



Print Lives and 10 Other Content Marketing Trends for 2012

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After the holidays, the intrepid among us look at the remains of our respective feasts and see opportunity. That turkey bone can flavor a soup. Those leftover veggies would taste great in a stew. That untouched pie should be sent to a shelter.

Making the most of the feast, during and after the meal, is smart, sensible and doable.

Companies and organizations can similarly extend the life of their feast. Companies are realizing the power of creating and sharing "unedited" messages through channels that more directly reach their consumers. Content marketing is having a renaissance, in large part due to Boston-area companies and thought leaders who have revived it as a vibrant part of building a brand and communicating corporate stories.

Those who eat from the content marketing plate should pay attention to the following trends in 2012:

- **Creative ownership:** 2012 will bring the question of "who owns it," which has dominated social media conversations, to content marketing. This long-standing marketing discipline, suddenly sexy again, will be subject to a land grab by PR firms, ad agencies and pure content creators.
- **Integrated marketing is back with a vengeance, and PR is part of it:** Companies will choose to work with firms that embrace and incorporate video, design, content marketing, search (SEO and SEM) and other creative tactics, and can pair those efforts with public relations campaigns and programs. 2011 started a dance around the edges of this shift – 2012 will bring content marketing as part of PR to the forefront.
- **Video will spread like... a virus:** Video is getting easier and cheaper to create, and websites and social networks now show and share video seamlessly. Companies will create video at record levels, but not all video will be good or able to accomplish its intended goals. Successful videos will tell good stories and move audiences to specific thoughts or behaviors.
- **Curation won't be just for museums:** Content curation is old school for the social media vanguard, but it will become a new focal point for companies looking to develop independent content centers on their websites. These news and information centers will drive search, serve as educational portals and fill in the gaps between earned media (media coverage), paid media (advertising) and Wikipedia.
- **Corporate journalists will be in demand:** Even the best executive blog posts can't match the stories that trained journalists create. Larger companies have already started hiring journalists to frame their marketplace, share their information and define their industries through regular, in-depth reporting. This trend will continue as companies see the value in the independent and/or marketing content that staff journalists deliver.

- **TV will be, well, TV:** Broadcast outlets, television and radio, still won't capture the huge prospective audience to their websites. Master content creators for TV and radio will continue to share redundant information through their websites, social media and branded content, ignoring the web's major differences and opportunities.
- **Content marketing will see resurgence in college curricula:** [Kirk Hazlett](#), APR, Fellow PRSA and associate professor of communication at Curry College, sees more hands-on classroom learning and internship opportunity for the next generation of content marketers. According to Kirk, "the challenge, or opportunity depending on how optimistic you are, lies in instilling in the next generation of communication professionals an understanding of just how important content-driven communication is. Although these young people grew up in an online environment, they haven't yet grasped the importance of authenticity in communication. Today's online participants, particularly those looking for a product or service, want to know the real benefits to them as a consumer, and they want to hear from a 'real' person. Our future communicators need to be shown that it's not an 'if you throw enough stuff against the wall, something will stick' process. It's a two-way, content-based dialogue. This is where, as a first step, educators can play a role through classroom training and internships that afford the student real-life, real-time experience."
- **Content marketing budgets will increase:** According to a survey by [MarketingProfs](#) and the [Content Marketing Institute](#), 60 percent of companies will increase content marketing budgets in 2012.
- **White papers will evolve:** Moving beyond static, lengthy and dry pages, white papers will feature more digestible content, parsed out in smaller nuggets, supplemented and shared using social media. Video will emerge as a slicker, content-rich way to disseminate white paper findings and knowledge.
- **Print lives:** Despite the troubles within the U.S. Postal Service and the dominance of digital, print marketing will reemerge as a tactile, creative and multidimensional way of sharing stories.
- **Mobile is the new social:** I just switched from being a longtime Blackberry user to owning a genuine Android OS smartphone. And despite some adjustment pain, its functionality has already proven useful. Andy Komack, "Conductor" of marketing at [Blue Train Mobile](#), offers this perspective on mobile's place in the content evolution: "It's not enough to state the obvious, that mobile is growing at supersonic rates. It's more important that marketers take mobile seriously and approach mobile appropriately. Simply taking traditional desktop content and reformatting for a mobile screen doesn't help anyone – you or your audience. When someone is visiting your website (which IS the first point of contact for a mobile surfer), they need content that fits their mindset – utility. Quick, easy, digestible, actionable and retraceable. The retraceable part is important. Once a user has interacted with your content on a mobile device, you need to make sure they can get back to that messaging from other devices (e.g. their desktop computers). You also have the challenge of making your mobile content easy to manage, and ensuring that there is a fresh stream of content for the mobile visitor."
- **Truth-o-Meters will get better:** Socially networked audiences waste no time in sharing both good and bad content. Fact-checking, sentiment-creation, good and bad experiences race across mobile channels at unprecedented speeds. This keeps content creators up at night, and rightly so. With audiences so networked and willing to communicate, successful organizations will maintain uncompromising standards of truth and integrity in their communication, all the while keeping their audience interaction rapid and genuine – sometimes a difficult balance.

2012 promises a rich feast for content marketers and the companies that embrace the discipline. Sharing stories locally or globally has never been easier. It's also getting more powerful, at least for those organizations that wish to reuse their marketing assets or create new content to tell meaningful, engaging stories. Boston is rich with talent, both in content creation and the technology that enables that creation. Enjoy the meal.

Mark O'Toole, managing director of public relations & content marketing at HB Agency, helps clients tell their stories and engage with their audiences using words, images, video and search programs.