiotic.

But I can have a relationship—a deep, meaningful relationship—with a person from a brand because of social media. Over the past year, I've built an authentic, personal relationship with the CEO of T-Mobile and I'm now one of those Verizon defectors. I'm a T-Mobile customer.

The future of all branding is people-powered. Is it just me that sees the irony in running a campaign called Humanability without making the Verizon brand more human, more social, more accessible and more authentic?

Online social interaction leads to offline action.

Here's the deal: If you embrace the authentic potential of a people-powered brand, my wife (who's still a Verizon customer) might not defect. But if I keep sending her John's amazing T-Mobile videos, I guarantee she'll switch. John's charisma is wearing her down.

What do you say? Why don't you tap into the power of the personal brands that built your business?

Whether you wanted it or not,  
Andrew Davis

#### DEPARTMENT COLUMNIST



**Andrew Davis** is the author of *Brandscaping: Unleashing the Power of Partnerships*. Follow him at @DrewDavisHere.

#### CHOOSE YOUR OWN CONTENT MARKETING ADVENTURE ➡

*Here be dragons! Defeat the fabled Ice Dragon of Drew to complete your mission. Roll a die.*

*1-2 = You're flambé! Turn to page 3 to start your mission again.*

*3-4 = The Ice Dragon of Drew traps you forever in its lair. You pass the time reading every article by Andrew Davis at <http://cmi.media/andrewdavis>.*

*5-6 = You slay the dragon! Start your next adventure by turning to page 25.*



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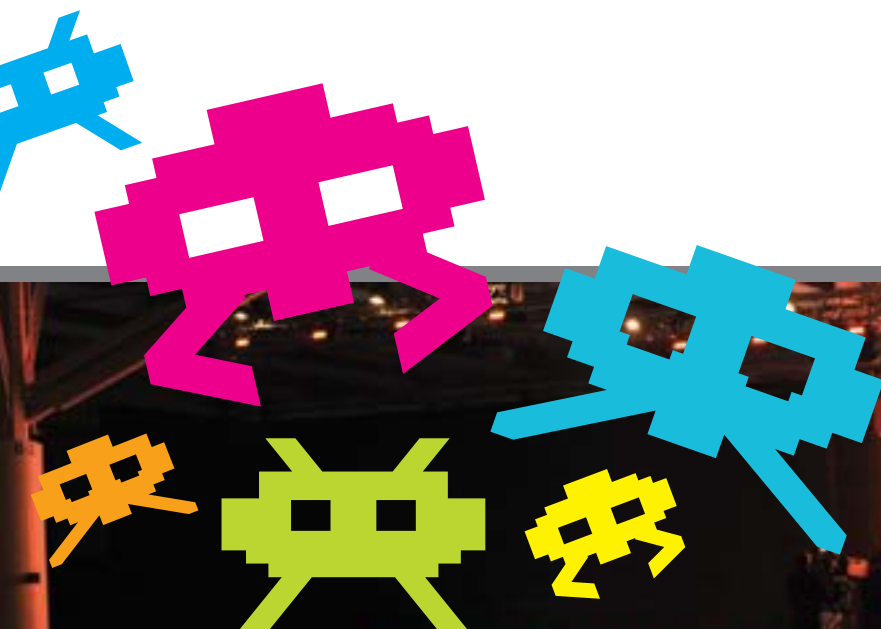


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