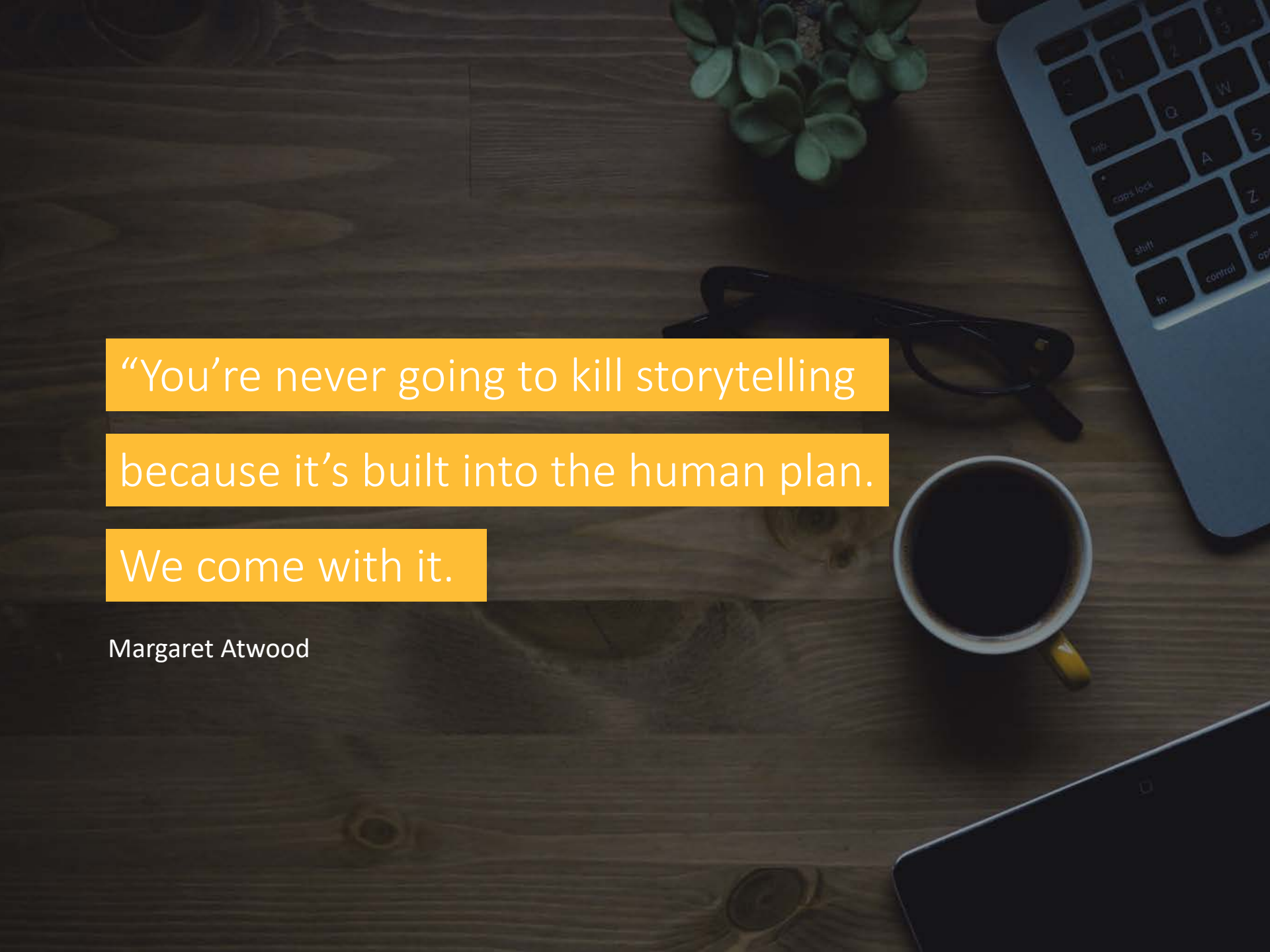




The Media Buyer's Guide to Branded Content

PRESENTED BY



A top-down view of a wooden desk. In the upper right, a silver laptop is partially visible. Below it, a pair of black-rimmed glasses lies on the desk. To the right of the glasses is a white coffee cup filled with dark coffee. In the upper center, a small green succulent plant is in a dark pot. The background is a dark, textured wooden surface.

“You’re never going to kill storytelling
because it’s built into the human plan.
We come with it.

Margaret Atwood



Jerrid Grimm
Co-Founder, Pressboard

Media buying is not a simple job. With the growing amount of new advertising and media products being introduced into the marketing mix and the increasing pressure to continually deliver more value to clients, it can be difficult to stay on top of everything. Branded content is one of those newer media products that is seeing a massive surge in popularity among advertising agencies and their clients – but like any new industry, it can be a bit like the Wild West out there. That’s why we created this complete guide to branded content with media buyers in mind. From ideation to execution, the information and insights within this guide will help you navigate every step of a branded content campaign and allow you to provide the most value to your clients.

Pressboard is a story marketplace. We make it easy for brands to collaborate with hundreds of media publishers to create branded content — instead of ads. In that same collaborative spirit, we created this guide to combine the wisdom of the greatest content minds and turn those insights into actionable advice that media buyers can all apply to their own portfolios of advertisers.

We cannot wait to see the stories that you will tell.

Pressboard would like to thank





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Our Esteemed Experts



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Head of Content APAC, BBC StoryWorks



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VP of Marketing, Visit Seattle



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Forbes Brand Productions



Ryan Galloway
Founder and Chief Creative,
18|Orion Media
Former Director of Branded Content
Services, Contently



Sam Sheffer
Creative Producer, Mashable

What's Inside This Guide

Chapter 1: Getting Started

Great content doesn't just happen. Find out how to plan properly to achieve a strong ROI.

Chapter 2: Contracts

The right contract can make or break a partnership. Learn what to look out for to maximize value for your clients.

Chapter 3: The Story

Storytellers from the world's top media publishers share their secrets to success and expert media buyers help you navigate client approvals.

Chapter 4: Distribution

See how the pros get their content in front of the right audiences by using various platforms.

Chapter 5: Measurement

We break down the true metrics of success in branded content and demonstrate what success looks like.





CHAPTER 1

Getting Started

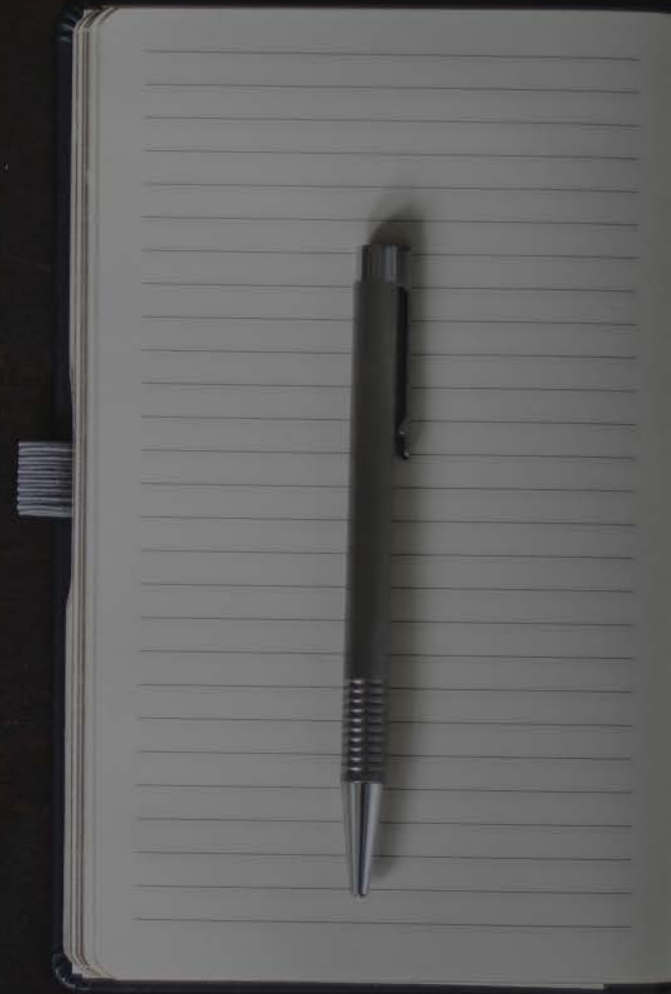


“Advertising was designed to be
interruptive. Content is created
to be consumed.”



Jerrid Grimm

Co-Founder, Pressboard



Defining Branded Content



Content marketing is one of the most effective and fastest growing forms of marketing today, yet many remain unclear as to how to define it.

This new kind of marketing is known by a variety of names, but not all of these titles are synonymous. While terms like “branded content,” “corporate storytelling,” “custom publishing,” “custom content” and “native advertising” are commonly used interchangeably with content marketing, it’s important to understand the distinction.

These titles are all forms of content marketing, which is an umbrella term used to describe marketing materials that provide valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience. Branded content could take the form of written content, infographics, web pages, podcasts, videos, books or other forms of published media, so long as a brand has a hand in producing the content.

In this guide, we focus on a specific type of branded content – branded content partnerships. Branded content partnerships are collaborations on content, typically between brands and media publishers. This type of content is often labelled as “sponsored”, “custom”, or “partnered” content on media publishers’ sites. The ultimate goal of branded content partnerships is to provide audiences with valuable content that cleverly incorporates a brand and influences the consumer.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL wsj.com. The page is titled "COCAINENOMICS" and is a sponsored piece by Netflix for the show "NARCOS". The article is titled "THE SYNDICATE" and discusses the challenges of the Medellín organization. A video player is embedded in the article, showing a scene from "NARCOS" with the title "PLATA O PLOMO" and a subtitle "Escobar's challenge was simple: 'Plata o plomo' ('Take my silver or take my life')".

Cocainenomics, an award-winning piece created by The Wall Street Journal and Netflix is a great example of a branded content partnership.

