

Content marketers continue to struggle with success. Their strategies are not delivering on their goals. *Inside Content Marketing* helps each member of the content marketing team understand how they can help deliver on the promise of branded content.

Branded Content in Action

Theresa Cramer

One of the questions I asked everyone I interviewed for *Inside Content Marketing* was this: “What’s your favorite piece of content marketing from the past year?” I received a variety of answers and have already detailed many of the examples in previous chapters. But when I spoke with brand journalists working at publishers, I asked them a similar but slightly different question. I wanted examples of their favorite branded content from their own websites. What they shared with me follows.

Dani Fankhauser, Branded Content Editor, Bustle

The branded content team at Bustle created “See What Inspires These 7 CEOs Each Morning” for L’Oreal. The slideshow consists of images of seven female CEOs in front of their mirrors, with an inspirational quote written in lipstick (the example in Figure 9.1 features Mariya Nurislamova, CEO of Scentbird).

Fankhauser says, “L’Oreal was a great brand to work with and brainstormed their stories with our team so we were able to come up with something very much in line with the brand’s values, but performed incredibly well with Facebook traffic because the article featured interesting women who had large networks on their own.” This content not only captures the values of L’Oreal but is also a

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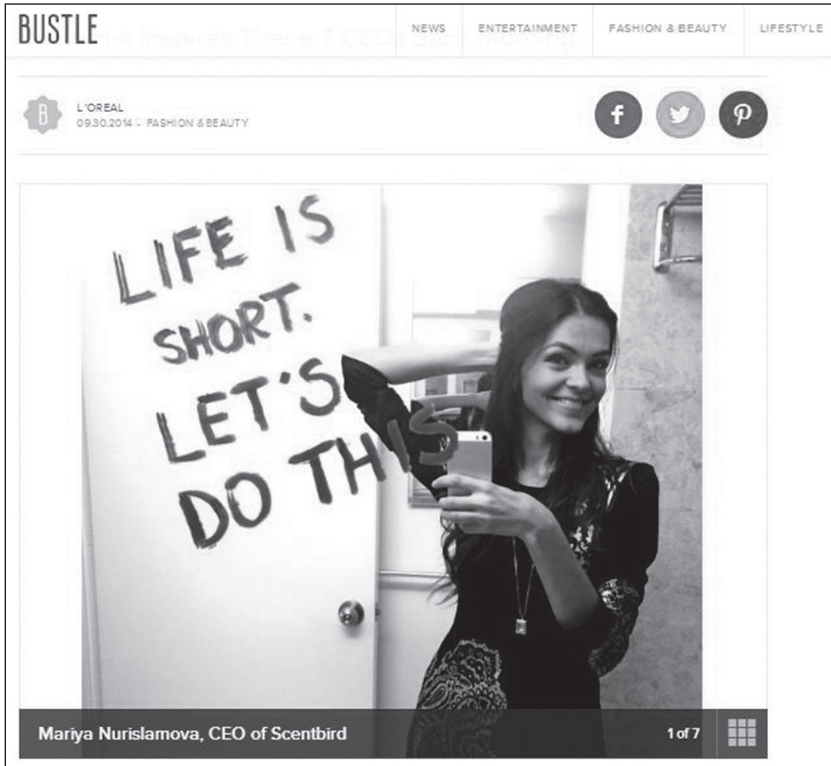


Figure 9.1 A screenshot of Bustle’s “See What Inspires These 7 CEOs Each Morning” for L’Oreal.

natural fit with Bustle’s lifestyle content geared toward women. It takes into consideration the brand, the publication, and the readers.

But outside of Bustle’s pages, what is Fankhauser’s favorite example of branded content? For that, she turns to the *New York Times*. This example, I have to admit, kind of blew me away as well. The *New York Times* teamed up with Google to create something that goes beyond a mere branded post and creates an entire interactive experience that feels more like it’s something cool that happens to be powered by Google than a plain ol’ native ad.

On the “Plan Your Next Adventure with 36 Hours & Google Maps” page (Figure 9.2), readers find themselves with an interactive image of the earth in their browser window and Google’s famous drop pins



Figure 9.2 A screenshot of the *New York Times*’ “Plan Your Next Adventure with 36 Hours & Google Maps.”



