

Delucchi Plus Digital Trends Report

Vol. 3: Brands as Publishers

Introduction

Thank you for downloading this Delucchi Plus Digital Trends Report, a bimonthly educational product from our Strategy + Insights team. The crowded conversation around digital trends can make it difficult to distill the chatter into actionable insights. The goal of our Trends Reports is to provide exactly this: A matter-of-fact exploration of the opportunities, cautions, and takeaways for marketers and brand champions to make the most of the latest trends.

The Trend: Brands as Publishers

As audiences change generationally, brands have been forced to adapt to new consumer preferences about advertising: Commercials are fast-forwarded through, video ads are skipped, and display banners increasingly ignored. If brands want to really reach consumers, they must engage them by more organic means. The concept of content marketing has emerged from this new need.

As we [noted](#) on our blog Plus Points last year, agencies and brands are increasingly building their own newsrooms and editorial structures to self-publish content. In our view, brand publishing is content marketing done at scale: It means a brand is generating its own content as a significant part of its advertising strategy in an effort to more authentically interact with consumers.

Brand publishing is an exciting alternative to traditional “interruption marketing” (the promotion of a brand or product through ongoing and often repetitive advertising, promotions, public relations and sales — essentially any marketing activity that interrupts a user’s attention) that has been used since the dawn of advertising. But despite its promise, major questions persist.

Throughout this report we explore the challenges and requirements of breaking into the publishing realm, the reasons why so many brands are making this shift, and some examples of brands that have been successful thus far. To truly enter the world of publishing, it requires a whole new level of commitment and investment, and it is the willingness of so many brands to take this leap that is truly interesting and indicative of the changing tides of marketing.

The Impetus for Brand Publishing

The driving force behind the latest surge of the brand publishing movement is a changing audience. Millennials now account for a quarter of the population and carry enormous purchasing power, and they are demanding more from brands.



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And the generation coming up behind the Millennials, Generation Z, will disrupt marketing strategies even more, as they have grown up not only digitally savvy, but mobile-centric (demanding interaction whenever and wherever they are). What has been a gradual movement away from traditional, interruption marketing tactics and towards authentic content creation is being sped up by this segment of the population that is essentially immune to the old forms of advertising. They seek to be engaged with an interactive experience. They want choice in content and need to be entertained and informed.

Not Your Grandmother's Content

Publishing covers an array of media and platforms. It is not just traditional magazines and printed material, or even digital verbiage: Today's published content includes original videos, photos, infographics, and even apps. It is any piece of original material created by a brand and disseminated independently for public consumption. This could mean posting on a brand's website, social media platforms, or YouTube. The idea is to create something new that will interest people and get them to engage and remember a brand.

Successful Brand Publishers

The below brands serve as excellent examples of companies who have laid the groundwork, devoted the resources and built a business to support ongoing content production that attracts consumers and builds brand loyalty. These brands (including one Delucchi Plus client) leverage content platforms to entertain, inform, engage and present their own content in an unselfish way. While not all brands have the resources to publish content at this volume, these examples serve as models to aspire to:

Brand	Explanation
Red Bull	The ultimate brand publisher. They have devoted huge teams of people and massive budgets to their video content (on top of extensive sport and event sponsorships). Red Bull is a prime example of the "big idea" method.
Oreo	Oreo's mobile game app – Twist, Lick and Dunk – is a monetized app, in which advertisers pay to advertise and people pay to play. After two years, the app was cash positive and acquired over 6 million downloads and 250,000 daily users (people who are engaging with the brand on a daily basis).
Coca-Cola	Coca-Cola's online magazine, Coca-Cola Journey, produces unbranded content at least half of the time, and otherwise posts creative Coke-centric content that showcases products and highlights different aspects of the company while remaining entertaining or interesting.
Barneys New York	Barneys blog, The Window, leverages amazing visuals from around the Web, combined with interesting stories and new trends happening in the fashion world to keep its readers up to date, while at the same time providing shoppable content.
Sassoon	As an aspirational salon brand, Sassoon generates unique content on a daily basis, which they push out through social channels and various publications to keep consumers up-to-date on the latest beauty and style trends. They rely more on generating stunning visuals and informative copy to resonate with their target customers instead of solely focusing on consumer engagement/review platforms like Yelp.



Roadblocks to Brand Publishing

The concept of brands publishing their own content is not new. As we have also [explored](#) previously on our blog, many brands have been at it for decades and have found significant success. But brand publishing hasn't taken off nearly as quickly as many anticipated, in part due to two main problems:

1. **Brands are too selfish with their content:**

Instead of sharing knowledge and useful information, brands too often only want to share content about themselves, which gives off an inauthentic feel. Good content cannot consist solely of thinly veiled sales pitches. Instead, it must provide consumers with real value, and in doing so, display brand values that will stick with consumers. Content marketing is not a direct conversion generator: It takes customers on a journey and if done correctly, ingratiates a brand with its consumers. The ultimate result is not simply a conversion, but brand loyalty (which is much harder to come by).