Why Branded Content



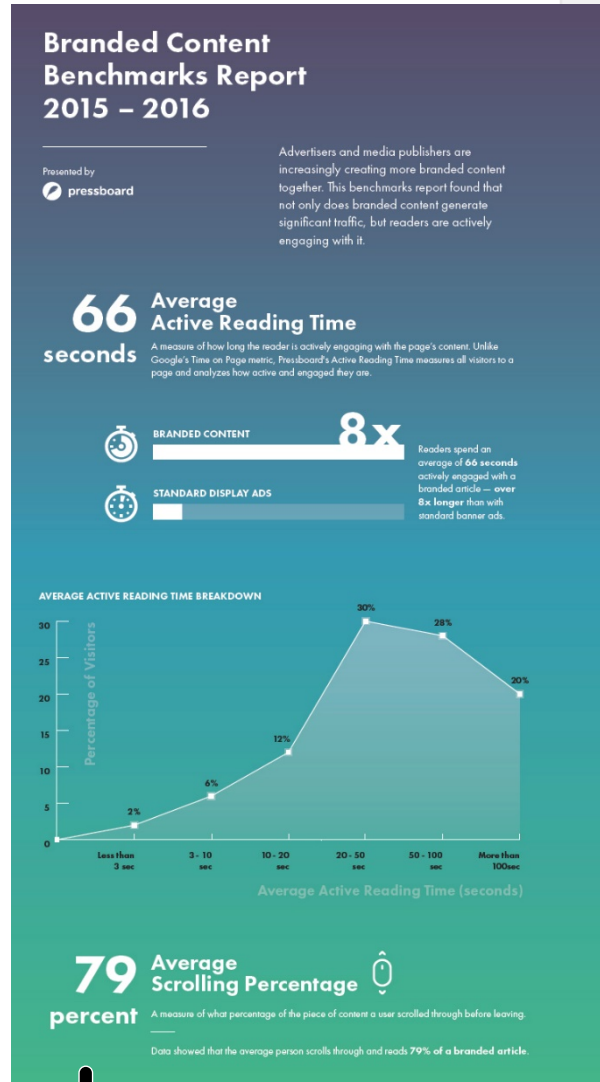
Jerrid Grimm
Co-Founder, Pressboard

Since starting Pressboard almost three years ago, we've worked with over 200 brands and digital publishers across North America to create hundreds of branded stories that have been read by millions. This means we're constantly receiving tons of data that gives us exclusive insights into how branded content is consumed and why it is so powerful for advertisers.

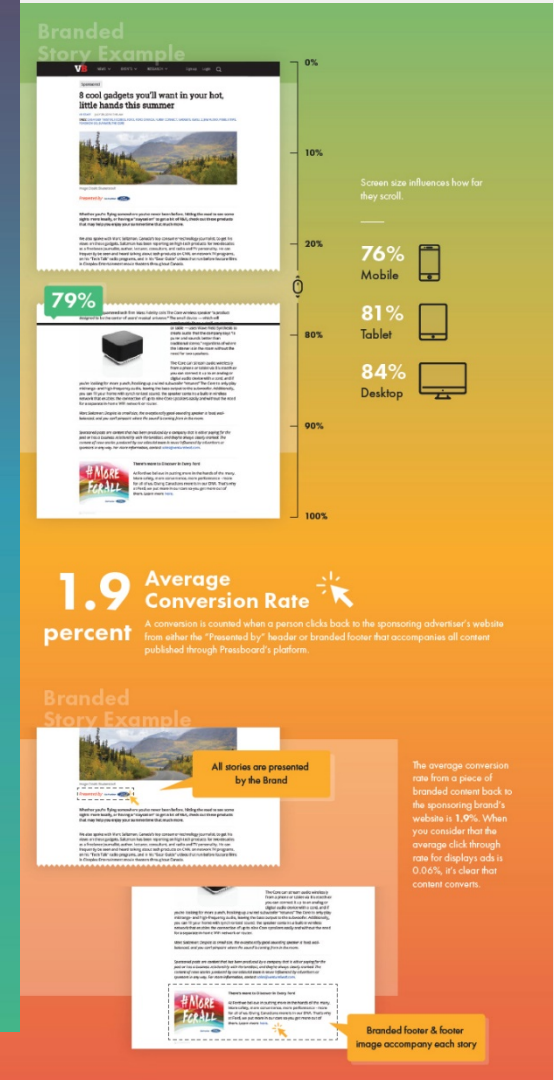
Using data pulled from over 900 stories created by brands and publishers through Pressboard's platform, we've compiled a [benchmarks report](#) that shows just how valuable branded content is to media buyers and their clients.

Branded content is about telling a great story, so it's no wonder that readers are engaging with this type of content more than with other forms of advertising.

This infographic breaks down a few of the key insights we found:



Click infographic to see more



Getting Brand Buy-in



Stephanie Singer
Senior VP of Communications,
National Association of Realtors

On the power of branded content:

“We believe very strongly in the power of story to entertain our audience while demonstrating our brand values. We aim to build a connection with people through our shared beliefs, attitude and personality, and content has been an important part of our communications mix to do so.



Britt Fero
Principal, PB&

On recommending branded content to clients:

“No one needs to see another ad, but they do crave entertainment, information and ideas. Great branded content actually delivers value to someone...not just delivering value for a brand to talk about what they have. Great content leads to greater engagement and actual attentiveness that a traditional ad just can't ignite.



Anna Fertel
Associate Director, The Media Kitchen

On clients that might be hesitant about branded content:

“It can be [tough to convince clients] for a variety of reasons – obviously cost is a big factor, flexibility around language. Everyone wants to maintain their own voice, so if you can't come to a good compromise, then it's probably not the right fit. If a brand has contextual sensitivities and a partner can't guarantee they'll place your traffic drivers in appropriate environments, then that's an issue. You just need to maintain really open lines of communication with your client and publisher partners, [and] be honest about why you're saying no to things to set everyone up for stronger partnerships.

Finding A Partner



Anita Kapadia
Partnerships Director, Pressboard

“Much has already been written weighing the pros and cons of creating and publishing your content versus partnering with a publisher, but at Pressboard, we believe that a well-rounded content marketing plan contains both.

Media buyers need to begin to see their clients as media outlets themselves, while also leveraging the expertise of seasoned publishers that have spent years mastering the craft.

Great partnerships are a blend of two entities. In the best cases, this blend creates something new and exciting that is more interesting, powerful and valuable than the sum of it's parts.

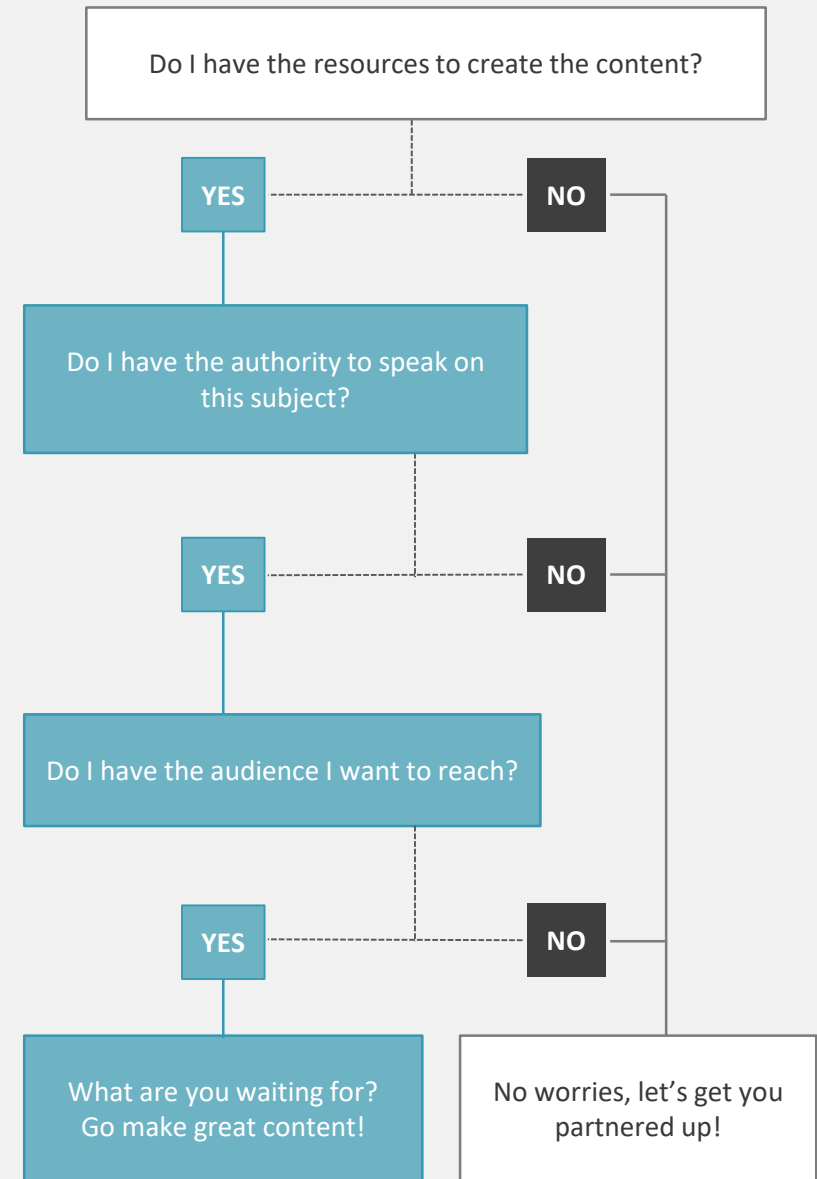


Diana Walter
Group Director, Digital Media, OMD Canada

On why they work with media publishers:

“Most publishers that media publishers have pre-established trust in the content that they release to their users, that's why we engage them. We also always review the publishers' content mix to see what their balance is between editorial content and paid content. We also analyze their social channels. I don't just look at their following either, I like to see what their organic reach is compared to their paid reach. What do your followers look like?

QUIZ: Do I need a partner?



Finding The Right Partner

The Explorers – BBC Future + Huawei



Huawei is looking forward to a world “beyond borders, barriers and limits” and believes that exploration is what will take us there, so partnering with the BBC’s forward-thinking science, health and technology brand was a great fit. This collection of short films celebrating present-day “explorers” is inspiring and really gives you the feeling that humanity is on the verge of something big.



