



BRANDED CONTENT

**EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES OR
THE FUTURE OF MARKETING?**

Thought Piece
2016

BRANDED CONTENT – HOW TO ENGAGE AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE IN THE CONNECTED WORLD

Content is the touchpoint du jour for more and more marketers – around 85 % of marketing professionals in the UK now use content marketing with around two thirds planning to increase spending this year¹. There is however, still some confusion surrounding the nebulous definition of content and where it fits in to a media mix.



Often, attempts at interpreting branded content straddle the wire of native advertising and advertorials before falling in to the abyss of general advertising – so what is it exactly and what does it offer that traditional channels do not already deliver?

One working definition [through Ipsos' partnership with Oxford Brookes University and The Branded Content Marketing Association] is:

“Branded Content is content fully or partly funded by a Brand which promotes the Brand's values and provides something of value to audiences – often by entertaining, informing and/or educating”

Now while this definitely goes a long way to defining what it is, there are two inherent foundations which require amplification:

1. It's experienced: there's a tendency to be Facebook/YouTube/Twitter myopic, but branded content doesn't necessarily need to be clicked or viewed – as evidenced by popular Red Bull events. Even The Lego Movie counts as branded content!

2. It's something people choose to spend time with: Branded Content at its best is unlike traditional advertising. Whilst conventional advertising is, in essence, an interrupter designed to snatch attention from something else; content is creativity enjoyed at an individual's discretion. Crucially, the consumer is in control – not the brand.



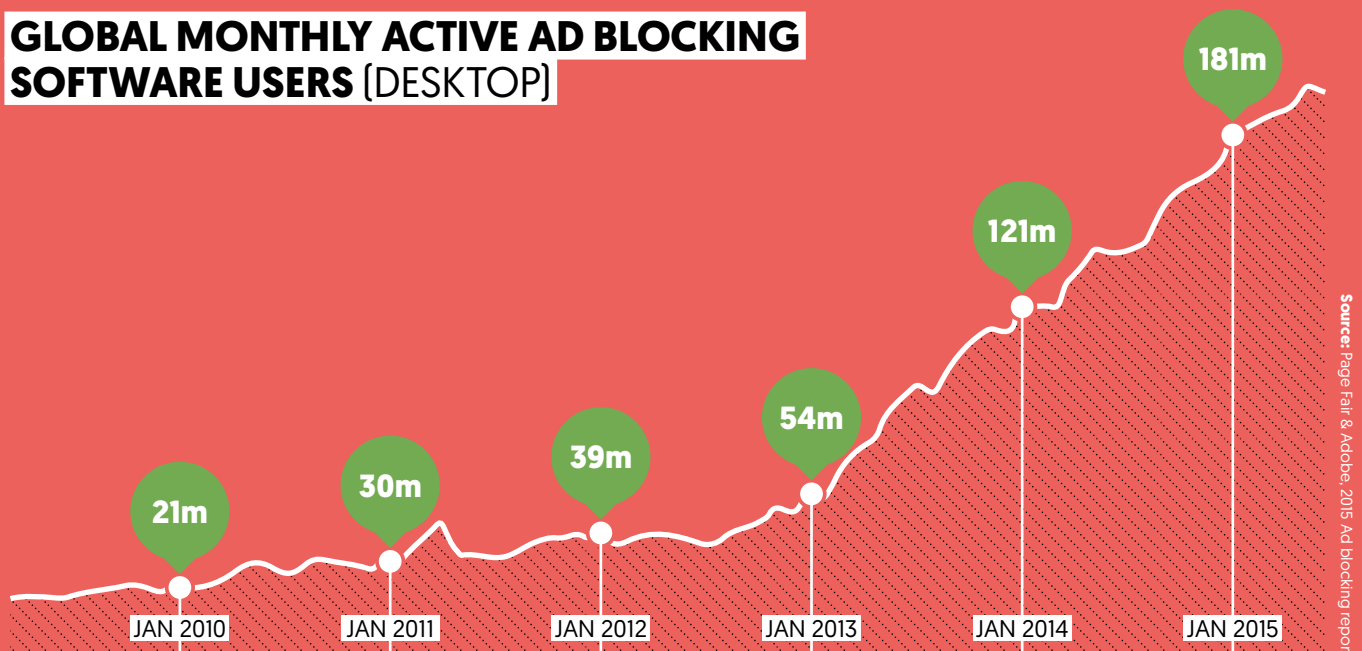
Unfortunately, in the same way that reach does not necessarily equal actual branded recognition and number of click-throughs does not always tally with campaign success – understanding how branded content works is tricky. We all have examples of good content, but this tends to be limited to true zeitgeist material (think 'Always', 'Nike' or the ALS Ice Bucket challenge). In other words, it's probably gone 'viral', been viewed and shared over a million times or the IPA have flagged it as laudable work. But does this tell the whole story? How do people really engage with content in the real world? Do people respond to content as anything other than highfalutin advertising? And though we know

