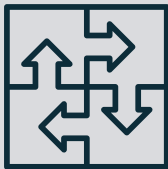


OWNED MEDIA: NURTURING CUSTOMERS WITH CREATIVE CONTENT

INTEGRATED COMMUNICATIONS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW



Thinking of 'PR' simply in terms of media relations is a thing of the past.

In today's multichannel marketing environment, brands can't rely on media relationships or focus all their energies on pursuing editorial coverage.

Influential, independent media are still as important as ever. But they're just one of many communications platforms which need to come together seamlessly and consistently to tell your brand story.

This is what we mean by Integrated Communications: using all relevant channels to reach your target customers, command their attention, engage them with your messages and provoke a response.

This requires a joined-up strategy and a rich mix of relevant, interesting content that works across every category of media – earned, paid, shared and owned.

Here we look at how to make your owned media channels an effective part of your integrated communications strategy.

OWNED MEDIA

'Owned' media are the communications channels which you have absolute control over as a brand owner – for example, your website, campaign microsites, blog, customer publications and marketing collateral.

Your social channels may also be considered as owned media channels in the sense that you control the content you post; however the narrative and message can be impacted by responses from your social community, so we'll leave it out of this discussion – it's covered in our separate guide, 'Shared: Being B2B Social'.

On your owned channels, you have the freedom to post all the content you care to create, and to dictate your own message, tone and timing. You don't have to worry about whether your content will attract the attention of an independent editor, or pay to see it published. You do need to proactively encourage customers to find your owned content, as well as allowing them to discover it for themselves.

Bear in mind that customers may be less trusting of content on brand-owned channels compared with earned media, knowing that it is not independently curated and will be naturally biased to your brand. For that reason, it's important to get the balance right with the content you publish. Of course you want to promote your products and make it easy for customers to find information, but you should also see your owned media channels as an opportunity to build credibility. This is the place to educate and inspire your potential customers and engage them with your brand by demonstrating your authority in a particular market sector, application or area of technology. If your content is unique, relevant and informative, it can serve your organic SEO strategy too, boosting visibility of your web pages to customers searching online.

The content you produce can stay on your owned platforms for as long as it is relevant and valuable for your customers. You can also adapt and repurpose it for multiple other channels to extend the value it delivers as part of your wider communications efforts. It's important to use channels such as social media to make your content more visible and drive traffic to your online properties. There you have the potential to capture data and prompt customers towards other material that may progress their journey to eventually buying from you.

As with other channels, you can use a range of analytics to measure which pieces of content are engaging customers most effectively, and to adapt your content strategy accordingly. It's important to monitor whether customers are discovering the content they want, not just what you think they want.

Owned channels are fundamental to an integrated approach to communications and inbound marketing for lead generation and nurture. With so much potential value to be gained from owned media activity, whatever the size of your business, it makes good sense to map all available content platforms, then consider how to enrich your content to increase customer engagement.

Read on for some guidance on how to maximise the value of owned content as part of a joined-up approach to your B2B communications.



OWNED MEDIA CONTENT

WEBSITES & MICROSITES

Of all the owned media channels at your brand's disposal, your corporate website is the most important. It's your brand shop window, the place where you showcase your products and services and communicate the essence of your brand.

Where your content marketing strategy is concerned, your website should be your first consideration. Think about how you could make the site more compelling for your customers by giving them access to more explanatory and educational content through short articles, Q&As and infographics, alongside simple descriptions of products and services. Make sure that the overall tone of voice conveys the right image and personality for your brand, and check that it's consistent across all areas of the site.

It's wise to review the imagery on your site periodically and consider refreshing the look and feel regularly, so that repeat visitors don't become overly familiar with what they're seeing and are encouraged to explore. Consider also how you might add video content to enhance the experience for a visitor to your site; for example with customer interviews and case studies, virtual showroom tours, interviews with senior management or subject matter experts exhibitions and product launch footage, time-lapse video of major installations, and so on.

In addition to your main website, there may be occasions when it makes sense to create a separate microsite to support a specific integrated marketing campaign. A microsite can be an ideal platform for publishing more in-depth content about a product, technology or business issues. Depending on the campaign you also have some freedom to adopt a slightly different tone and visual style, distinct from your corporate site. This is particularly valuable if your campaign is trying to reach vertical or niche audiences who are likely to find your main web presence unappealing and who need specific content tailored to their interests.

BLOG

A blog offers an opportunity to add personality and individuality to B2B content. Blogs are effectively opinion pieces published on a channel which you control editorially, so you can say what you like; the only 'curation' will be the response you provoke from your target audience.

A blog gives you a platform to establish all-important thought leadership on business issues or areas of technology innovation. Through a well-written blog that is proactively promoted via your direct customer communications and social channels, your brand – or specific spokespersons – can become a go-to authority on the subjects that matter to your customers and prospects, making it an effective part of your lead generation strategy. Blogs can be used to deal with frequently asked questions, to educate about complex technologies, and to share perspectives on latest market developments.

To add interest for consumers of your blog content, consider using multiple sources within the company to author blogs, invite guest posts from partners and other third parties that align with your message, and vary the text format of the blog content, mixing video and longer-form pieces with other, more digestible formats.

NEWSLETTERS & E-BULLETINS

As regular touchpoints with your customers and prospects, newsletters and e-bulletins can be a useful platform for sharing the most current information about your organisation, products and services. This type of owned content should have a light touch, ensuring that it's a quick but informative read that may prompt the reader to come to your main website to find more in-depth content. These are important mechanisms for regularly driving customer traffic to your website, where you can deepen engagement with your brand and nurture interest.

CUSTOMER MAGAZINES

With so many digital communications channels, it's easy to underestimate the unique value of printed communications, but they can play a significant role in connecting with customers and prospects at a deeper level that can be achieved with digital content. A customer magazine allows you to place a curated selection of premium content directly into your customer's hands, encouraging them to take time to engage with your messages at a different level, compared with the tendency to 'scan and skim' online material.

Presenting a magazine-style mix of news, in-depth features, case studies, explainers and 'shorts' in a well-designed, easy-to-navigate layout with great images makes for a captivating read and gives you the opportunity to develop your narrative and demonstrate your expertise. And in an integrated strategy, your printed magazine can drive readers to extension content online, or to participate in social discussions, while individual stories can be posted online and shared socially.

SALES AND MARKETING COLLATERAL

Collateral like brochures, catalogues, product guides and spec sheets are all essential elements of your B2B marketing tool kit. Don't overlook the opportunity to enrich the content of these materials and use them to drive customers to other value-added materials that will improve their experience of your brand. Within the collateral itself, consider moving beyond simple lists of product features and benefits, for example by adding technology explainers, 'how-to' tips and so on, or by including short pieces of editorial to convey expertise and market insight. Make the collateral work harder as part of your integrated content strategy, offering links to additional material online, such as user case studies, demo and explainer videos with product experts, 'under the bonnet' technology animations, and so on.

HOW CAN AD COMMUNICATIONS HELP?

At AD Communications, we have more than 30 years' experience of researching and developing brilliant B2B content for our clients, from magazines, newsletters and technical/business development guides, to in-depth issues-led and technology white papers, and research publications.

Our team has a talent for creating compelling copy and visual content, combined with a deep understanding of the ever-evolving mix of B2B content channels. We devise carefully integrated communications strategies that harmonise and amplify your content to build awareness, credibility and authority with your target audiences, and to generate and nurture all-important leads.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HOW TO WORK CREATIVELY AND ACHIEVE TANGIBLE RESULTS, PLEASE CONTACT HELEN TOLINO:

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