Nicola Eliot

Head of Content APAC, BBC StoryWorks

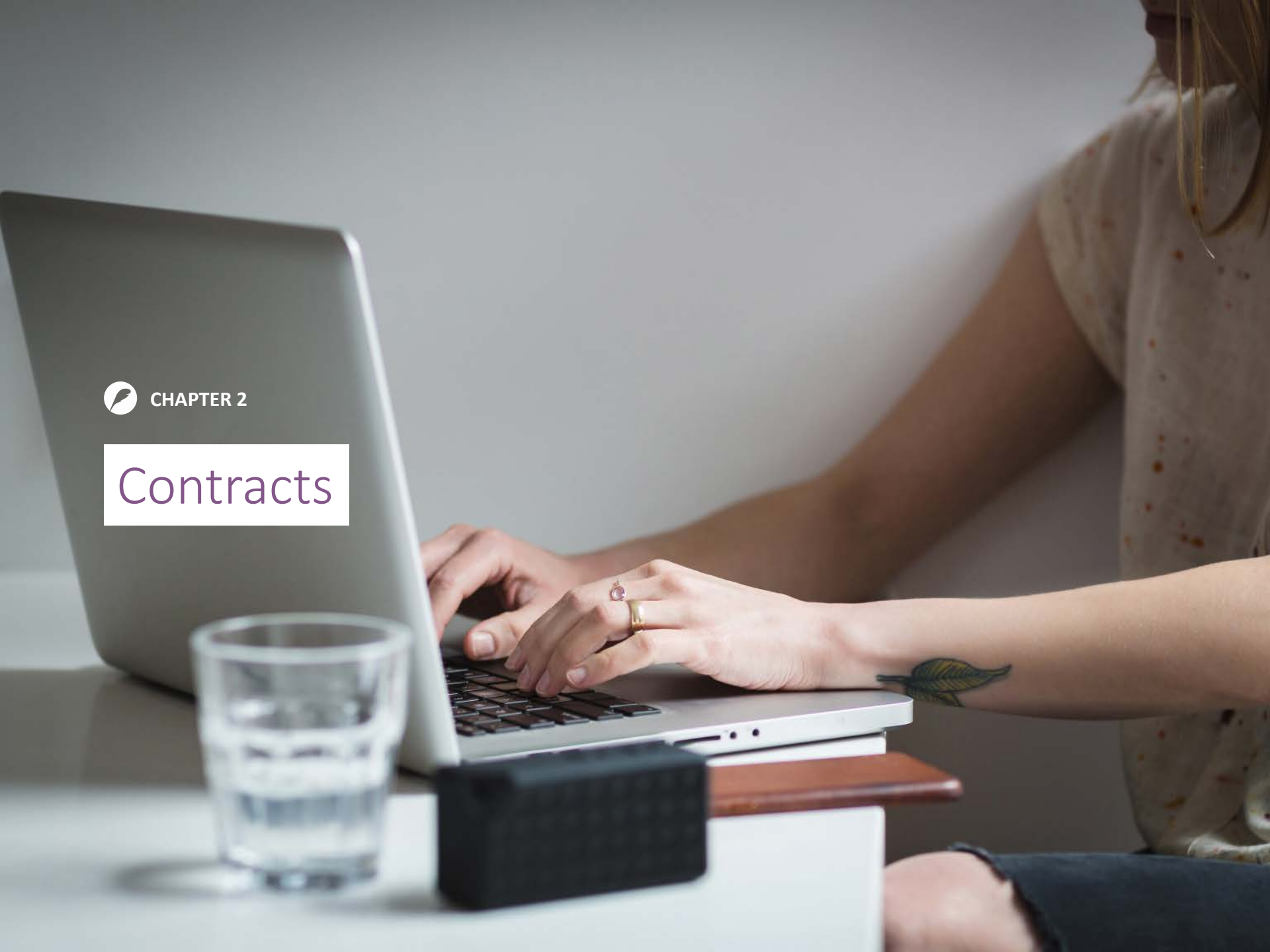
On finding the right partner:

My best piece of advice would be to really take the time to listen to what publishers have to say about their audience, and the type of content that works best on their platforms. One of the key advantages that publishers have in this area is their extensive knowledge of and relationship with their readers. This knowledge can help shape your content strategy on their platform to achieve maximum results. A good example of this is our recent Huawei campaign ‘The Explorers’, where we looked at key top performing people, themes and stories across our site to help source the story pillars and influencers we knew our audience was already eagerly consuming. Our client gave us the freedom to choose the right topics and people that we knew would work for our readers whilst trusting that their brand objectives were at the core of that selection, resulting in content that was truly valuable to both brands and audiences alike.



CHAPTER 2

Contracts



“Know your deal-breakers – if the
partnership isn’t right,
don’t force it.”



Anna Fertel

Associate Director, The Media Kitchen

Pricing

Pressboard surveyed over 160 North American publishers about how they price branded content and found that just over **91%** are based on a flat fee or impressions-based model. This is in stark contrast to what the media buyers had to say about how they would *prefer* to buy branded content from publishers. **75%** of media buyers interviewed for this guide said that they would prefer to buy branded content on a cost per view/read basis. While there is still a big disconnect between buyer and seller, many media buyers we spoke with mentioned that they have started to see a change in pricing models and a willingness on the part of publishers to commit to results-based pricing.



Jason Gee

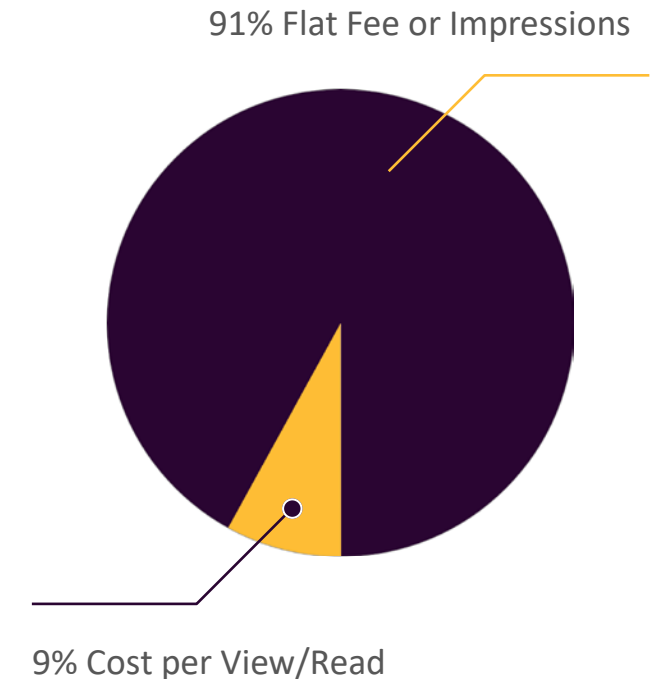
Digital Media Specialist, Best Buy Canada

“At Best Buy Canada, depending on the content, we would prefer to buy branded content based on views/reads as long as they aren't capped. This model helps us to set expectations for the dollars invested as the primary goal is to get as many people as possible to engage with it.

The next preferred method would be a flat fee, as it allows more flexibility for the content. The flat fee model allows the advertiser to negotiate custom details that could potentially increase the chances of something turning viral. However, the downside is during the planning stage it's difficult to predict how many views you will be attaining, and there isn't a structure in place to guarantee views, which means there is less incentive to push the content beyond the contractual amount.



How Publishers Price Branded Content





Courtney Dalton
Senior Digital Planner, Horizon Media

On pricing and add-on purchases:

“ Preferably, we would want to purchase on an engagement-based model - page views, video views, whatever the KPI is for that program. We want to be sure that the value is behind engagement with the actual program piece rather than surrounding media or promotional drivers, as that is really the objective behind these dollars. Though of course surrounding media and promotion is important, ideally these would be included as added value contingent on the spend associated with the branded content program.



Renata Andersen
Senior Media Manager, Puma

“ Work closely with publishers and their content / editorial teams to fully understand the goals and products / message, but allow freedom to create content that fits the audience and platform. Make sure your buying method / contract aligns with your goals and KPIs.

Potential Add On Purchases

- Organic social media posts
- Display / House Ads
- Paid social media
- Native ad units
- Email newsletters
- Retargeting
- Rich media executions
- Print media
- Influencer marketing
- Experiential activations

Terms & Conditions

Even seasoned media buyers should take a close look at the fine print of branded content programs. Every client is unique and has different needs, and there will be different terms and conditions that are important to each. In order to best represent your clients, it's important to ensure that where needed, the contract contains provisions for items such as; timelines, publishing deadlines, performance goals, copyrights, subsidiary rights, payment terms, licencing, warrants and indemnities, cancellation clauses, and licensing and republication rights.



Anna Fertel

Associate Director, The Media Kitchen

On negotiating a branded content buy:

“Ask a million questions – no matter how often a publisher says they've done something, every branded content activation is unique and requires very specific conversations to make sure it lives up to a client's expectation. You're paying for the partnership and deserve to have maximum transparency around all elements of the partnership – where/how your content will be distributed, how many people you can expect to see it, how people can engage, nuances with video players (is it a YouTube embed, do they have a native player), what metrics you'll receive afterwards, etc. Know your deal-breakers – if the partnership isn't right, don't force it.



Bobby Miller

Senior Strategist, The Media Kitchen

On how he'd prefer to pay for content:

[I'd prefer to spend based on] time spent with content. The real value of branded content is in getting people to spend quality time reading/engaging with that content. It's one thing to put together a robust promotional package to drive traffic to your content, as well as counting how many people viewed your content, but that doesn't really qualify if anyone is engaging and getting the takeaway we want.



CHAPTER 3

The Story

“Give them content that’s worth their time.

Remember, loyalty is built from being

pulled in, not pushed through.



Jason Gee

Digital Media Specialist, Best Buy Canada

Choosing Your Content Formats

On content formats:

An important part of a media buyer's job is choosing the right formats for your client's media mix. Choices should be made based on available resources, your target audience's values and ROI. The time and budget you can allocate towards content are major variables that will immediately narrow the options. Consider your target audience's needs and preferred formats. What formats work well in their industry? Are there any identifiable gaps in the content being created? After you've had some experience buying different types of content, look back and see what provided the best ROI and then recommend inserting more of that into your client's media mix.

Further Reading

[A Guide to Creating Content in the Formats Your Audience Loves](#)

[Which Content Marketing Formats Are Most Effective](#)

[105 Types of Content to Fill Up Your Editorial Calendar](#)



Content Marketing Media Matrix

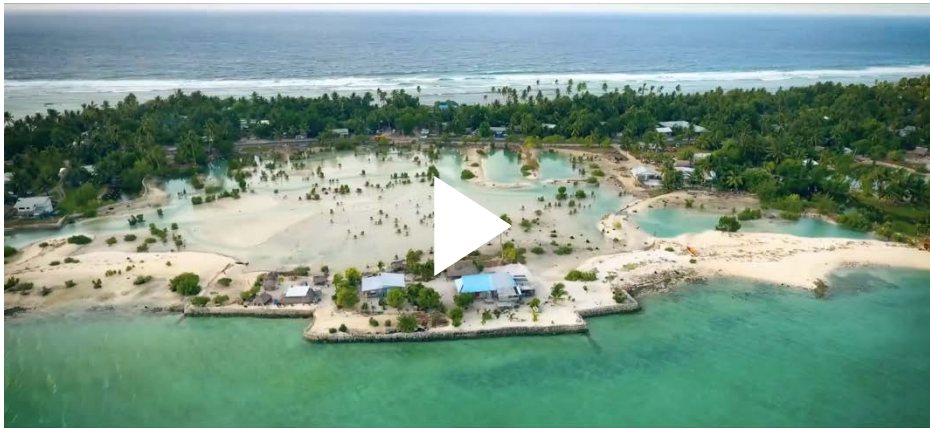
This matrix from PRWeb shows how different types of content require varying levels of resources.