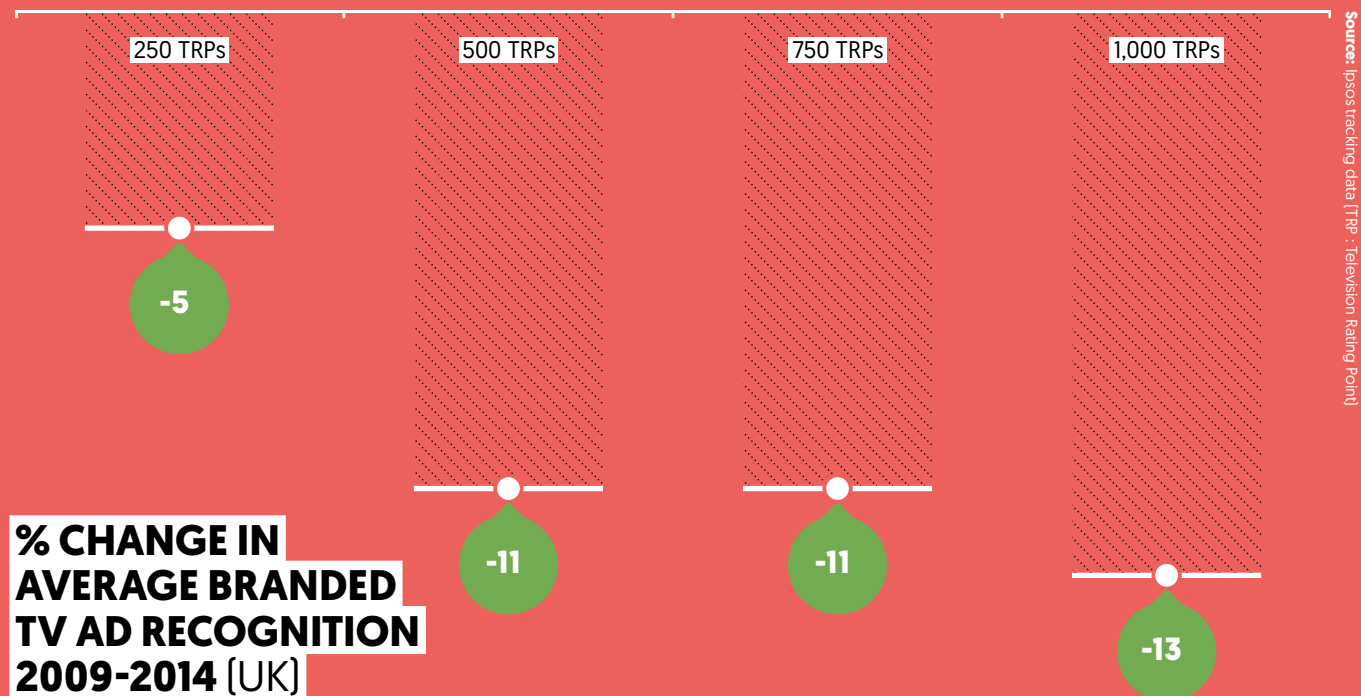
what qualifies as successful content, what does content need to do for it to be successful?

ADVERTISING IS DEAD; LONG LIVE ADVERTISING!

News flash – most people cannot discriminate between branded content and advertising! Not a massive surprise given struggles within the industry to correctly categorise it but throughout our research, it was clear that the concept was alien to most. Indeed, early qualitative work showed that even after a week of exposure to branded content, content was still referred to as 'ads' and attempts to give examples often strayed into sponsorship, endorsements and other malapropisms.