Figure 9.3 “Plan Your Next Adventure with 36 Hours & Google Maps” plotted out a 36-hour adventure in Copenhagen.

placed at a number of different cities. You can click on any place that strikes your interest, or hit the “Surprise Me” button to be taken to a mystery destination. Google then provides you with a complete itinerary for 36 hours spent in a given city—in the example in Figure 9.3, the city happens to be Copenhagen.

“There’s a trend towards app-like experiences for branded content which I think allow for more brand integration than straight text content would, so I think we’ll continue to see more interactive stuff like this,” says Fankhauser. If a user actually gets inspired to visit one of the cities on the map—rather than just inspired to head over to

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Google.com—she can save the itinerary right to her Google account from the *New York Times*' page.

Imagine you're browsing the Travel section of *The Times*. Maybe you're thinking about taking a trip, but you don't have a destination in mind. You stumble across this post—which is, no doubt about it, an ad—and before you know it you've decided that 36 hours in Madrid sounds like just the ticket! You've saved the itinerary to your Google account, and now you're using Google to search for flights.

This is exactly what can happen when a publisher knows its audience and a brand knows its own strengths. Everyone wins, including the consumer who just had one of the best, most helpful ad experiences of his life.

Nisha Gopalan, Creative Strategist and Branded Content Manager, *New York Magazine*

Is there any store more quintessentially New York than Tiffany & Co.? No, which makes the store the perfect fit for a branded content partnership with *New York Magazine*. "I'm very proud of two recent Tiffany & Co. executions we've done," says Gopalan. "The jeweler has really responded to our desire to mingle their chic aesthetic with technology, in a refined setting."

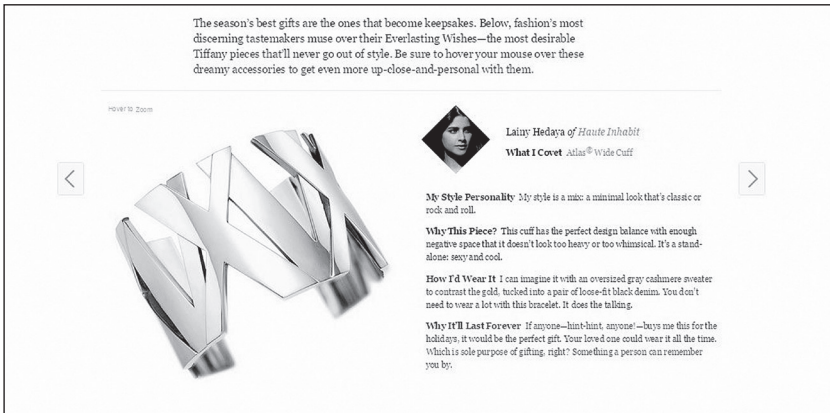


Figure 9.4 A screenshot of *New York Magazine*'s "Fashion's Most Coveted: Style Insiders' Tiffany & Co. Wish Lists."

For “Fashion’s Most Coveted: Style Insiders’ Tiffany & Co. Wish Lists,” the magazine asked fashion bloggers and trendsetters to talk about the items they wanted most from Tiffany’s shelves (see Figure 9.4). Gopalan says, “Basically, we want branded content to feel like a special experience, but still feel organic to the tone and aesthetic of the vertical you’re reading—NYmag.com, Vulture, The Cut, Grubstreet, Science of Us, and so on. So whenever possible, we try to come up with ideas or experiences that possess an element of intrigue. Consuming branded content should be worth your time!”

In “Count Down to Your Most Exquisite Valentine’s Day Ever” (see Figure 9.5), the magazine created an interactive calendar—sort of like an Advent calendar, only you get jewelry instead of candy—and then told readers to Tweet @NYFYI to get date and gift suggestions. You

