Content Marketing: The Big Come-Back

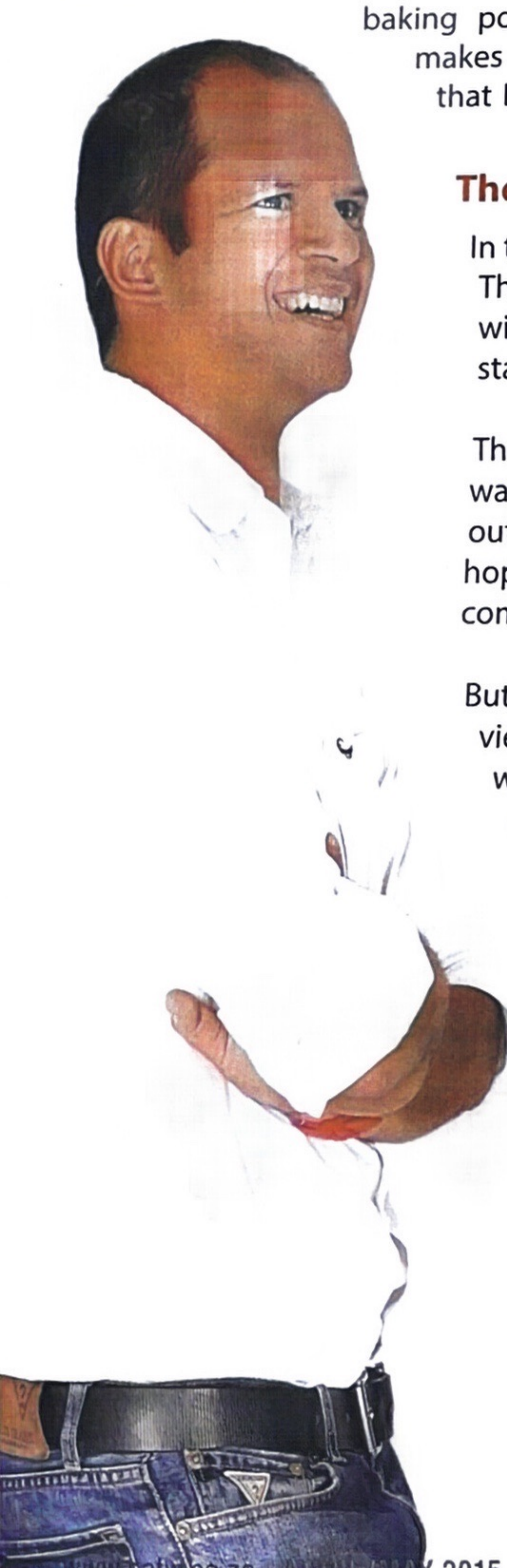
Quality Content Has Always Been In Style

By Etienne Bruwer – Chief Genius

One of the most notable catch phrases in the marketing landscape is "Content is King". Marketers and industry leaders alike have been throwing it about like sweepstake tickets and by now, everyone has wrapped their heads around the idea that content plays a much bigger role in the marketing scheme of things than it used to. In fact, it is estimated that by 2016 marketers will spend a staggering R28 billion on e-mail marketing alone.

The trend has been around for quite a bit. Communicating and storytelling is almost as old as time. Just look at cave paintings, Egyptian hieroglyphs, or think of traditional stories shared around the camp fire over the course of generations.

One of the earliest examples of marketing utilising this specific craft dates back to 1891. Dr August Oetker (Dr Oetker is still a well-known brand today), sold small packages of baking powder to households. What makes this example so significant is that Dr Oetker printed recipes on the back of the packaging which soon became so popular that he published a highly successful cookbook in 1912.



Said book is known as one of the most successful cookbooks around the globe – reaching 19 million sold copies over the past 100 years. The Doc's secret ingredient? Understanding the customer's need for practical, consumable information, which, to a certain extent, could be translated as, well… love

Other brands who used this tactic in the 19th & 20th centuries are John Deere and Michelin respectively. The phrase "Content Marketing" was first used in 1996 when John F. Oppedahl introduced a shift in focus for journalists investigating newspaper readers and how newspapers were marketed. They were urged to measure satisfaction rather than readership.

A Short Definition

Content Marketing is defined as the creation, curation, publishing and distribution of information / media that is aimed at educating, entertaining and retaining customers by adding value to their lives.