Source: [CopyBlogger](#)

Experimenting With Formats

Capital Creates Change – The Wall Street Journal + Morgan Stanley



Morgan Stanley’s partnership with WSJ Custom Studios tells four stories about the companies and technologies they’ve invested in that are making global improvements in sustainability and mobility. What stands out about this partnership is how they document those changes through three awesome VR films that even take you to outer space for a truly global perspective. If you don’t have a VR headset, you can still enjoy the standard short films they made for each subject.



Fara Warner

Global Content Director, WSJ Custom Studios

What challenges does VR present for branded content campaigns compared to standard video?

I think the biggest challenge for our team was making certain we had compelling stories to tell in 360°. It can’t simply be the “newness” of any technology that makes you use it. It has to be used to its best advantage and in collaboration with other tools that we have traditionally used such as traditional video, long-form storytelling and data visualizations.

One of the challenges for the team was marrying the immersive nature of 360° video storytelling within a custom digital experience that also included traditional video and text. We needed to find an easy way for our audience to navigate between all of the elements so they could explore all the pieces, not just the 360° video. We worked with Morgan Stanley to create a compelling digital experience that is easy to navigate and makes certain that all the storytelling elements come together in one seamless integration.

Coming Up With Story Ideas



Ryan Galloway

Founder and Chief Creative, 18|Orion Media
Former Director of Branded Content Services, Contently

Tips for brands that are new to content marketing:

1. Check out the competition

Use an "opportunity analysis" to audit your competitors' content (and remember: you're a media organization now, so you're competing with established publications, not just direct competitors in your space). Look at the sources they use, the readers they address, content types they leverage and the topics they cover. Then look for white space: who's not being addressed, what topics aren't they covering, which content types are they failing to deploy? Know where your opportunities to steal/mindshare are, and the ideas will surface themselves.

2. Ask yourself "what would get my attention?"

Content marketers – especially new ones – love to play it safe. That results in a lot of content that's very similar, meaning your brand doesn't stand out. Don't be afraid to be unconventional.

3. Mix it up

Bring in fresh minds. Leverage some freelance writers to pitch stories. Bring in people from other departments. Don't rely just on your internal marketing or content teams. This one is the easiest tip to execute, and it almost always injects some unexpected ideas into the mix.

Adam Loeb

Senior Video Producer, The New York Times T Brand Studio

“The best video storytellers I know are always asking why someone would care about a narrative. It's a question I hear often when brainstorming ideas, “why would someone care about this?” — simple, but incredibly effective in a world where you are competing for people's attention with near infinite amounts of distractions.



Toolbox

[Google Keyword Planner](#)

[Google Trends](#)

[BuzzSumo](#)

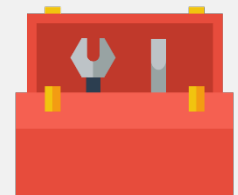
[Open Site Explorer](#)

[Google Alerts](#)

[Social Crawlytics](#)

[Notey](#)

[Portent's Content Idea Generator](#)



Inserting Your Brand Into The Story



Courtney Dalton
Senior Digital Planner, Horizon Media

On publisher insight:

“Branded content allows marketers to reach audiences in a way that feels more authentic and trusted, by aligning with and appealing to their interests. The value proposition here is that by leveraging the credibility and voice of a publisher, a brand can create valuable content that audiences will be interested in engaging with. Publishers have the most insight into what their audiences are most receptive to and what they aren't, which is extremely valuable in reaching users in a way that feels organic to the environment rather than forced.

On helping clients understand that:

“First, it is important to work with the client to establish clear objectives ahead of time. What are we trying to accomplish with this program? Is the goal to tout brand messaging, or is it to align contextually to reach and appeal to a publisher's audience? From there, it is important to set expectations from the forefront and communicate what the publisher feels their audience responds best to. It is of course a collaborative process between the parties; however, it is important that goals and expectations are managed appropriately from start to end.



Horizon Media and A&E trusted their publishing partners and the results paid off. This sponsored video generated almost 1 million views.

“Stay true to your brand personality and have fun with it! Content should be as entertaining as it is informative.”



Stephanie Singer

Senior VP of Communications,
National Associations of Realtors



Trusting Your Partners

Project Five by Five – Sundance TV + Visit Seattle



Visit Seattle started the new year by debuting five incredible short films with Sundance TV. Visit Seattle's VP of Marketing, Ali Daniels, explained that the partnership was the result of asking media partners to find more creative storytelling solutions. Daniels and her team understood that non-residents could bring a new perspective to telling the story of Seattle that they couldn't as locals. Aside from the stunning results, one of the most impressive things about this campaign was that Visit Seattle trusted Sundance TV and the filmmakers to shoot each video in a single day!



Ali Daniels
VP of Marketing, Visit Seattle

“Have confidence in your brand. If you pick the right partner, it can go really well.”



Diana Walter

Group Director, Digital Media, OMD Canada

On execution and revisions:

“Overall, it's pretty easy to explain to a client why they should be doing branded content during the planning phase. I believe the challenge is once it comes to execution. Branded content partnerships are a lot of work and a brand will often become very hands-on with the content itself. Often it is difficult for them to let go and allow the publisher do what they do best, which is to write. It can become an advertorial very quickly.

Tips for Handling the Revision Process

- ✓ Put expectations in writing at the start
- ✓ Trust your publishing partners
- ✓ Think about the content's environment
- ✓ Keep brand objectives in focus
- ✓ Consolidate feedback before returning to publisher with notes
- ✓ Make any requests straight-forward
- ✓ If possible, provide the information needed — don't make the publisher hunt for it



CHAPTER 4

Distribution



“Be platform agnostic. Focus on how and where your audience wants to consume your content, and take your content to them in a way that truly adds value.”



Nicola Eliot

Head of Content APAC, BBC StoryWorks

Distribution Summary



Jerrid Grimm
Co-Founder, Pressboard

On where to share content:

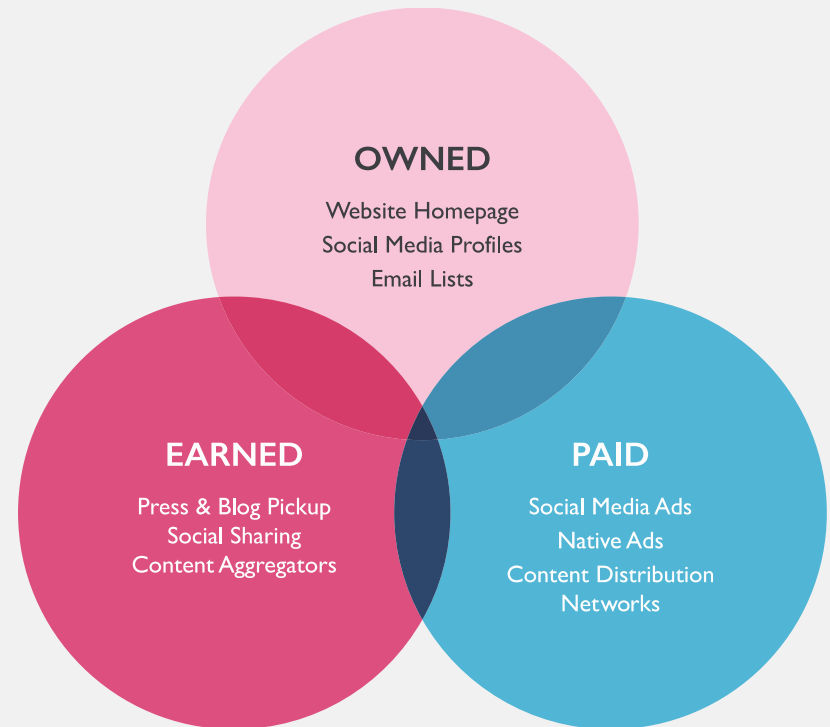
“Without a proper distribution plan, even the greatest content can languish unseen. It’s essential to understand the distribution options available and select what’s right for your content. That mix depends on the type of content, your target audience and your budget. Distribution options fall under three categories: owned, earned and paid. This section will take you through some of the most popular distribution options and provide tips, tools and best practices for each.

73.6%

of traffic to branded content is driven by Facebook. It is the #1 traffic source, by a long shot.

Source: [Pressboard](#)

Distribution Channels



Homepage

Depending on the publisher, homepage display ads or native units can be a significant driver of traffic to branded content. When publishers sell a branded content program based on impressions, that most often means impressions on these ad units on the homepage and other pages on the publisher's website.



Trevor Fellows

Former Head of Global Media Sales, Wall Street Journal

On the importance of the homepage:

“Obviously, we, like every other publisher, are enjoying massive growth in sideways traffic, but our home page remains incredibly important; it's the water cooler moment, if you will, for millions of the world's opinion leaders every day. So when we launch a native campaign, it gets immediate attention and buzz that's quite unlike anything else.

24.8 pages

Average number of pages viewed per visitor that started from the homepage. Visitors arriving from Facebook and Search only view an average of 4.2 and 4.9 pages respectively.

Source: [Pew Research](#)



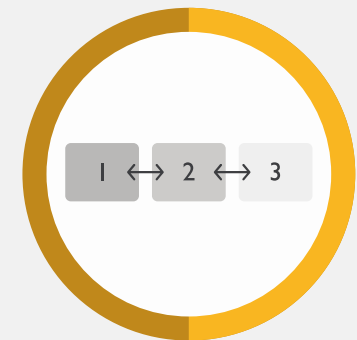
Homepage Trends of Fortune 500 Companies

63%



63% have content above the fold.

50%



50% will feature a scrolling content window of some kind.

Source: [GO-Globe](#)



There is an ongoing debate in the advertising and media world about whether or not brands should pay their publishing partners for social promotion of the branded content they create together. As organic reach across social media declines year-after-year, it's easy to see why spending money on paid promotion makes sense. Some publishers also argue that audiences will be more responsive to their social media ads, as opposed to those from brands. The reason is that consumers are more inclined to trust their favourite media companies compared to brands.

On the other hand, some advertisers and media agencies feel that they can pay to promote content themselves, and shouldn't have to pay a premium for media publishers to do it. Whether or not you include paid social media promotion in your branded content campaigns is a choice best made on a case by case basis, dependant on your client and publishing partners.



Lajja Sheth

Associate Director, Digital Investment, Mindshare World

On paying for social amplification:

“ I would make sure you understand fully what every package entails. We typically don't pay for amplification/content seeding with a partner nor do we pay for production fees – if fees occur, they should be baked into the overall CPM. I would encourage media teams to take the time to understand what they're actually paying for and what type of licensing agreements are put in place for clients to leverage content organically/paid, if preferred.



Diana Walter

Group Director, Digital Media, OMD Canada

On paying for social amplification:

“ I'm less concerned about whether it's paid or not, and more concerned with the targeting of the promotion. When a publisher is using their organic channels, I know who it's going out to, but with paid I need to ensure that the targeting being used still matches my desired audience.