GLOBAL MONTHLY ACTIVE AD BLOCKING SOFTWARE USERS [DESKTOP]





This doesn't make content marketing the media equivalent of 'Emperor's New Clothes' though. In many ways, the challenges are similar to those of conventional advertising. Like advertising, the main goal is to have a positive impact on the brand. Romantic as it is to imagine companies acting as philanthropic raconteurs bringing joy to the world – there's always a motive. Also like advertising, you're competing with the real world. Despite what some marketers would like to believe, most people do not go on 'content hunts', trawling the internet for branded material. We all cultivate our own media-consuming microcosms characterised by habit and autonomy

– whether it be a surreptitious scan of Facebook at lunch or a YouTube bender consisting of Thug Life videos and compilations of overweight animals failing in elaborate scenarios. The implication is that branded content needs to interrupt to get noticed but it cannot disrupt – discovery must be as organic as discovering pure content. Therefore to achieve cut through at scale, Branded Content needs to be found in relevant places and creatively sign posted to draw people in.

In general, cutting through is getting tougher. Advertising is by no means dead, but as with the advent of online and the encroachment of

CONTENT

People will only choose programmes, movies, articles etc that they have an interest in/like



BRANDED CONTENT

People must see something they like to choose to spend time with it and for it to have a brand impact



ADVERTISING

While beneficial for long term brand building, people don't necessarily need to like advertising for it to have the desired brand impact



programmatic – adaption and evolution are very real. Whether it be the impact of multi-screening or increasing use of ad-blocking software, it's not as easy to get noticed.

And herein lies the appeal of content marketing – having your assets shared and sought-after rather than filtered and/or thwarted. The gravitation toward “emotional advertising” isn't just a trend towards twee, affected communications; it's intended to build an affinity between brand and consumer. It's certainly one way of appealing to people but you don't need to tug at heart strings to connect with people. Creating genuinely engaging content that really

resonates with people – either through emotion, information or entertainment – is the key.

So attention is vital, but likeability is a prerequisite to engagement – and even more so for content. You do not always have to like advertising to be influenced by it but we generally consume content because we get something in return. Branded content has to appeal like content but have the effect of advertising – a daunting but not impregnable challenge.

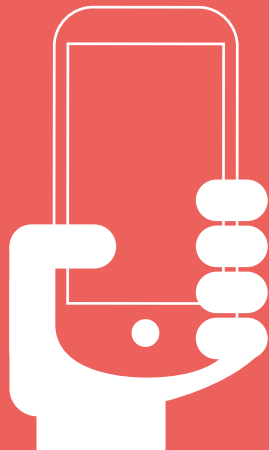
Of course, salience is probably the biggest concern for content. As if being likeable and resonant wasn't difficult enough, we also need to consider the desired

consumer. We are an increasingly impatient audience where the first 5 seconds can make or break our attention and battling impassivity is even harder when people have the autonomy of choice. The growing predilection for content marketing means that it's very difficult for any one item to achieve 'shareability status'. Add to this, nascent platforms (for which good levels of organic reach were once possible) are now established business models with 'business brains' who increasingly monetise this reach. In short, shareable content not only needs 'shareability', it needs a competitive budget.

**NO SUCH
THING AS A
FREE LUNCH
OR ORGANIC
REACH**

Justifying this expense will become a larger issue in time but in truth, content is unlikely to be a marketers'

**OUR PROPRIETARY RESEARCH INDICATES
THAT PEOPLE GENERALLY USE JUST
18 APPS AND 15 WEBSITES
EACH MONTH**



**FORRESTER RESEARCH HAS
THEN FOUND THAT
SMARTPHONE OWNERS SPENT:
>80% OF
(IN APP) TIME ON
JUST 5 APPS**

heaviest touchpoint. Creating a TV spot that stands out in the clutter and delivers on all a brand's multiple media manifestos is tough enough; competing with amusing clips of adorable toddlers, FAIL compilations, and other (much more debauched) searches is even trickier.

The objective is to work out where branded content fits in to a media strategy – is the aim to supplement a wider campaign by supporting the brand's motives or to appeal to a target you struggle to communicate with through your standard channels. In short – is the content designed to inspire reaffirmation or reappraisal?