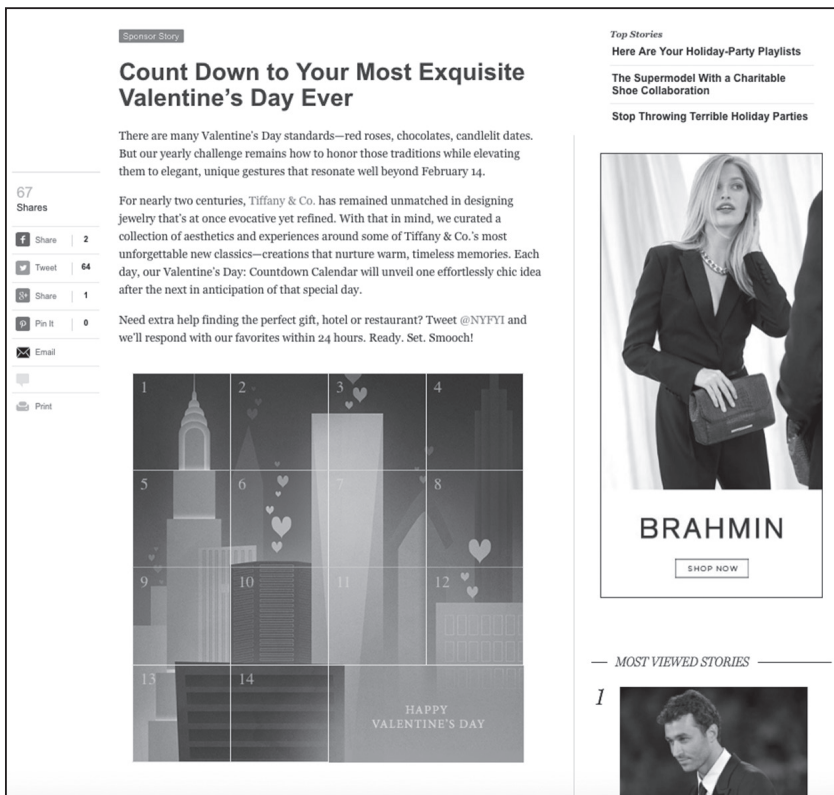


Figure 9.5 A screenshot from “Count Down to Your Most Exquisite Valentine’s Day Ever” by *New York Magazine*.

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may notice that the examples from *New York Magazine* are heavier on brand and product integration than some of the examples we have already seen. Gopalan explains, “This was purely an aesthetic decision. The lighting and detail of photos Tiffany & Co. typically takes are spectacular; we knew this from experience. So why mess with perfection? We decided to take their photos and try something

The Humanitarian Giving Back Through Fashion



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Growing up in Guinea, Africa, Mariama Mounir Camara-Petrolawicz dreamed of coming to America to be an artist. Her affluent parents, however, wanted her to become a doctor. A rebellious teen, she left anyway—and did it on her own, with just \$100 in her pocket. Today, Camara-Petrolawicz is a successful women’s rights activist (through the There Is No Limit Foundation) and a textile designer (through Mariama Fashion Production). Her prints, created by African artisans, got a massive endorsement last year from Michelle Obama, who set off a tie-dye craze by donning a Tory Burch frock made of Camara-Petrolawicz’s electric blue-on-white fabric.

“This is my passion. I needed to do something I loved,” says the

Figure 9.6 A screenshot from “The Revlon Provocateurs” on *The Cut*.

new with them—the magnifying effect—to show off that clarity. We knew this type of presentation, which is chic but interactive, would be something that would resonate with our readers.”

Gopalan also pointed me toward “The Revlon Provocateurs” (see Figure 9.6 opposite) which appeared on *New York Magazine’s* The Cut vertical. Like the Tiffany ads, this campaign focused on styling and then profiling interesting women. “We executed a five-month-long branded-content series for Revlon,” she says. “The campaign really spoke to Revlon’s imperative to celebrate smart, successful women whom the readers of The Cut could immediately relate to.” This is a far more in-depth content-oriented native ad, which brings the stories of everyone from humanitarians to bloggers to The Cut’s audience.

Beyond her own work, Gopalan says, “I’d have to high-five the *New York Times* Idea Lab for dedicating themselves to innovation. Every time they drop something new, it’s a headline! And I’m definitely a fan of what *Forbes* does—terrific examples of elevating brands through smart reporting and sleek presentation.”