Eric Korsh
President, Mashable Studios

On how to make sure a piece of content is shareable on social media:

“ I have two tips that are really easy to understand and really difficult to follow.

The first is for any evaluator to take their work hat off and put their consumer hat on, and simply evaluate the content or message as any consumer might – would I share this? That's different from ‘would I read or watch this?’ The difference is that this question forces you to dig into the mechanics of sharing – am I willing for people to know that I connected with this content – which helps govern the content itself.

The second tip is to recognize that virality is difficult to achieve. Content and ideas need to be supported through paid promotion. Without it, your investment is unlikely to succeed, regardless of the quality.



Mashable
December 31, 2015 · 🌐

7 facts about New Year's Eve celebrations from around the world.

7
NEW YEAR'S EVE
CELEBRATIONS
AROUND THE GLOBE

69K Views

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

👍 682 Top Comments ·

355 shares

Mashable
December 16, 2015 · 🌐

Bei Bei the baby panda struggles to stay awake for his media debut.

1.4M Views

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

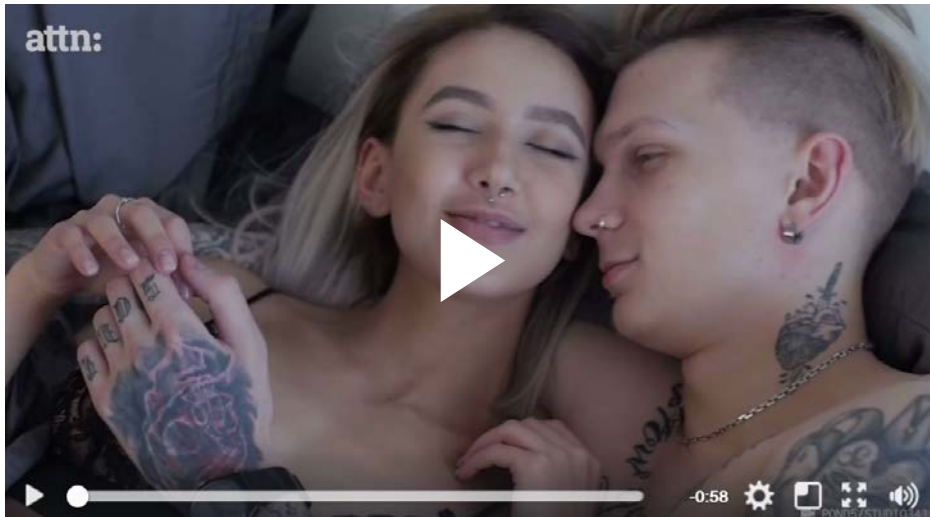
👍 🗨️ 🗨️ Newt Gingrich and 25K others Top Comments ·

17,612 shares



Shareable Branded Content

Successful Women Are Sexy – ATTN: + Match



Taryn Crouthers and her team at ATTN: are experts when it comes to creating shareable videos. Both their editorial and branded content regularly racks up millions of views, and the latter consistently ranks among the top branded videos across all of Facebook thanks to widespread social sharing.

Recently, a video her team produced in partnership with Match.com was the number one branded video on Facebook, as ranked on Brandtale, getting over 12 million views by being shared by almost 100K people!



Taryn Crouthers

Head of Sales & Brand Partnerships, ATTN:

On creating shareable branded content:

Our mission at ATTN: is to tell stories that are worth your attention. Many of these stories are centered around issues people are most passionate about, across education, social justice, politics, parenting and the environment. We use conversational language to create a singular argument around each issue, with a distinctive point of view. When they share our videos, our audience is proudly declaring something about themselves, their beliefs or their lifestyles.

Instagram

Why Instagram?

Instagram built its success as a photo sharing service, but since launching video in 2013, the platform has turned into a serious competitor in the video market, making it an important distribution channel for branded content. In March of 2016, the company announced that its 500 million users had increased the amount of video being watched on the platform by more than 40% in six months. With its longer 60-second video format, Instagram stories, and new video channels in the Explore feed, it's evident that the company is placing an emphasis on video for the future.



Oren Katzeff

Head of Programming, Tastemade

On harnessing Instagram for video:

Instagram is a huge part of our overall video strategy. Slightly over a year ago, we started publishing less pictures to our channel, and committed to delivering our Instagram audience beautifully shot food and travel videos everyday. Since that time, our followers have grown 5300% (from 50k to over 2.7 million) – and we are going to continue to deliver quick hitting, mouth watering, beautifully shot stories to them.

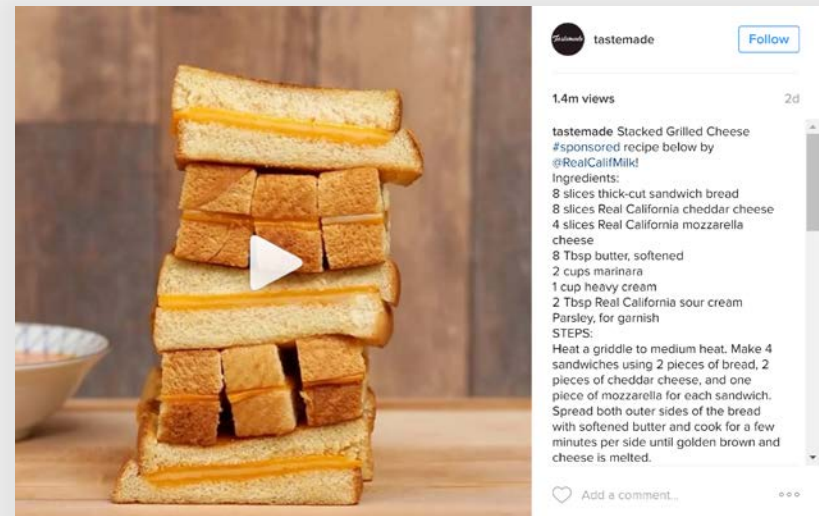


2.4x

On average, videos posted by brands on Instagram receive 2.4x the comments and photos

Source: [Pixability](#)

A recent branded Tastemade video racked up 1.4 million views in two days on Instagram





On distribution through Twitter:

Twitter is a powerful distribution tool for nearly all types of content. Your content is guaranteed to appear in your follower's feed thanks to Twitter's use of a historical timeline. However, this real time firehose results in tweets having shorter lifecycles.

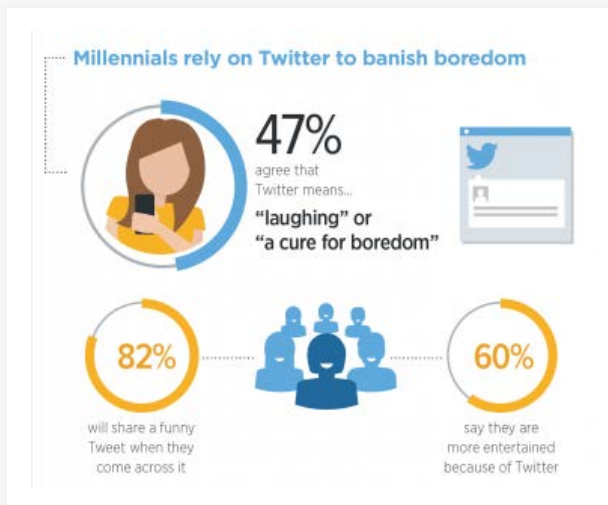
Unless you already have a large engaged audience, driving organic traffic through the platform can be challenging. Twitter's variety of paid campaign options should be part of most media buyer's distribution plans because of the ability to drive a high click-through rate from a highly targeted audience. Consider targeting relevant hashtags and people that engage with your competitors as a starting point.



10 Twitter Best Practices for Brands

1. Do your research before engaging customers
2. Determine organizational goals
3. Utilize either a branded or personal profile
4. Build your Twitter equity and credibility
5. Track metrics and conversation trends
6. Don't go overboard; less structure is better
7. Listen and observe before engaging
8. Be authentic and believable
9. Track, measure and iterate
10. Don't just strategize: execute!

Source: [Mashable](#)



Source: [Twitter](#)



Michael Monroe
VP of Marketing / Head of Re:think, The Atlantic
Former VP of Marketing and Head of Forbes Brand Productions

On creating content that performs well on LinkedIn:

Content that speaks directly to a specific business audience does especially well on LinkedIn, since it's a site where professionals go to seek out insights in their industry.

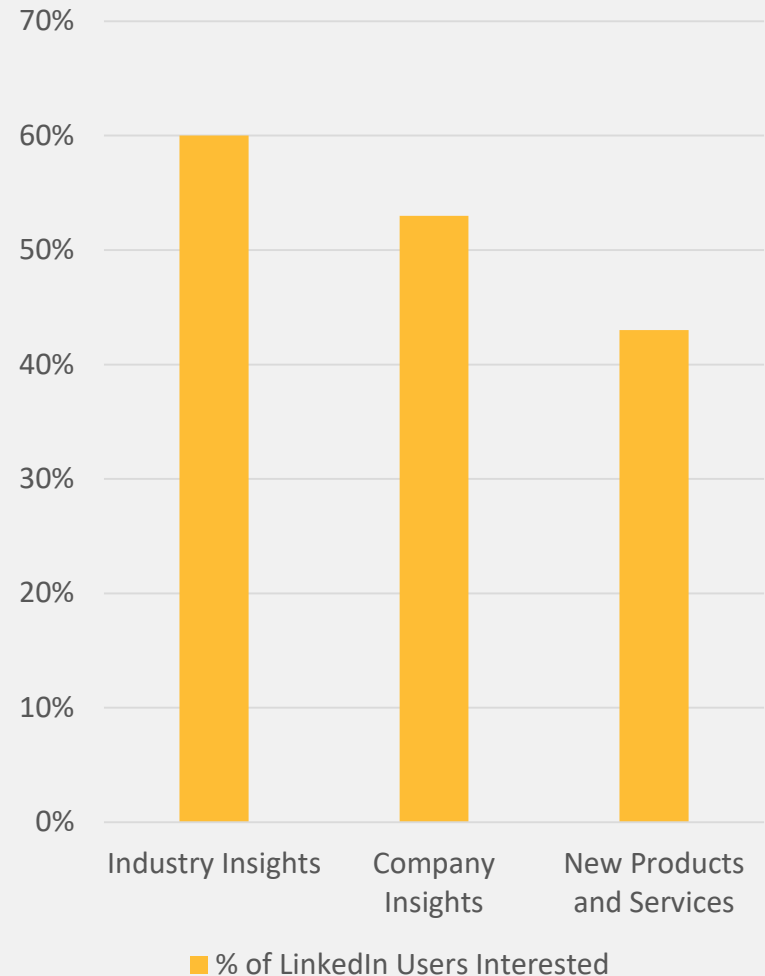
Focus on specific takeaways and unique data points that are useful to the business audience or industry you're trying to reach with your content. But don't be too dry! All the rules for creating great content still apply — use an accessible tone, tell a story, share examples.