WHAT DOES SUCCESSFUL CONTENT NEED TO DO TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

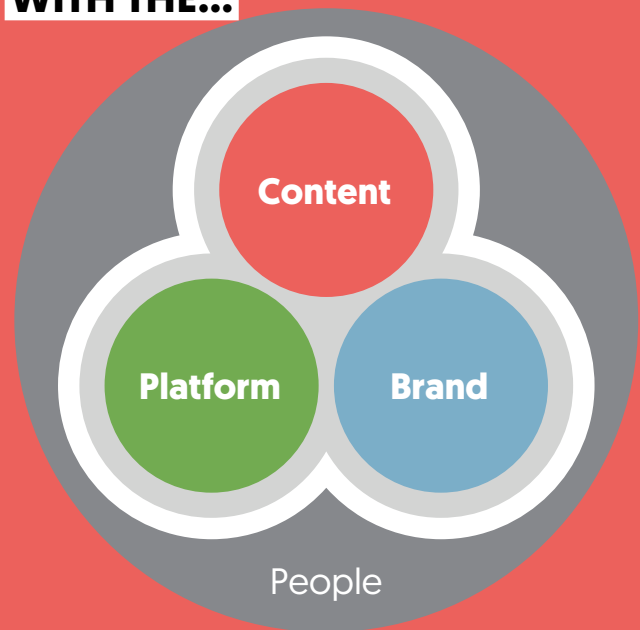
Our quantitative research presented participants with 3 examples of branded content in a mocked up in-situ environment (YouTube for video and Facebook for pictorial stimuli). For video, it was important that we allowed people to skip if they wanted to – after all, it's rare that people are tied down and forcefully exposed to content in the real world. Of the tested materials, we found that almost all of skips came as soon as the option became available. Perhaps this is a Pavlovian impulse; an automatic reflex from impatient internet patrons, savvy to the game. What became clear was that positive response didn't necessarily correlate with watching a video in its entirety – less than half of

participants viewed Lexus Hoverboard and Always 'Like a Girl' to the end yet they performed best overall.

Snacking is common with content – we choose to watch a 10 minute compilation but we might skip a vignette that lasts too long. We might not read an entire magazine, but there might be sufficient appealing articles that ensure you buy next month's issue. An entertaining YouTube channel might deliver an underwhelming entry but it need not be a relationship-breaker. What matters is satiation – have we got what we need from it? To use Ipsos parlance, has it met my needs? Clearly, a skip doesn't necessarily suggest disinterest – it's just a reminder of a content-consumer's sovereign right.

This is why choosing to spend time with content becomes so important; the power is entirely with the consumer. They can dismiss or embrace what they experience and they're often in an environment characterised by caprice [vines, anyone?]. It really comes down to relevance – is the content relevant [i.e. is it informative, entertaining, inspiring?]; is the content relevant to the platform [NSFW material might not be sharable on Facebook for fear of offending Auntie Agnes and your manager at work but it might be okay via Snapchat] and is it relevant to the brand [in other words, does the brand have permission to produce content in a certain manner]. Crucially, this is

THE FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESSFUL BRANDED CONTENT IS RESONANCE FOR PEOPLE WITH THE...



“The more integrated they are within the overall business and brand strategy the more beneficial and productive it will be for everyone involved. As a result it will be much easier to implement and combine the efforts for a common goal across our brands and business.”

Alper Eroglu, Global Media Director
Deodorants and Oral Care Categories, Unilever

all within the individual's preference bubble – it makes sense that football memes should appeal to football fans, but it's the interaction between these features that inevitably decides success.

For example, recent research shows that Facebook [37%] is considered the most popular, or 'coolest' social network amongst all UK internet users, but is considerably lower amongst teenagers aged 16 to 19 [14%], who rate YouTube [20%] and Instagram [16%] higher². Not only does this reflect the importance of the platform when deciding the vessel for your content, it also illustrates the transience and capriciousness of social outlets.

It's not enough to set up a channel on YouTube and expect results, in the same way that you can't shoehorn a celeb in to an ad campaign and expect success. It all needs to fit. Because although you might

be aiming for Generation Z appreciation and brand re-appraisal, you still need the content to appeal to them (preferably in the right context and executed in a way that isn't too contrived).

