

90%

*Proportion of consumers that find custom content useful*

Source: CMO Council Content ROI Center

THINK QUARTERLY

COLOURS

LOOKING AT ART / GUARDARE L'ARTE

35%

*Proportion of UK B2C marketers using print magazines for content marketing (compared with 37% in North America).*

Source: Content Marketing Institute

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# POWER OF CONTENT

Consumers are in control: they don't have to pay attention to you. So how do you stand any chance of making them bite – and ultimately buy – your product or service? For many companies, the answer lies in content; while the committed few are finding success in corporate publishing.

**Take any minute of the day:** during those 60 seconds, YouTube users will upload 72 hours of new video; Twitter users will tweet 277,000 times and Facebook users will share 2.4 million pieces of content. Every minute of every day. Unsurprisingly, marketers want a slice of the action and content marketing budgets are on the up. But as more people switch on to the power of content, they are also realising they need to become more serious about what such a scenario entails.

Having a proper strategy to start with would help. And according to the US-based Content Marketing Institute (CMI), very few companies take such a formal approach to content: only 33 per cent of B2C content marketers in North America and 42 per cent in the UK have a documented plan.

CMI founder Joe Pulizzi says that too many companies are flooding Facebook, Vine and Pinterest just because they think they should – and that if you took away the branding and navigation for many “top tips” blog posts, companies would not even recognise their own work.

“Many companies feel like they have to boil the ocean with their content; they

spread themselves too thin.... We'll see more moving towards focusing on one or two channels that they can do really well,” says Pulizzi. Given that so much content is shared every day, the danger of poorly produced or unfocused material will very quickly be swallowed up and washed away in the tidal wave.

And although he argues that choosing your distribution channel should come last – after you've asked yourself questions about who your audience is, what you want to influence them to do and what (credible) stories you're going to tell them about – print is one way in which a brand can show just how serious it is.

**Magazine moments**

There is a lot of research that highlights why magazines continue to be popular with readers and advertisers alike. Guy Consterdine, research consultant at worldwide magazine media association FIPP, says: “The characteristics and power of magazines are global.”

In 2012, FIPP pulled together various surveys in its Proof of Performance report,



*Corporate publishing allows companies to “tell, instead of sell” or, as the Content Marketing Association puts it, “to sell without the obvious sell”*

showing that ad recall in magazines was high (50%+), as was readership (five hours per week in the Czech Republic, for example). A subsequent analysis, published in 2014, of 29,000 ads in 805 tablet issues found this to still be the case: the average level of audience recall for tablet and print magazine ads remained at 52 per cent. The report also detailed the main reasons people give for reading magazines: for inspiration, learning and relaxation and because the content suited their tastes. If a brand can tap into these motivations by providing relevant content, it stands a good chance of being read.

According to research from London-based content marketing agency Seven, while 66 per cent of consumers tolerate advertising, 57 per cent feel more positive about brands that generate content for “people like me”. That sentiment is even stronger in the US: 90 per cent of Americans find custom content useful, and custom content makes 78 per cent of consumers feel that the organisation providing it cares about building a good relationship with them, according to the CMO Council. Seven’s research also found that customer magazines fell into their top three preferences for receiving brand messages – after magazines and newspaper, and outdoor ads.

**Branded journalism**

Corporate publishing allows companies to “tell, instead of sell” or, as the Content Marketing Association puts it, “to sell without the obvious sell”. Importantly, it gives brands the opportunity to position themselves as the expert.

Ebele Wybenga, founder of Editorial Embassy Amsterdam and author of *The Editorial Age*, has spotted the move towards quality branded journalism. He argues that the level of credibility this generates, when targeted at a very specific, and often international, audience, means the magazines often end up being displayed on the coffee table or kept for reference.

He highlights United Colors of Benetton’s quarterly magazine, *Colors*, as “one of the best magazines in the world”. This publication reinforces one of Benetton’s key brand values – that diversity is good – by looking at social issues around the world, in six different editions (Chinese/English, French/English, Italian/English, Korean/English, Portuguese/English and Spanish/English).

This type of magazine can also be used to make a brand’s core fan-base feel special – or part of an exclusive club. Google pursued this with its *Think Quarterly* publication, the content from which was posted online for everyone to

**91%**

*Proportion of US adults who read magazines.*

Source: Association of Magazine Media

read. Business contacts, however, received a personalised print copy of the magazine.

“You couldn’t buy it, you couldn’t order it; receiving it really was a status symbol,” says Wybenga.

Several fashion and lifestyle brands take a similar – if not quite so exclusive – approach. UK online retailer Asos, for example, has a magazine it sends out to “premier” members, who pay less than £10 a year for the privilege.

And these types of brands are well suited to corporate publishing because it can reflect the kind of magazines the audience tends to buy. In 2012, Net-a-Porter launched a new bi-monthly magazine, *Porter*, delivered to subscribers in 60 countries – and one of the reasons it gave was that its consumers were already heavy magazine readers, reading four or five each month. It has since grown to a subscriber base of 152,000 with further downloads via the Apple app store.

Wybenga, however, warns that brands should not hide their brands behind quality content. Stealth sales tactics will only get you so far, and consumers expect transparency, he explains.

Both Wybenga and Pulizzi also argue that good content strategies require a different mindset to straightforward advertising: it’s an opportunity to engage on a deeper, longer-lasting level. Decent print content has longevity as reference material, and it can also be used online or used to link to extra content online. But, for once, marketing trends are going in a direction that even smaller companies can do something about: and this is all the more relevant if your audience is abroad.



**60**

*Number of countries Porter magazine reaches.*

Source: Net-a-porter



**ASENDIA TIPS:** *Max Rubens, head of industry, press & wholesale, Asendia*

**Several practicalities need to be considered, especially if you decide to take your corporate publishing approach international.**

**1 Format** – Postage costs will vary depending on the size of magazine and the countries you are sending it to.

**2 Frequency** – Not all postal operators allow free publications or customer magazines to access their preferential “press” rates. The ones that do usually require that a publication is issued at least four times a year.

**3 Distribution** – There is little point of investing in content if it doesn’t get read by the right people. If you’re sending it to subscribers or exclusive customers you need to keep your lists up-to-date. If you’ve invested in content that is going to be kept as reference material, it’s worth considering how you can fulfil requests for back issues.

**4 Outsourcing** – As more publishers focus more of their efforts on delivering the content their readers want, there is a growing trend in outsourcing for subscription management and global logistics, especially with updated services making press mailings to France and Switzerland easier and more efficient.

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