400 Million+

Executives, entrepreneurs,
entry-level and exiting workers
are on LinkedIn

Source: [LinkedIn](#)

What LinkedIn Users Are Interested In



Source: [LinkedIn](#)



Sam Sheffer
Creative Producer, Mashable

Why Snapchat?

“I’m always surprised by the amount of IRL (in real life) interaction we get from our organic Snapchat account. We recently hosted a MashMeet in London for Snapchat creators and over 100 people showed up to create amazing Snaps and share them with their community. I think it shows how personal Snapchat is, and the amazing community of creators who have surrounded it.

How should content creators making video for Snapchat approach it differently than other video platforms?

“YouTube videos are produced with a post-production process, as are Facebook videos. Snapchat videos are all done right then and there on the spot, with the phone, in the moment. Snaps will never be perfect, and creators should know and understand the medium and its limitations when making video for it. Additionally, keeping in mind that Snapchat is a vertical video medium is important for content creators.

Samples from Mashable’s Snapchat



10 Billion

Daily amount of video views
on Snapchat

Source: [Bloomberg](#)

If your publishing partner has built a healthy subscriber list, newsletters can be a great way to reach their core audience, as those subscribers are often more engaged readers than the typical social media follower. As a media buyer, it's important to compare the cost of adding newsletter distribution to your campaign to the list's size, open rate and click-through-rate.



Paul Josephsen

Vice President, The CoLab @ Thrillist Media Group

On crafting a compelling e-newsletter:

“The goal with any e-newsletter should be to create consistent value for an audience. Too often we see newsletters or email delivery as a way to "push" a message to people and wait for them to respond by interacting with what we said, or what we thought they would like. By understanding your audience and creating a product that serves a real need (not a perceived need), you can very naturally bring brand messages to life through that delivery.

Creative testing will be critical on every platform, but focusing first and foremost on a consumer need and building 1) a product and 2) a message that serves that need will create a very positive relationship amongst your audience.



MailChimp's Tips for Subject Lines

When it comes to subject lines, boring works best. When you write your subject line, don't sell what's inside — tell what's inside.

Best Open Rate Subject Lines (60-87%)

1. [CompanyName] Sales & Marketing Newsletter
2. Eye on the [CompanyName] Update (Oct 31 - Nov 4)
3. [CompanyName] Staff Shirts & Photos
4. [CompanyName] May 2015 News Bulletin!
5. [CompanyName] Newsletter - February 2016

Worst Open Rate Subject Lines (1%-14%)

1. Last Minute Gift - We Have The Answer
2. Valentines - Shop Early & Save 10%
3. Give a Gift Certificate this Holiday
4. Valentine's Day Salon and Spa Specials!
5. Gift Certificates - Easy & Elegant Giving - Let Them Choose

Source: [Mailchimp](#)



Utilizing Newsletters for Branded Content

Women In Tech and Science – Lenny Letter + GE



Jennie Scheer
VP and Director of Media, DigitasLBI



Source: [Lenny Letter](#)

Lenny Letter, the popular newsletter and now website spearheaded by *Girls'* creator, Lena Dunham, launched a weeklong branded content series with GE about the importance of women in tech and science. It's a perfect fit for a publication focused on feminism whose small but rabidly loyal audience is what most publishers dream of (over 500,000 newsletter subscribers with a 70% open rate!). Though the series also covered topics outside of GE's influence, it was Lena Dunham's interview with the company's vice chair, Beth Comstock, that was most popular with readers.

On utilizing newsletters for branded content:

There's a delicate balance between wanting to reach your audience at scale while also partnering with sites that are on the fringe. Loads of brands would be attracted to it, especially if they need to infuse their brand image with some sort of personality or point of view. Lena Dunham has never been shy and her property casts a halo.

Source: [Digiday](#)

Syndication



Matt Crenshaw

Vice President of Product Marketing, Outbrain

Why should brands consider adding content syndication networks to their distribution strategy?

“Digital marketing is about storytelling. The very first display ads were a great and simple hack to get brand messages onto the page. But as display ads have scaled, users have learned to tune them out. Their interest in display ads has scaled proportionately – but in the opposite direction. We talk about "impressions," but the data shows that actually very few display ads make an impression. So, how do brands make that all-important impression and stand out from the noise? It comes from their content, delivering content that is useful, informative, funny, entertaining, or whatever term you prefer to signal "a bright spot in someone's day."

As brands tell stories, they have to think about where their stories are going to be most impactful. "Where" is just as important as "who" and "what". Where do users go for content? They go to media sites, to publishers. That's where they are most engaged. Users are flooded by options online, so the best way to hold their attention is to tailor messages to the mindset they're already in.

In 2016, ad block usage grew by

30%

Source: [PageFair 2017 Ad Blocking Report](#)



Further Reading

[Maximize ROI via Content Distribution Networks](#)

[The Complete Guide to Building Your Blog Audience – Chapter 8: Content Syndication Networks](#)

[23 Creative Content Syndication Ideas](#)



Native Advertising



Dan Greenberg
CEO & Co-Founder, Sharethrough

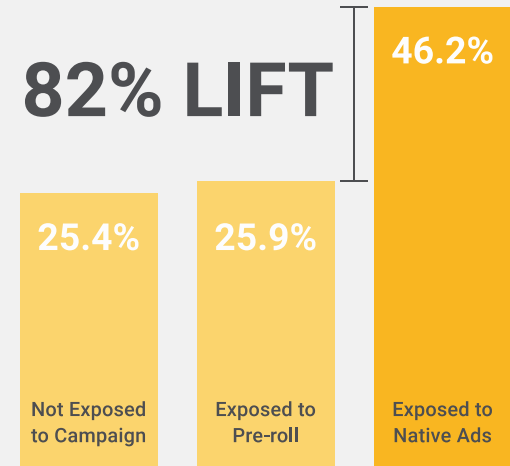
Why native advertising?

Native video is the perfect distribution model for brands to both extend the reach of their TV spots or create and promote independent brand content. Native ads have proven themselves as the highest-impact digital ad unit period, and native video is no different. Headlines, combined with strong visuals, mean that native video is uniquely suited for stopping someone in the feed and arousing curiosity. Native video's high completion rate reflects that. They generally have higher CPMs, but the increased engagement they get makes up for any price differential. It's an incredibly efficient way to drive cost-efficient brand views, and the headline is an added bonus to drive specific messaging.

A Sharethrough study with Nielsen found that native video contributed to higher brand lift than pre-roll. What do you think contributes to that?

Native video respects the audience experience and finds them on their own terms. Pre-roll requires someone to sit through a video before being allowed to watch the thing that they want to. Native video finds people in-feed, while they are in the discovery mindset and on the lookout for engaging content, even if that comes from a brand.

Pre-roll forces attention, which is never going to be as productive or memorable. Also, the combination of headline, description and context allows a brand to create positive associations very quickly. Research from Facebook found that the majority of ad recall, awareness and purchase intent with native video happens within the first seven seconds.



EXAMPLE: NON-ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE
FAVORABILITY BRAND LIFT

In a study with Nielsen and Sharethrough, native ads generated 82% brand lift.

Those who were exposed to pre-roll units were 29.3% more likely to respond that they viewed the brand “unfavorably” or “very unfavorably” than those who had not been exposed to the campaign.

Source: [Sharethrough](#)



 CHAPTER 5

Measurement

“Be an expert on the topic of
your content – you’ll know who wants to
read it and where to find them.



Bobby Miller

Senior Strategist, The Media Kitchen

What to Measure



Tiam Korki
Co-founder & CTO, Pressboard

“If content is King and distribution is Queen, then measurement is the throne they sit on, the table that they eat at and the bed they sleep in. Without the support of measurement, content and distribution will eventually fall flat.

Not all metrics are created equal however. Traditional advertising metrics focus on impressions and clicks. Good content metrics look at what happens after the click, taking into account time, attention, reading behavior, sharing and feedback. Sales metrics go a step further and analyze how exposure to each piece of content translates into traffic to your site, people in your stores and sales in your tills.

Media buyers running branded content campaigns for their clients should understand that because success in content is measured differently than in traditional digital advertising, the way it is purchased should be as well.



Advertising Metrics

Impressions on ad units, click through rate

Impressions/Clicks

Content Metrics

Reads, time spent, active time, social shares, comments

Reads/Attention

Shares

Sales Metrics

Click and view through, appointment, purchase

Sales

Impressions



Joe Fullman

Vice President of Marketing, Onion Inc.

On the impression as a branded content metric:

“The impression is definitely sick, and probably dying, but it's not dead yet. There's a humongous ecosystem around display advertising, and the banner ad isn't going to disappear anytime soon. But I'd be lying if I said that I think that we'll be building plans based on impressions forever.

I am not convinced that engagement (broadly defined) will replace the impression. There's a big difference between a link click, a video view and a 'like'. In the future, I think we'll plan campaigns based on 'content views' with success judged by social lift. In a world of distributed content strategies, value will also be driven by social lift.

Some of that is based off of the marketplace power of BuzzFeed, and some of it is based on the fact that 'content views' force publishers to 'guarantee' a degree of success to deliver on plans.

0.06%

The average click-through rate of display ads
across all formats and placements

Source: [HubSpot](#)



Further Reading

[Is Digital Advertising Ready to Ditch the Click?](#)

[Alarming Facts CMOs Should Know About Banner Ads](#)

[One Obvious Reason Why Content Marketers Are Not Feeling Effective](#)



Clicks



Shawn Ragell
Marketing Manager, Pressboard

On measuring clicks for branded content:

“Clicks are a ubiquitous metric that have been used, rightly or wrongly, since the dawn of digital advertising. Clicks are often used as a signal for how well display ads are performing. While we prefer content metrics such as reads and attention, clicks are still a useful metric when it comes to content promotion.

Measuring the rate of people that click through from a social share, native ad or e-newsletter to the content can be an important indicator of how effectively your headline and imagery are pulling readers in. When clicks are used in conjunction with deeper analytics, such as reads and attention, they can be a useful top of the funnel metric.

