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ACTIVATING BRAND CONTENT ONLINE



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Brand content is reinventing itself.

It's no longer just about your grandmother's Procter & Gamble-sponsored television soap operas. Nor is it about sticking Coke bottles inside The Red Room on the "American Idol" stage. And it's not even about hiring a bunch of fancy directors to create online short films with BMW cars in them (though those films were really cool).

In the new online media landscape, brand content isn't the "sit back and watch" branded entertainment of traditional media. It is a more actively consumed form of entertainment, something that engages, participates with, and is spread by an audience.

Does this sound too good to be true? It's already happening in small ways. But for the most part, content creators and advertisers still hold on to old media mentalities and create passive experiences. Brands still feel like an afterthought to the content.

For brand content to realize its full online potential, there are a number of things both advertisers and content creators must first recognize.

It's About Co-Creation

Advertisers and content creators share common goals. They both want to emotionally connect with and inspire an audience. But while advertisers are good at getting their message across in spots in 60 seconds or less, the film and television industry usually needs at least 30 minutes to tell a story. In online video storytelling, the melding of these two skill sets is key: create content in short form that

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tells a story rather than just sends a message. Add to that the interactive skills most advertising agencies have been honing since the advent of Flash technology, and you've got a winning formula.

Perhaps the real solution for the writers on strike is for them to bypass the big networks all together and partner directly with advertising agencies. Working together could result in better uninterrupted online content and break old media's vicious pay cycle.

Seek Out an Audience, Don't Build From Scratch

Social communities are the new video networks. And they're popping up in every shape and form. It's only a matter of time before every niche demographic will be consuming and producing some form of video content. So don't build another one. Join one (or two!) that already exists.

Spending media dollars to drive traffic to yet another community is no longer money well spent. Seek your audiences out. Learn their passions. Understand what motivates them. Get to know what audiences exist, embed your content into their networks, then cater your content to their needs. The best way to write a story is to know whom you're writing it for, and the online space allows that luxury.

Then use the money you would have spent on building that audience to distribute and syndicate your content through multiple networks.

The Community Is in Control

Last week, Nokia announced the future of entertainment will be [circular](#). It predicted that "up to a quarter of the entertainment consumed by people in five years time will have been created, edited and shared within their peer circle rather than coming out of traditional media groups."

Like circular entertainment, online brand content doesn't have to be a one-sided conversation. Allow the audience to participate and share the spotlight. Leave enough room in the plot for them to add their own storylines. Even embed interactivity into the video so [they can decide how the next scene unfolds](#).

By allowing a community to be a part of the storytelling process, people are much more likely to include you in their inner circle of friends. And with new technology like Google's [Open Social](#), that also means free peer-to-peer distribution through multiple networks.

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The Relationship Between Brand, Content Is Liquid

There are no hard-coded rules about how a brand weaves into a brand content experience. If a story can be told better void of the brand, then let the brand support the community around that story.

Questions to ask now are: How can the brand act as a facilitator to the content and the community? What tools can be created for the community that will make the experience even more engaging? The line between what is brand entertainment and what is brand utility is blurred within the online spaces you design.

And in the end, it's all about how the audience experiences the brand through the content they're engaging with. If the advertisers and content creators are actively listening to what their audiences are saying and are actively involving them in the process, it's a win-win for everyone.

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