The Evolution and the Internet of things

In the beginning there was print advertising only. Followed by radio ads and finally short TV ads. The Internet however, changed a lot of things. It is estimated that by the year 2020, customers will manage 85% of their relationships with enterprises without talking to a human. A shocking statistic perhaps, but not far fetched by a long shot.

The amount of information digested, purchases made and relationships maintained by way of the Internet is growing exponentially. Initially marketers were frantically pushing out banner ads, creating AdWord-campaigns and measuring click through rates in the hope that consumers would pay attention and notice them in a sea of other products or services competing for the same thing: a single click.

But, as CEO of Chartbeat, Tony Haile, puts it, we had it all wrong. Measuring clicks and page views are dead. Even though traffic to your content is valuable, it is not a clear indication as to whether your content made an impact. Metrics to take into account in terms of measuring real return on investment is time spent on a page, finish percentage and return engagement. In other words: Did you captivate the audience? Did they connect on a personal level? Did the time they spent reading your content add any value to their lives?

The Age of The Consumer, Again

In the past, publishing was limited to the media. Nowadays everyone can publish their own content, be it via social media, blogging or by commenting on articles published in forums. You are either part of a conversation, or not.

Consumers are looking to the digital landscape for building meaningful relationships with brands, leading us back to where it all began: creating brand stories that are relatable, consumable and of the highest quality.

To quote thought leader, entrepreneur and marketer, Seth Godin: "Our job is to connect to people, to interact with them in a way that leaves them better than we found them, more able to go where they'd like to go."

Two Local Case Studies

Remarkable examples of Content Marketing in our own backyard.

#1 - Goodbye Citi

There probably is not one South African who doesn't have a Citi Golf story, whether it be one of adventure, inheritance or daily routine. The VW Citi Golf's presence in South Africa could be compared to a Saturday braai with friends, brannas and coke while watching the rugby game or just good old tripe. Needless to say, the whole country was in a state of disbelief and shock when they announced that the Citi Golf had been discontinued in 2009.

VW decided that the country's most beloved car would go out with some tears, one last road trip and a very big bang. One last opportunity to say goodbye was given – the last Citi Golf took to the wide open road and travelled one last time around the country. Family, friends, fans and Citi enthusiasts were encouraged to follow the trip and sign the car, creating a life-sized farewell card. The whole trip was filmed and uploaded to YouTube. A microsite with all the latest updates was created and fans were encouraged to say their goodbyes on multiple social media platforms.

#2 –The One Rand Man

During National Savings Month 2014 Sanlam conducted a social experiment in which a man received his whole salary in nothing but one Rand coins, eliminating opportunities for digital banking, credit cards and any overdraft facilities. The experiment served to educate South Africans on the importance of saving and getting back in touch with how to manage their money.

The One Rand Man's journey was documented and loaded onto YouTube in a weekly series-format during National Savings Month. Videos with insights from financial and behavioural experts were available after each episode. Helpful articles were published in a financial newspaper each Saturday reflecting on issues that came up during each episode.

The astonishing story was also shared, followed and commented on through multiple social media platforms. The One Rand Man even appeared in national and international magazines, newspapers, TV and radio shows.

The Pudding

Did these campaigns meet the par? As they say, the proof is in the pudding.

Ogilvy Cape Town's Goodbye Citi campaign had the whole country buzzing, and even got some news coverage. Just about 7 000 people signed the car and more than 10 000 said their goodbyes online. Around 59 000 Citi Golf patriots followed the journey on the microsite and the sentiment around the campaign caused the last 1 000 Citi Golfs to become collectors items. A staggering R12.6 million in free publicity was generated.

King James' One Rand Man YouTube advert was South Africa's Number One ad during July. The series attracted more than 900 000 views on YouTube, totalled more than 74 million media impressions and generated more than R41 million in earned media. It is important to note that during and even after the social experiment, the conversation about saving continued. The campaign did not only entertain, but informed and enriched lives by equipping the audience with necessary tools and insights on saving. Not to mention the six awards won at The Midas Awards in New York.

Back to the Future

Content Marketing is one of those things that's been around for eons, and is not likely to go away any time soon. The best way to approach one of the hottest topics in marketing at the moment is to get with the programme, get busy and involved in conversations by bettering and enriching the lives of your clients, as well as their customers. The more you tell, the more you'll sell.

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