Try multiple versions of your social posts, native ads and e-newsletter headlines to see which ones resonate best. Here is an example of two variations of the same Facebook promotion for a piece of branded content and resulting difference in click-through rate:



2.6%
CTR

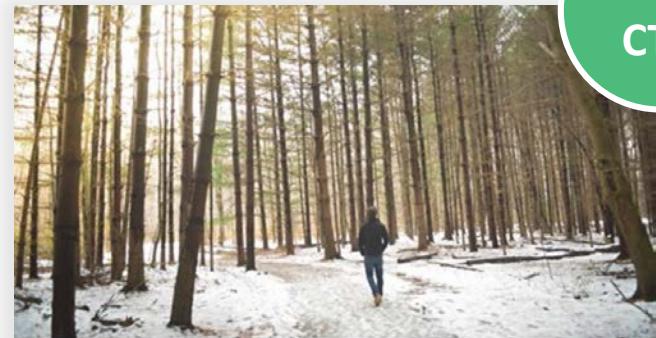


5 Tips to Ditch the Holiday Hectic

Because December shouldn't be a haze of stress and malls.

BESTHEALTHMAG.CA

5.5%
CTR



5 Ways to Ditch the Holiday Stress

Stay focused on what really matters this season.

BESTHEALTHMAG.CA



Anita Kapadia
Director of Partnerships, Pressboard

On measuring reads:

“The performance of content doesn’t end with how many people saw the headline in their feed. You need to know how many people actually read the story. You can achieve this by measuring unique views combined with the time spent with your content.

Companies such as YouTube, Chartbeat, Upworthy and Medium are proactively moving towards viewing time and attention as the preferred performance indicator. Pressboard takes this model even further, guaranteeing reads on every story facilitated through our Marketplace.

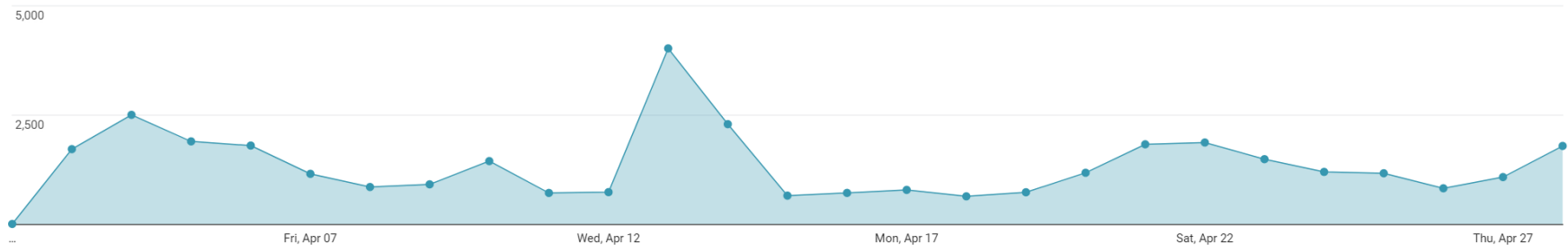
Report

Engagement Devices Viewability Locations Traffic Sources **Attention**

Region Filter
All Regions ▾

Date Filter
Apr 02, 2017 - Apr 28, 2017 ▾

Total Reads **68,385** Reads for Date Range **36,174** Average Reading **54 sec** Total Reading **33120 min 16 sec**



Source: [Pressboard Platform](#)



Leah Bjornson
Content Manager, Pressboard

What defines a “view”?

“Tracking the success of videos isn’t as simple as it used to be. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Vine, Twitter and Snapchat host content across platforms, and each has their own method for counting views.

As a result, a view on one medium isn’t necessarily as valuable to marketers as it is on another. There are four key factors to consider when comparing video views:

- 1. Initiation:** Whether the video auto-plays or is user-initiated
- 2. Time Spent:** Required amount of time spent watching a video before it's counted as a view
- 3. Viewability:** Amount of video required to be on screen before it's counted as a view
- 4. Platform:** Whether views are only counted in-app or when embedded on other sites

We created this infographic to break down how all the major video sharing platforms count views.



Click infographic to see more



Neil Malik
Director of Content Strategy, Pressboard

On measuring attention:

“How much attention is the reader actually giving to your story? Where are they dropping off?”

Once you've established reads or views as a core content metric, you can begin to further analyze attention signals such as Active Reading Time, Average Scrolled and Completion Rate. Attention metrics give you deeper insight into the quality and value of your content to the reader.

Report

Engagement Devices **Viewability** Locations Traffic Sources Attention

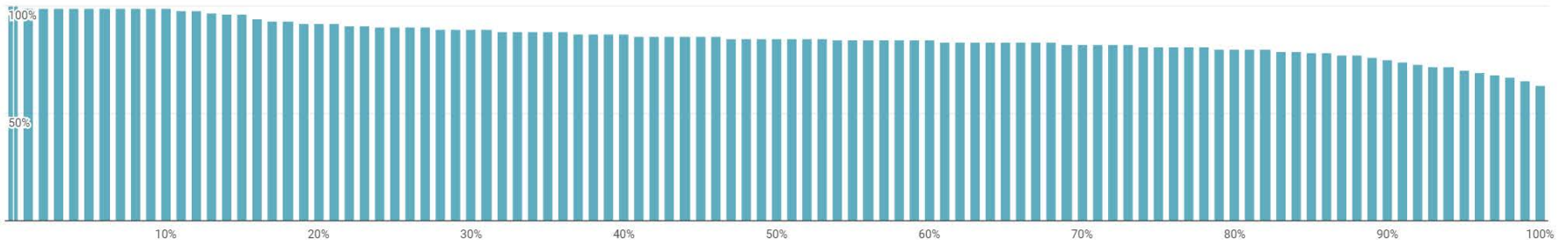
Region Filter
All Regions ▾

Date Filter
May 02, 2017 - May 31, 2017 ▾

Story Average Scroll
84%

People Started Reading
96%

People Completed Reading
63%



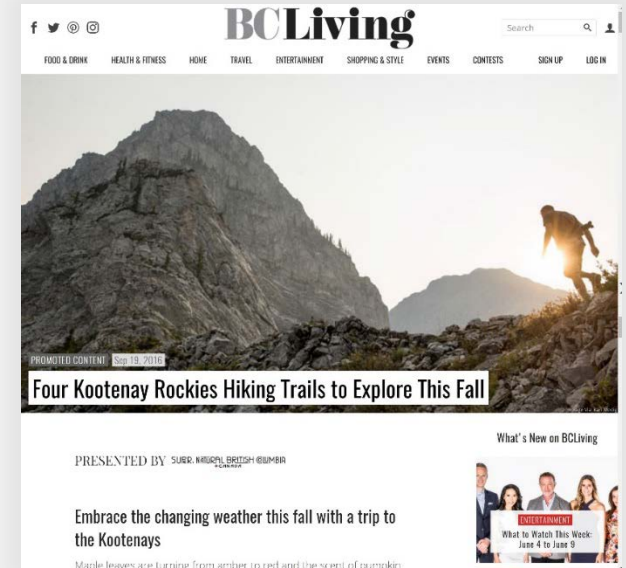


Measuring Active Reading Time

Explore Home – Destination BC + Multiple Publishers

Already known worldwide among travellers, British Columbia’s tourism board wanted to remind its own residents about the wide range of unique autumn activities available right in their own backyard. Teaming up with multiple BC publishers to create travel-based stories and lists was an incredibly successful way to engage local audiences. The average reader spent a whopping 2 minutes and 59 seconds actively reading the branded content!

Source: [Pressboard Platform](#)



Report

- Engagement
- Devices
- Viewability
- Locations
- Traffic Sources
- Attention

Region Filter
All Regions -

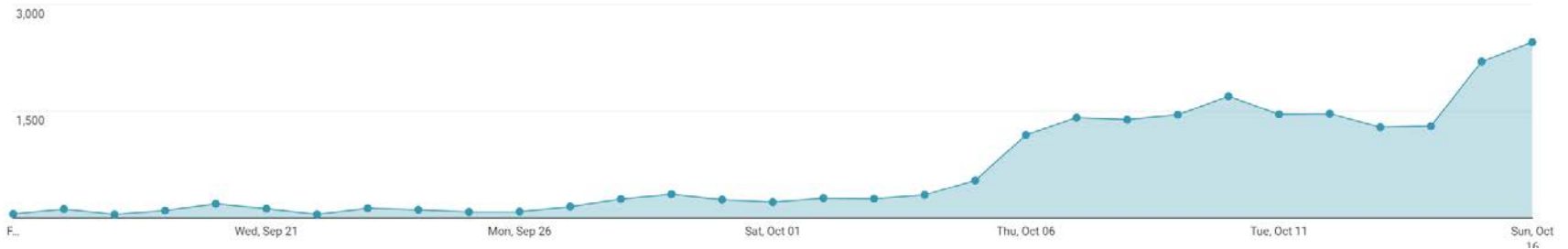
Date Filter
Sep 16, 2016 - Oct 16, 2016 -

Total Reads

Reads for Date Range

Average Reading
2 min 59 sec

Total Reading
63287 min 34 sec



Source: [Pressboard Platform](#)



Ryan Holmes

Founder and CEO, Hootsuite

On social engagement metrics that media buyers should track:

“What social metrics matter will vary depending on the kind of content you’re sharing and the goals of your campaign. As a general rule, an aggregate of total social shares across all platforms offers a good idea how “viral” a piece of content is.

On sharing links vs publishing natively on social platforms:

“Native publishing comes with rewards and risks. One benefit of publishing directly on social platforms is the ability to tap into a much larger audience than on a traditional blog, not to mention that content is more widely and easily shared. The trade-off is that you’re not necessarily driving traffic to your own site and, in some cases, you lose access to valuable backend metrics.



Fun Fact

A social world

More than 2 billion people are now on social media.

The average user spends nearly two hours a day on social platforms.

Sources: [Yahoo](#) | [Adweek](#)





Tiam Korki
Co-founder and CTO, Pressboard

On measuring conversions:

“Most branded content is created for awareness, and sits at the top of the marketing funnel, but because of the nature of digital marketing, it’s possible to track conversion goals as well.

Brand links within the content can be tracked for click through. By adding a conversion pixel to your brand site, you can even measure visitors that may not have immediately clicked from content, but did so at a later date. We built both click-through and view-through tracking technology right into Pressboard content campaigns.


Conversion Goals

Click-through to Landing Pages | Newsletter Signups | Form Completions | Downloads | View-through | Pages per Visit | Sales



Pressboard Story Layout

The Story Headline

Presented by 

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Plan your next Las Vegas adventure

It’s all waiting for you in the world’s most exciting destination: the one-of-a-kind [shows and events](#), world-class [restaurants](#), unrivaled [nightlife](#), incredible [shopping, spas, attractions](#) and much more.

All you need to do is use [LasVegas.com](#) to plan your next adventure, and let the fun begin.

 pressboard



Branded Content That Converts

UA Run Camp 2 – Under Armour + Multiple Publishers

Under Armour turned to branded content to reach Canadians with the message about their second season of UA Run Camp and entice runners to enter a contest to earn their spot. They partnered with five different national publishers to produce stories about what could be expected from the camp. Interest in the pieces of branded content skyrocketed, and an incredible **4.61%** of readers converted back to Under Armour’s website from them! That’s almost **2.5x** higher than the average conversion benchmark for branded content.