Deanna Zammit, Director, Digiday Content Studio

Digiday’s branded content extends beyond its website to its live events, which brings us to one of Zammit’s favorite examples of her team’s efforts. “For Xaxis, the premier sponsor at Digiday’s Programmatic Summit, we attempted to reinvent the sizzle reel, producing a series

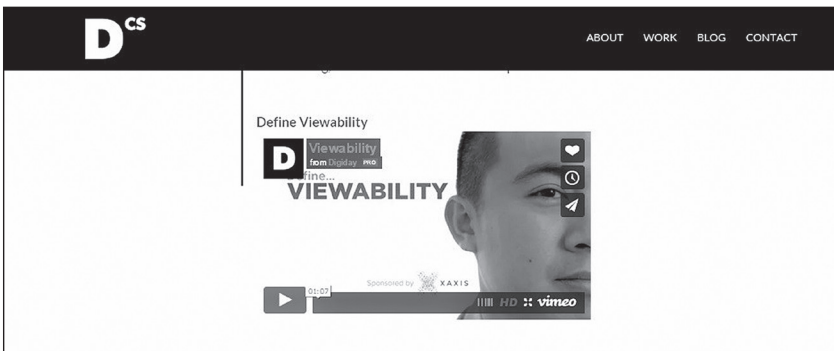


Figure 9.7 An example from Digiday’s Content Studio of the videos it created for Xaxis and featured at Digiday’s Programmatic Summit.

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of videos that dovetailed with the event content and felt at home on Digiday.com,” (see Figure 9.7) according to a case study about the project. Zammit elaborates, “As Digiday is an integrated platform, we used our Summit experience and publishing site to feature Xaxis as a sponsor of the debate around thorny issues like viewability and ad fraud. It was a truly native experience, featuring video interviews of event-specific speakers on topics that dove tailed with the Summit’s editorial agenda.”

The Xaxis videos are a great example of thinking outside the box to create content that benefits your clients as well as your audience, but on the more traditional branded content front Zammit points to a series of posts. “I’m also proud of our series for iStock by Getty Images—an article series that targeted advertising creatives at small agencies as well as freelancers who need cheap, high quality images to integrate into their work (see Figure 9.8). The series did especially well and showcased our ability to reach beyond ad tech clients and

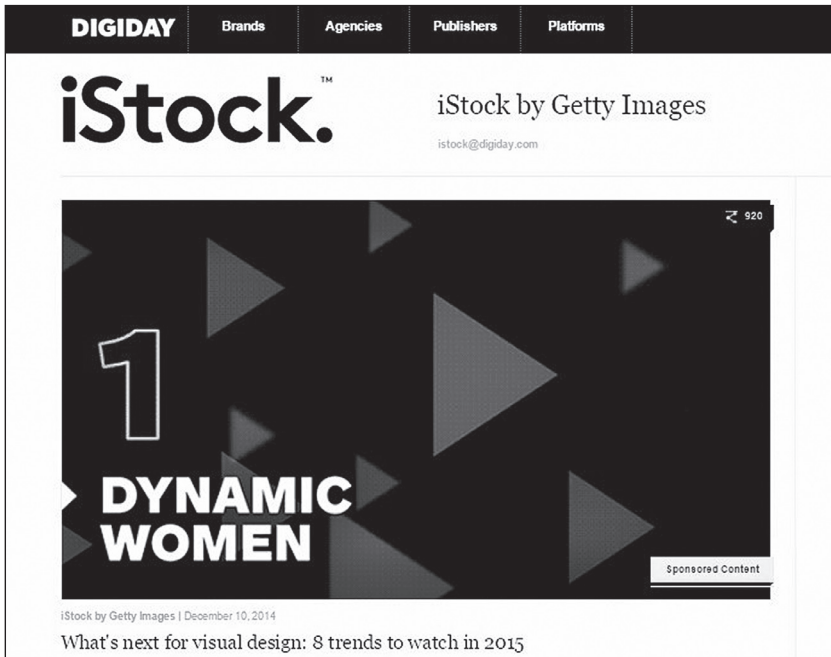


Figure 9.8 A screenshot from Digiday’s campaign targeting advertising creatives for iStock by Getty Images.

ad buying executives to the creative community. It also featured a mix of in-depth and lightweight, shareable content.”

The Best of Branded Content

The past few years have been big for branded content, and the business is only continuing to heat up. You can Google your way to countless “best of” lists, but I’ll save you the trouble and detail some of the best and brightest examples of branded content. From short, shareable videos to elaborate quizzes, brands really outdid themselves. However, I noticed that most of the experts who compiled “best of” lists cited content that comes directly from brands, not from content studios at publishers. This is a shame! But it is also an opportunity.

Hootsuite—“A Game of Social Thrones”

Hootsuite, the social media management tool, took the opportunity to capitalize on one of the biggest television events of the year. With the fourth season premiere of HBO’s *Game of Thrones* looming,



Figure 9.9 A screenshot from Hootsuite’s parody of the *Game of Thrones* opening sequence.