WHAT DOES THE BRAND GET FROM IT?

Branded Content has the potential to have a strong impact on brand. We found that positive response to the content had a strong influence on enhanced perceptions of the associated brand. For example, the Always 'Like a Girl' video had a profound effect on brand perceptions amongst their target group. Almost all brand perceptions [ranging from 'is an inspirational brand' to 'is distinctive from other brands'] saw significant improvements based solely on exposure to the content. In fact, this was true regardless of gender – proof that a universally appealing message and elegant execution can transcend any barrier (including

POWER TO THE CONSUMER

COOLEST SOCIAL NETWORK

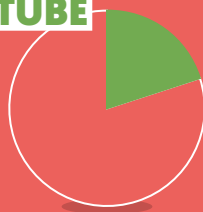
ALL UK USERS

FACEBOOK
37%

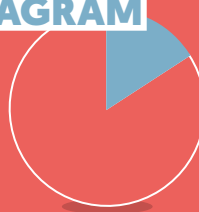


AMONGST 16-19 YEAR OLDS

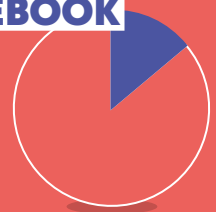
YOUTUBE
20%



INSTAGRAM
16%



FACEBOOK
14%



intent to buy!). Always is a strong brand to begin with; the content acted very much as re-affirmation, strengthening brand affinity.

On the other hand, the Lexus hover-board did a terrific job in provoking re-appraisal from a traditionally indifferent and unfamiliar audience. Amongst younger participants, over half found the film unexpected for Lexus, but it was almost universally liked. Against a demographically consistent control cell, there were positive shifts on various measures including perceived popularity and modernity as well as personal relevance and 'is a brand to aspire to'. In the UK Lexus face stiff competition from brands such as Audi, Mercedes and BMW in terms of spending power so the ability to successfully leverage distinct channels is a real asset.

“**Adapt to your customer's needs. They expect it.**”

Scott Abel, Content Strategist

**In the UK only
6% share content**

Particularly when those engaged with the relevant platforms are those who will one day have the disposable income to seriously consider a Lexus.

The innate 'shareability' of engaging content means ROI can extend beyond opportunity to see, click-through and Facebook friends but with the rise of more 'paid for' content, it will become more difficult. The key is keeping the content relevant.

Shareability shouldn't be overestimated though; Ipsos research shows that only 6% in the UK claim to have shared content in the last year and even then, the channels for sharing are tangled. Few would argue with retweeting #unstoppable or posting an Always video to Facebook but polarising material from Paddy Power might be best kept to more private channels such as WhatsApp.

IN SUMMARY

So remember these three things:

- Make it interesting, useful or memorable or go home
- Don't stray too far from your brand path or you'll get punished
- Make the most of what the platform offers; push the boundaries or get lost

The common denominator though, is people. As US content strategist Scott Abel notes – “Adapt to your customer’s needs. They expect it”. This has never been truer and success for the brand depends on it.

SOURCES:

- 1 <https://contently.com/strategist/2015/10/07/state-of-content-marketing-united-kingdom/>
- 2 <https://www.globalwebindex.net/blog/youtube-is-the-coolest-social-platform-for-teens>

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

HEAD OF CONTENT & CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT



Eleanor heads up our Content and Creative development offer. She is particularly interested in recent advances in our understanding of how the brain works and our ability to bring this knowledge to bear on developing great communications.

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RESEARCH MANAGER



Liam joined Ipsos several years ago as part of the graduate programme. He has a wealth of early stage and tracking experience utilising different collection methods. He also has an unhealthy obsession with Thug Life videos.

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Ipsos Connect

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Our services include:

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- **Content and Communications Development:** Communications, content and creative development from early stage idea development through to quantitative pre-testing alongside media & touchpoint planning.
- **Media Measurement:** Audience measurement and understanding.

Ipsos Connect are specialists in people-based insight, employing qualitative and quantitative techniques including surveys, neuro, observation, social media and other data sources. Our philosophy and framework centre on building successful businesses through understanding brands, media, content and communications at the point of impact with people.

