

Content is a conversation

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Content marketing done right has the power to boost brand growth and build life-long brand relationships. But how to get it right?



[John Brown Media SA](#)'s recent Content Summit saw journalist, screenwriter, author, broadcaster and [John Brown Media Group](#)'s Chief Content Officer, Matt Potter, share some spirited thoughts on what makes great content. Managing Director of John Brown Media SA, Lani Carstens, asked Matt to talk a little more about what content can do for brands – and more importantly, their customers.

Matt, welcome! To start, tell us what you think content can do for our clients and their customers?

Content is a chance to produce a moment of connection with what is best in a brand. These moments, to customers, are big. 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.

What's the best practice agencies should adopt to create winning content?

Think like a journalist and 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?

And what potentially makes great content ineffective?

When it's strategised, planned, executed and reviewed by people who don't quite understand what it is or how it works, but have been told it's important. Meaning, the story itself – the core truths of an organisation, their opportunity to connect – is treated (i.e. bought, planned, budgeted for) as if it's a synonym for "stuff". So that's what it becomes. Got some data, got a channel, just put whatever in there, pump it out.

So what should we be aware of when combining data with creative?

Analytics and audience data has sunk more great marketing than it's enabled – not because it's wrong, but because the people using it are afraid of it. Don't let the data push you around. If content is the journalistic story, then data is the leads and clues. Your overarching human intelligence will then turn this into something that will light fires, make people notice, capture hearts and minds and forge change in attitudes or behaviours.

How can advertisers use branded content to authentically engage consumers?

Step outside the self-affirming brand presentations and see yourself as others see you. Working inside a brand and being passionate about it does not mean that everyone else feels the same way. 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.

Also, use your emotional intelligence and put yourself in the mind of the consumer. Do you have anything really interesting about you that I might find stimulating and fun and compelling? If you're a [car brand](#), your view on future cities or technology might be really cool. If you're a [food store](#), I want to hear provenance and trends stories, not just promos dressed as recipes.

Finally, don't rely on partnerships, sponsorships and celebs to "borrow" attention or interest. These days, kids on Instagram are adding #spon to their posts to pretend they're being paid to promote things. 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.

Matt, thank you. Any parting thoughts?

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

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