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Hootsuite created a YouTube video (see Figure 9.9) that played off of the show's opening sequence. The video put Hootsuite at the center of all the most important social media tools, in a map of a sort of social Westeros. This short video capitalized on the popularity of *Game of Thrones*, understanding that many of its young, tech-savvy users would connect and get the joke.

Twixt—Which Absurd Consumer Psychographic Are You.com

If BuzzFeed has taught us anything, it is that people love quizzes. Twixt, an RFP processing app, took advantage of this knowledge and created a website that allows users to figure out which demographic they fit into. This could be dry—or silly—but it's actually quite funny. And as it turns out, I'm a Jenny! Learn all about Jenny (and me) in Figure 9.10. (Unfortunately, the quiz is no longer available online.)

Purina's "Dear Kitten"

If you've used social media in the past year, you've probably seen a "Dear Kitten" video where a wizened old cat schools a kitten in the way of his household (see Figure 9.11). Whether the cat is teaching his new friend about the dog or the way humans behave during the Super Bowl, these videos are adorable, funny, and highly shareable. They also happen to



Figure 9.10 A screenshot of results from Twixt's Which Absurd Consumer Psychographic Are You.com.

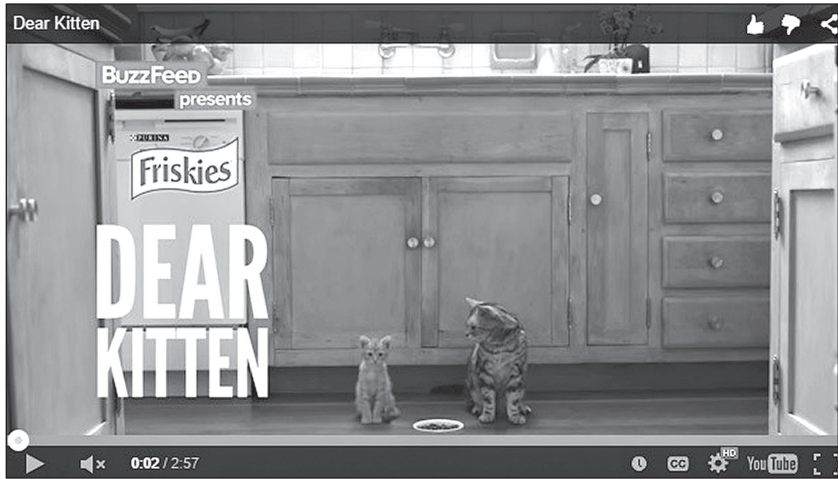


Figure 9.11 A screenshot from the “Dear Kitten” video series from BuzzFeed and Friskies.

be created in conjunction with BuzzFeed. It’s no coincidence that of all the examples I’ve listed here, this is probably the only one you’ve heard of unless you’re a huge content marketing geek. One of the things publishers have to offer branded content clients is their audience, and while Purina’s content happens to be especially fantastic, BuzzFeed’s massive audience is also to thank for the runaway success of these videos. Word on the street is that one of BuzzFeed’s own employees was the voice of the cat—which gives new meaning to “capturing the voice” that audiences love.

Branded Books

Are you wishing there was a *Branded Content for Dummies* book out there? Well, John Wiley & Sons will do you one better. The publisher of the famous “Dummies” series is now creating branded content under the umbrella of its best known brand. Household names such as Google, Coca-Cola, and IBM have already hopped aboard Wiley’s branded book bandwagon.

For Google, Wiley created *Connecting People Using Google for Dummies*. The search giant was looking to promote its AdWords product, so the book included a money-off offer. Readers could download the book from a special microsite.

Wiley has created similar branded books about everything from acoustic guitars to happiness (Coca-Cola was behind that one) to green office interiors.

An In-Depth Look at Branded Content

Up until now we've talked about branded content as a means to new revenue for publishers. A big part of that is rendering content creation services, but some really big projects entail a lot more participants than just a client and a media outlet. Following is an *EContent* case study about one such branded content collaboration.

Del Monte Foods: A Case of Thanksgiving Branding

San Francisco-based Del Monte Foods were introduced to American grocery stores in 1886 and have been a pantry staple ever since. "At Del Monte, we will always strive to cultivate the best garden quality vegetables, fruits, and tomatoes to help you and your family live a life full of vitality and enjoyment," according to the company website.