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2. **Brands aren't willing to change their business model:** To facilitate content creation and publishing at scale, a brand must devote staff and resources (especially financial) to a significant publishing operation. Generating great content on a daily basis cannot be done well by one person: The whole company must get behind the movement.

The Profitability Problem

In addition to these obstacles, with any company the first question asked about a new idea or initiative is "will it make money?" Profitability is the ultimate end game for any endeavor that a brand invests in. Often times, the biggest obstacle content marketers face is a lack of buy-in because it's more difficult to show ROI from media consumption. It's not enough that thousands of people watched a video — what did they do *after* they watched it? Did they go out and buy something as a result? And how do they now feel about the brand *because* of the video? The true purpose of content marketing is to build a relationship between the brand and the consumer: Because this is difficult to measure, it requires more time and patience than any traditional advertising method. The concept of measurement and proving value is going to be a hot topic as brands and marketers navigate this complex and evolving channel.



Actionable Advice for Marketers

If you are thinking of taking the leap into brand publishing, be prepared to commit. Simply throwing one's hat into the ring and posting on Facebook will not automatically bring you success. Think of the many struggles and challenges of traditional publishers: They didn't start with a blog and bam! Readership! Creating quality content and convincing people to spend time and money consuming it is no easy feat — it takes dedication, resources, and a thorough plan.

How to Become a Successful Brand Publisher

The following tips are the first steppingstones towards successful brand publishing. These general concepts seem matter-of-fact, but are often overlooked in the rush to enter the content race.

Tip	Explanation
Remain Goal-Focused	Do not focus too heavily on what your competitors are doing, or feel obligated to get a massive amount of content out. Instead, keep a firm grasp on the ultimate goals of the company's content publishing campaigns. Don't lose sight of why it is you are investing the time and resources to create good content.
The Big Idea	Consumers are discerning — content for the sake of content won't boost your brand any more than a basic display banner ad will get lost in the noise of the massive amount of content out there. Start with a big idea — something that will get peoples' attention and reel them in, then let that big idea trickle down into various channels.
Supportive Business Model	Change your business model to support this new marketing operation — you can't decide to go into large-scale content production and dissemination without having the people and assets to make it successful. Becoming a full-fledged publisher requires total buy-in: There is no half-doing it.
Quality, Then Quantity	Prioritize creating high-quality, worthwhile content that consumers will want to engage with, and <i>then</i> worry about frequency. Simply generating content, any content, does not mean success. It must be thoughtful and engaging. Once you get the quality down, then look towards scale and frequency.

Where is the Trend Going?

Wider Adoption

As Generation Z graduates enters the workforce and becomes a more involved consumer group, the shift from interruption marketing towards content publishing will only gain steam. As a result, we should all be prepared to see more and more brands generating and publishing their own unique content. This content is going to be engaging and creative, as it is ultimately the only way that brands are going to be able to engage these younger consumers who are immune to traditional advertising methods. If a brand hasn't yet ventured into content



marketing, it should consider testing the waters, as the brand-publishing arena is only going to grow.

Scrutiny and Transparency

As it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between paid-for and straight editorial coverage, the Federal Trade Commission has shown increased interest in guidelines and labeling practices — and brands will be well advised to maintain transparency in their publishing efforts. With native content performing well, there shouldn't be the need to cloak it as something it's not... especially when the outcome can only mean hefty fines and consumer distrust.

Publishers as Brands

As we discuss the shift of brands becoming publishers in an effort to effectively reach changing audiences, we should also keep an eye out for the reverse: Magazines and publishers venturing into ecommerce, creating efficiencies for consumers and providing new ways to build their own brands and monetize them. While this trend has yet to fully emerge, we certainly see traditional media sources moving into advertising and opening up in-house studios to develop content that looks and feels aligned with their editorial content. Ultimately, the concept of creating “engaging” content doesn't just mean eye-catching or interesting, it means that it provides utility. The shift towards digital and mobile is not simply because those are the devices and means available, but rather that these devices have enabled convenience and efficiency — something we now look for at every avenue. This in mind, it would not be surprising to see publications once thought of as only content generators to shift into retail.

Conclusion

Brand publishing is certain to be a part of the future of marketing, but it isn't necessarily right for everyone. Brands should weigh the costs and benefits of investing in a high-quality content strategy, taking into account that in most cases, brand publishing is a long game, not a short one.

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If you're interested in learning more about how brand publishing will affect your company, you're in luck: Delucchi Plus recently introduced a suite of products to help our clients maximize their marketing investment with our analytical and actionable approach to data. Please [contact us](#) to learn how the Strategy + Insights team can help your team and your business grow, whether it's through data-driven research, a custom trends report, or a webinar or lunch-and-learn.

As we said, the intent of our Trends Reports is to arm clients, colleagues and partners with the latest thinking in the digital space. We hope you learned something and will continue to join us on our educational journey.