

Create better content in 2020

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Matt Potter, chief content officer for [John Brown Media](#) UK, shares some insight into how to create better content - and it's all about connecting with your consumers on an emotional level.



Content is a chance to produce a moment of connection with what's best in a brand. "These moments, to customers, are big," says Matt Potter. "They might be the best, most inspiring thing they see on a terrible day. The content might allow them to dream, to feel more confident, to take a new view on life. That's worth taking seriously."

And creating winning content is actually easier than you think – you just need to think like a journalist, says Potter. "Ask yourself: what's the story and why does it matter? Who is the audience? What connects, not with what you want to say, but with the client or customer's curiosities and passions and inner lives?"

Potter recalls how he used to have story ideas pitched to him at the BBC by people who wanted to do travel stories. "I'd say, 'What's the story?' They'd say, 'Paris.' But Paris isn't a story, it's a place. I'd tell them to go away and think more about why their story should cut through – why it mattered."

A famous American reporter once said journalism is the art of taking something people don't know about or care about and making them care. "That's also a pretty good summary of content marketing," says Potter.

Four ways for branded content to authentically engage with consumers

1. Get out of your own wilderness of self-confirming PowerPoints and seeing yourself as you think others see you. "I've met so many advertisers, marketers, the lot, who are convinced that, because they work inside a brand and drink the Kool-Aid every day, anyone out there gives a damn," says Potter. "You see it in car brands, [which] talk to consumers as if consumers are car nuts. You see it in banks and telecoms companies talking about the people who take their money-off offers as if they had bought into a set of beliefs around the brand. Stepping outside also means avoiding what a content-marketing programme should look like, because that's what it tends to look like. This risks making it invisible and meaningless. Part of a good agency's role – and certainly a good part of its value – is helping to unchain the thinking inside an organisation."

But ad-think, like everything, gets institutionalised, says Potter. "People know what a bank ad, or content marketing programme, should look like, because that's what it tends to look like. But that's also the very thing that risks making it

invisible and meaningless. It's like pumping out dummy copy. And a lot of money is spent on that. Part of a good agency's role – and certainly a good part of its value – is helping to unchain the thinking inside the organisation.”

2. See your customers or prospects or whatever for what they are – rounded people, with a life and an inner world that has nothing to do with you, your product or your relationship with them. “Sure, I might drive your car or bank with you, or shop at your store, but that doesn't mean you only have permission to talk to me about cars or financial products and services, or groceries. In fact, I don't want you to – because you're just trying to sell to me, and there'll be a good chance I'm not even in the market for a car right now.”

Potter says you need to use your emotional intelligence (EQ), and put yourself into the mind of the consumer. “Do I just want you to keep pushing at me, or are there really interesting things about you I might find stimulating and fun and compelling? If you're a car company, your view on future cities, or technology, or whatever, might be really cool. If you're a food store, I want to hear provenance stories and trends, not just promos dressed as recipes.”

3. Don't rely on partnerships, sponsorships and celebs to “borrow” attention or interest. “People are wise to it,” he says. “We've reached the stage where kids on Instagram are adding #spon to their posts to pretend they are being paid to promote things.” Potter says people are aware of this and are looking for more authentic experiences with a brand. “Get people into your owned channels, and keep them there by being compelling, fascinating and consistently brilliant. You have a better chance to impress, share more info, give more insight and get more shared time.”4. And most importantly, own your audience. “You'll always get more out of people – more of a chance to impress, more info shared, more insight, more shared time – if you host the party than if you rock up at someone else's and try to buttonhole everyone. We've now seen the consequences of brands trying to build entire audiences exclusively on social platforms, only to realise too late that the platform was holding their audience hostage. Get people into your owned channels, and keep them there by being compelling, fascinating and consistently brilliant. You'll thank me for it,” says Potter.

Earlier this year, Potter spoke at the John Brown Content Summit 2019 and revealed that 95% of his job is getting his clients to back away from the specifics. Missed it? Watch his presentation today:

[Overlaying market intelligence with human intelligence - Matt Potter](#)

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