Business Challenge

What would Thanksgiving be without the traditional turkey and a cornucopia of vegetables? In 2014, Del Monte was looking for a way to strengthen its ties to Thanksgiving in customers' minds—specifically as regards its green beans. The company teamed up with PopSugar to implement a content-marketing initiative that included a branded portal for content. Additionally, Del Monte needed assistance with content creation.

Vendor of Choice: Vibrant Media

"Vibrant connects consumers in real time with engaging content and brand experiences—delivered cross platform," says the company website. With solutions for advertisers and publishers, Vibrant places native advertisements across platforms to improve reach and scale. Its clients include Unilever, HP, Microsoft, Jaguar, and Visa.

The Problem in Depth

“With the 2014 holiday season approaching, Del Monte wanted to strengthen ties to Thanksgiving and drive brand interaction and engagement with the famous Del Monte green beans,” according to a press release. Virginia Moon, associate brand manager at Del Monte, says, “Del Monte has been around for over 120 years. We’re an iconic American brand that people know and love....However, our brand is not very tightly tied to Thanksgiving.”

It’s hard to compete with the all-important turkey and cranberry sauce for the hearts and minds of Thanksgiving diners. Del Monte wanted its green beans to have a place at the table, so to speak, and decided that a branded content push was the way to go. “We were running our green bean TV ads, which makes a lot of sense in terms of awareness and keeping us top of mind,” says Moon. “But to really extend that conversation, create that relevance and that stronger tie to Thanksgiving, we felt we really needed to do something from a digital standpoint—and specifically that content marketing would lend itself to...being able to provide our consumer with something that’s extraordinarily valuable to her in the moment—especially during what’s a typically stressful holiday occasion.”

As any would-be content marketers know, creating great content is hard. Getting it in front of actual potential customers can be even harder. Del Monte does not have an in-house content marketing team. More to the point, the company needed to reach beyond the borders of its own website to reach consumers who were not already immediately thinking about Del Monte when planning their menus. That meant finding the right partners to create branded content that would be sure to keep Del Monte green beans on consumers’ minds and then push the content out to a wide audience.

The Solution

With the help of its media-buying agency, Starcom, Del Monte teamed up with Vibrant Media and PopSugar.com to deliver its message. PopSugar describes itself as “a global women’s lifestyle brand focused in media, commerce, and technology. Our mission is to connect women with new entertainment, products, and experiences they’re most passionate about.” This, along with its ability to create a branded portal for Del Monte, made it a great fit

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Figure 9.12 A promotional image from Del Monte of its mobile content marketing.

for the food provider’s Thanksgiving content offensive (see Figure 9.12).

But Del Monte also wanted to increase its reach beyond just that portal, so it also enlisted the help of Vibrant at the suggestion of Starcom. According to Moon, Del Monte was drawn to Vibrant “because of their targeting capabilities—not only through keywords but also through image targeting.”

Vibrant’s Amplify solution can commission, curate, and distribute brands’ paid, owned, and earned content in relevant editorial articles. Del Monte used content created by PopSugar as well as Vibrant to

populate its branded portal, which housed the content as well as general lifestyle content related to Thanksgiving that PopSugar was already creating.

Articles contained within the branded site included “Healthy Twists on a Holiday Classic” and “Top Ten Tips for Smart Holiday Entertaining.” Writers also offered up their personal green bean casserole recipes. Wyman says that Vibrant works with Scripted, which creates content on demand, to help clients develop the right content. She says they would identify article ideas before briefing “writers on what we want and how we want it to be delivered.”

Meanwhile, Del Monte was also creating “data-driven stories for mass-media coverage by partnering with PR Hacker, an agency that specializes in story based, data-driven content that creates news,” according to the press release. “For this part of the campaign, Del Monte asked 1,500 Americans to ‘go green bean’ and rate their fondness for the classic green-bean casserole side dish. The result: The first annual ‘Del Monte Green Bean Index’—a ranking of the top 25 U.S. states with the highest concentration of green-bean casserole lovers for the holidays.”

While Vibrant helped provide content, it really excelled at leveraging the Del Monte content using Vibrant’s contextual ad network that served the branded content up as ads on other sites, says Jennifer Wyman, account executive at Vibrant. So if you happened to be searching around the internet for healthy Thanksgiving recipes last holiday season, there’s a good chance Vibrant placed an ad for Del Monte’s content within your line of sight. This was made possible through Mosaic, Vibrant’s tool that syndicates brand and social content across the web.

