

## Chief Marketing & Sales Officer Forum

# Content is queen

Social media needs a woman's touch.

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For all of you chanting “Content is king!”, you’re barking up the wrong tree. It’s not that content has dropped from its position of prominence. Content still is critical in any online effort. But the “king” metaphor is out of date. Today’s winning content is queen. And with it, all those traditionally feminine attributes needed to engage the modern customer.

**Good at sharing.** Successful social content is very different the previous generation of informational or even entertaining content. Content needs to be developed with sharing in mind, which means keeping it short and providing tools to facilitate the exchange and interaction. That’s more than just sticking a “like” button onto the page. Consider Zynga, the world’s leading provider of social game services with more than 240 million monthly active users playing its games (*CityVille*, *FarmVille*, and *Words With Friends*). The addicting aspect of the games is not about awesome graphics, virtual explosions or heart-pounding action. Indeed, these games are rather tame by modern gaming standards. The fun, Zynga shows, is in the sometimes addictive group experience of virtual sharing. Just ask Alec Baldwin how hard it is to put down *Words with Friends*. Content must be available in sharable bits and pieces with ease of trade and exchange built into the design.

**Into relationships.** Content needs to be build deep relationships with customers by being personal, relevant, and authentic. Social media age is the bonding agent that forms and fosters those relationships. This is especially true with brands. Content is how people experience your brand so the content equivalent of a one-night stand won’t cut it for the long-term relationships brands need to thrive. Amazon gives shoppers personalized recommendations based on their previous purchases and surfing habits. Coca-Cola has introduced Freestyle vending machines, which enable patrons to create their own beverage by mixing together existing Coke products and then sharing news of their favorite creations with their friends via Facebook. Consumers are increasingly comfortable providing their information with companies they know will use it to help personalize their products and communications, or companies providing essential services such as insurance.

According to a recent study in the U.K., 75% of consumers that have an existing relationship with a company they trust are happy to share their information with it, while 62% would share their information with a company selling products or services they need. And that authenticity doesn’t stop at

the product; it needs to extend through the company, its values, its employees and its corporate social responsibility as well.

**The perfect hostess.** The brand should also be adept at fostering relationships by letting users share content with each other. Recently, an international beverage giant that sponsors a popular sports league learned that most fans watch the games alone at home. To build community spirit and make watching more fun, the company introduced a smartphone and Facebook app that lets stay-at-home spectators communicate with one another to guess outcomes of individual plays throughout the game. Through this, the beverage company built a relationship with the sports fans – and made it possible for the sports fans to create relationships amongst each other. Intuit harnesses the same impulses to share business knowledge. Customers and experts find many ways to share information, tips and support within the Intuit online community.

**A good listener.** You can't really talk effectively until you understand what your audience wants. Digital is creating all sorts of hints and clues that a good listener can interpret. In the digital space, brands must continually keep a finger on the virtual pulse to understand what they want from their brand or product experience. A company that shows it's a good listener gets rewarded. A survey by InboxQ found 64 percent of customers surveyed are more likely to make a purchase from a brand that responded to them. More than 80 percent of those who made complaints on Twitter and received a response from a company said they "loved" or "liked" it. Dell has a social media listening command center monitor the more than 22,000 Dell-related topic posts that average in the marketplace each day. And that's a number only likely to grow larger as the social conversation expands. Already, average daily mentions of Dell on Twitter alone have a greater reach than the combined circulation of the top 12 daily newspapers in the United States.

Good listening is about more than monitoring social chatter; it's also about understanding what the data is telling you. A European retail bank, for example, developed a database that provided a complete picture of the customer, using both bank data, such as transaction history, and external information, such as credit scoring. Using advanced modeling, some competing analytical models, and even experimentation, the bank created a clear set of guidelines and leads for the front line. In two years, the number of qualified referrals and leads fed to branches doubled; account balances rose almost 50 percent. In total, the bank saw a 5 percent lift in revenue beyond growth rates in its market.

This more feminine world of content has big implications for today's modern content supply chain, and it demands a new approach to content creation and management. It takes a different mindset to develop content that is shareable and cements relationships with customers. And there are important business implications as well here. Women are more active on social than men in general (56 percent v 44 percent, according to a 2010 Pew study) and that's not a market you can afford to ignore. The "social" aspects of content can't be sprinkled on top like salt after the fact. They need to be built into the fabric of any company's communications. Social media has forced companies to think about new ways to engage with customers. So it stands to reason it needs a new rallying cry.

Let me hear it: Content is Queen.