Running NEWS SECTIONS BLOGS VIDEOS FEATURES GET/SUBSCRIBE

What is Under Armour Run Camp?
Looking for a totally different running experience? The Under Armour Run Camp takes athletes from different backgrounds to a location where they use training to push their limits. Find out how to #EarnYourSpotCA.

September 6th, 2016 by Canadian Running | Posted in Destination Race, homepage, Runs & Races

Presented by **UNDER ARMOUR** Presented by header

Trying to compare this experience to something else is difficult because there isn't really anything comparable. The exhausting physical, mental and emotional involvement packed into a week leaves the athletes in awe of their own capability. It's a unified fight against nature and the limitations you believe you have. Being the best version of yourself means sometimes stepping into uncomfortable ground. UA Run Camp allows the open-minded athlete to step out of his or her comfort zone and realize they are capable of more than they know. Round two will be no different.

RUN CAMP
#EARNYOURSPOTCA

UA Run Camp brings together the world's most passionate runners and pits them against some of the world's worst conditions. The goal: to push the limits of athletes farther than they ever thought possible.

The first challenge was extreme elevation. Next up: the desert. Got what it takes? Find out how you can #EarnYourSpotCA to UA Run Camp.

Subscribe to Canadian Running **SAVE 45%** off the cover price

Sponsored Footer

Source: [Pressboard Platform](#)

A Word of Thanks



Jerrid Grimm
Co-Founder, Pressboard

Every good book must come to a close, and you're nearing the end of ours. We hope that you've learned something new, been inspired by the experience of others and are ready to go out and craft your own stories for clients.

I'd like to personally thank all of our valued contributors for sharing their knowledge so freely. This would have been a pretty empty guide without your sage advice.

A lot of behind the scenes work went into creating this guide, much of it shouldered by our small but scrappy team at Pressboard. Special thanks to Shawn, Phil and Leah for your hard work.

Please pass along this guide to your friends, colleagues, clients and anyone that you believe would benefit. As with any good piece of content, it was created to be shared.



Share a copy of the Media Buyer's Guide to Branded Content



<http://get.pressboardmedia.com/media-buyers-guide-branded-content>



[Equalizing Music – Vice + Smirnoff](#)

By embarking on a mission to “double the women headliners in electronic music”, Vice and Smirnoff have created something even more impactful than the content itself – purpose. Content that stands for something always stands out, especially with the 90% of millennials who would switch brands to one associated with a cause.



[Black-ish Season 3 – ABC + Microsoft](#)

Microsoft’s season-long partnership with ABC’s hit comedy series *Black-ish* stood out because it also included custom 60-second pieces of branded content that aired during traditional ad slots. Part of what makes these pieces so great is that they align with each episode’s storyline, making for a seamless viewing experience.



[Family Trips – Fatherly + Airbnb](#)

We really enjoyed this series of family vacation stories from Fatherly and Airbnb because they felt authentic. Having fathers share genuine stories and photos from their trips pulls the idea of traveling out of the hypothetical and makes it real for the reader, because they can probably relate to the writer in some way.



[VICE Money – VICE + BMO](#)

In an effort to speak to millennials where they are, BMO partnered with VICE to help launch the publisher’s new finance-focused section, VICE Money. Millennials became the largest generation in the workforce last year, and with that comes a lot of decisions about how to spend that money.



[Redefining Rivalries – WSJ + Showtime](#)

This partnership demonstrates perfect audience alignment between brand and advertiser, because there really isn’t a better place to promote a TV show about a hedge-fund mogul than on The Wall Street Journal!



[The secret to your Discover Playlist? A “cyborg” approach. – Vox + Spotify](#)

Vox has perfected the art of creating explainer videos that are both entertaining and educational by weaving stories into every lesson. The overarching story of how an obscure 70’s synth-funk artist helped shape Spotify is what really captures your attention at the start.



[The Renewal Project – The Atlantic + Allstate](#)

Allstate and The Atlantic have leaped well beyond the typical branded content campaign to launch a website and newsroom tasked with covering the people and organizations “advancing social good and contributing to civic innovation in America.”



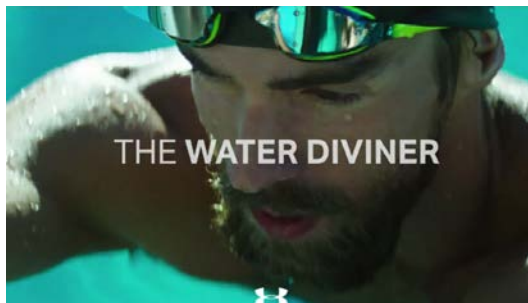
[Baked Chilli Lime Popcorn Chicken – Tasty + Ritz Crackers](#)

We like to imagine a lot of high fives going around at Ritz Crackers after this successful integration with BuzzFeed’s Tasty property to the tune of 19 million views on Facebook alone! Tasty has found their sweet spot with these simple, fun and appealing videos and I fully expect every food advertiser to jump on board at some point.



[How to Solve a Murder – The Guardian + Amazon](#)

Playing off the popularity of true crime series like *Serial* and *How To Make A Murderer*, Amazon teamed up the The Guardian Labs to create a popular true crime series to promote their new criminal investigation show, *Bosch*.



[The Water Diviner – Complex + Under Armour](#)

This phenomenal piece of custom content profiles a typical day in the life of the world’s most decorated Olympian in history, Michael Phelps. The combination of top-notch writing and custom video make this piece a must-see for anyone in the branded content industry



[Tour of Beauty – The New York Times + The Florida Keys and Key West](#)

The beautiful visuals and bright pops of color immediately transport you to sunny Florida, where NYT’s custom content team, T Brand Studio, take you on a ride through the Keys with stunning video and an itinerary full of adventure.



[The Earliest Show – Funny Or Die + Cap’n Crunch](#)

This fake morning show presented by a cereal brand wacky, weird and probably makes a lot of brand managers uncomfortable — and that’s what is so great about it. Comedy like this can be risky, but if the show finds its audience, the payoff can be huge for a brand involved from the start.



[Undisputed – Multiple Publishers + Ford](#)

Ford simultaneously partnered with nine different publishers to create an incredible 22 pieces of branded content which included stories, infographics and custom video. It all promoted their flagship truck, the F-150, across a spectrum of English and French sites with different voices and audiences.



[UA Run Camp – Multiple Publishers + Under Armour](#)

Under Armour partnered with five different publishers to produce stories about their annual run camp. The campaign generated a conversion rate back to their contest landing page that was four times higher than average benchmarks!



[Gluten Free Cheerios – Multiple Publishers + Cheerios](#)

General Mills wanted to let Canadians know about their new gluten-free options, so they launched a national content campaign with stories across five different publishers. The content ranged from gluten-free recipes to nostalgic personal stories about growing up on Cheerios.



[Get What's Yours – Multiple Publishers + H&R Block](#)

Working with six different publishers, H&R Block offered advice such as the various documents you need to file, smart ways to use your tax refund and how to use H&R Block's Pay With Refund service to avoid paying out-of-pocket filing fees.



[Après – Multiple Publishers + Destination Canada](#)

Canada's tourism organization launched a massive content campaign to show Americans that Canada is cool, not cold, during the winter season. They created content targeting Americans in major cities across the country using publications like [Eater](#), [Gothamist](#), [Boston Mag](#) and [Philly.com](#).



[Summer Stories – Multiple Publishers + Whistler Blackcomb](#)

Local publishers [Daily Hive](#) and [Vancouver is Awesome](#) each sent writers up into the mountains to experience the best summer has to offer, resulting in four honest and appealing first-hand accounts.

“Good stories change the way
you think. Great stories change the
way you feel.



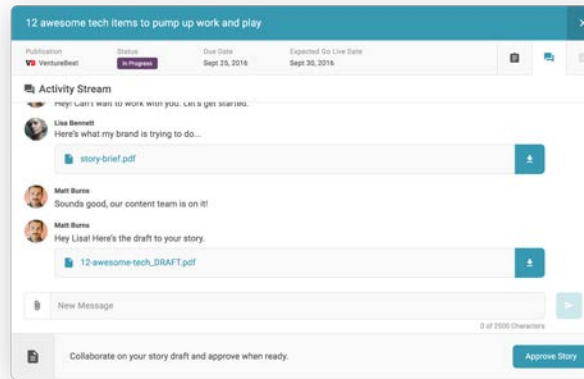
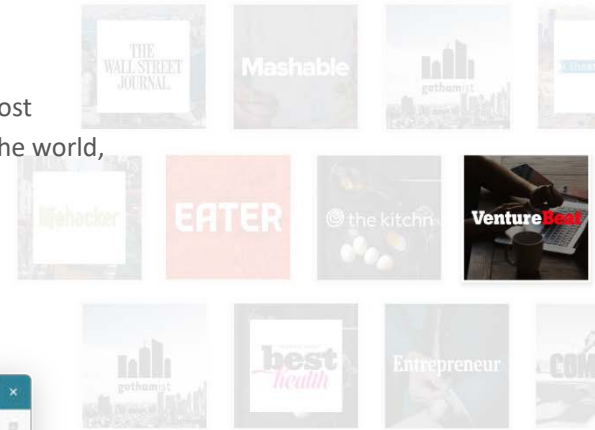
Jerrid Grimm

Co-Founder, Pressboard

About Pressboard

We believe that stories are better than ads. Brands use Pressboard to tell compelling stories with the world's greatest publishers.

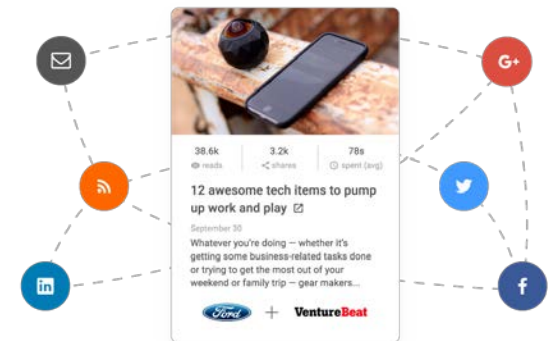
Whether you're interested in working with the most popular business, technology or lifestyle sites in the world, you'll easily find your next content partner in the Pressboard Marketplace.



Once selected, your content partners get to work crafting stories their audience will love. They'll suggest the best ways to showcase your brand, whether it's through an article, video or infographic.

Once approved, your stories go live for the world to enjoy! All stories live on your content partner's website and are shared through social media, e-newsletters and native ads.

Pressboard's platform tracks the number of people viewing your stories and measures their level of interest. Our cost-per-view model means that you only pay when someone actually views your brand's story.



We'd love to hear your story.

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