The Outcome

The goal of Del Monte’s campaign was to drive brand interaction and engagement, and Moon says that, so far, it looks like the campaign was a resounding success. In terms of what Del Monte expected from Vibrant “we were looking for click through rates and time on site” says Moon.

“Click-through-rates were extraordinary,” she continues, adding that they “far surpassed industry standards.” In addition, she says that time on site was twice the norm. “On average it’s something like seven

seconds,” but with this campaign Del Monte saw time on site jump to almost 15 seconds.

That, Moon says, “speaks to the value of the content and the way Vibrant was able to target” content to the right readers.

According to the press release, “In addition to achieving impressive rates of viral sharing, the Del Monte Green Bean Index was covered on more than 100 media outlets—including top media outlets such as Bloomberg and Yahoo Travel, plus dozens of local TV news stations—garnering an estimated 80 million total audience in less than two weeks.”

“What we were able to accomplish with Vibrant was more than what we expected,” says Moon. “We were trying to drive value and engagement and that tighter connection with Thanksgiving....If we were to run another digital campaign we would certainly consider working with them again.”

Measuring the Results of Branded Content

One of the wonderful things about the web—and specifically digital marketing—is the interactivity. It is easy to know exactly how a digital ad campaign performs, though, that doesn’t always hold true for branded content. How is Netflix supposed to know if the *New York Times* piece about female inmates led to more viewers for *Orange Is the New Black*? A UK-based newspaper the *Telegraph*, launched an entire division to answer just this kind of question.

Spark—as the new division is called—aims to give clients more insight into campaigns, which it hopes translates into more confidence in branded content. Ricardo Bilton of Digiday wrote “How the *Telegraph* measures native ad campaigns,” which says, “Spark will also offer clients data dashboards for each campaign, which tells them how individual articles are performing in real time.”

The *Telegraph* hired a gaggle of data analysts to help make sense of its data for Spark. And it’s working. As Bilton wrote, “Data has already influenced how the the *Telegraph* creates sponsored content. In one campaign for coffee company Kenco, the *Telegraph* created a microsite about sustainable coffee in Honduras (see Figure 9.13). But the data showed that only a few hundred readers got to the page by searching for ‘sustainable coffee,’ instead of finding it while looking



Figure 9.13 A screenshot of the *Telegraph’s* content created for coffee company Kenco.

for articles about Honduras’ issues with drugs and cocaine. So the *Telegraph* used that data to convince Kenco to let it create content around that topic.”

Data is important, but you also have to know what to look for and how to interpret that data—which is why newspapers like the *Telegraph* are spending money on tools and people. According to Brian Honigman’s post “7 Metrics to Accurately Measure Your Content Marketing” you need to be looking for

1. Brand lift
2. Increased traffic
3. Social interactions
4. On-Site engagement
5. Lead generation and subscriptions
6. Thought leadership
7. Conversions

If you’re a publisher who is still taking those first tentative steps into branded waters, you can’t start measuring until you take the plunge. Just remember to figure out what your customer wants to achieve

before embarking on a branded-content campaign. You can't be successful if you don't know what you're trying to achieve.

About the Author

By day, Theresa Cramer is the editor of *EContent*, where she covers the world of digital media and marketing. By night she is a reader and writer of books, NPR addict, and avid gardener. Cramer has over a decade of experience in publishing. From newspapers to books to magazines, she has worked in every arm of the industry. With the inherent curiosity of a journalist, and the attention to detail of a seasoned editor, she helps create content success stories.

A graduate of the University of Connecticut, Cramer began her career working at a small-town newspaper with virtually no web presence. After several years of covering the Board of Education and local sports, she moved on to Harper Collins Publishers. In 2008 she joined the *EContent* team as assistant editor, taking the helm as editor in 2011. Covering the digital media industry has taught Cramer many things, chief among them that the internet allows us all the freedom to experiment but that it takes commitment to strategy and execution to succeed.

Cramer lives in Connecticut with two cats and a dog. She blogs about her adventures in home decorating (and whatever else strikes her fancy) at TheresaCramer.com. Send her your comments at the website or follow her on Twitter @TheresaCramer.

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