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MEASURING CONTENT FOR SUCCESS

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From social media and television to satellite radio and talking bus stops, from streaming video and magazine articles to native content and six-second ad campaigns, today's consumers are constantly surrounded by content. For marketers, this offers a wide range of opportunities to connect with customers through owned, paid and earned media interchangeably as people become accustomed to consuming content everywhere, regardless of who creates it or how it's paid for.

It is abundantly clear that marketers have grasped the power of content—and, as they build dedicated content marketing departments and PR and media teams to drive content strategy, it's obvious that they have bet their futures on it. A few telling trends:

- Paid marketing spend in native formats is projected to reach \$41.4 billion in 2019—amounting to 61 percent of total display business, according to eMarketer.
- Fifty-nine percent of digital ad budgets are now allocated to original video distribution, IAB found.
- Twenty-two percent of business-to-consumer and 26 percent of business-to-business marketing budgets are devoted to digital content, according to the Content Marketing Institute.

- Seventy-five percent of CMOs plan to increase spending on earned media over the next five years, the ANA says.

Yet despite this enormous investment in content, be it owned, earned or paid, marketers are hobbled by a lack of infrastructure and tools to measure results across the wide array of formats, types and channels—in other words, they can't determine what's working and use that knowledge to direct their growing content investment wisely.

The convergence

Historically, marketers have taken different measurement approaches to evaluating the success of different marketing disciplines, whether PR, communications, media or content. But with this convergence surrounding content, marketers now need to take a consistent, cross-channel approach to measuring and improving ROI.

Given the growing sophistication of brand metrics, marketers are no longer interested in merely eyeballs and page views, clicks and demos. They want to know how or if people are truly connecting with their content and whether that content does, in fact, change how the consumer thinks or behaves. Perhaps most importantly, they want to know what mix of content and media works and what



doesn't so they know where to invest in the future.

The natural extension of that interest is that successful marketers will need to break down measurement silos to develop a standard framework and infrastructure for holistically measuring the impact of content in all of its forms.

"Using a unified view of content performance ... can help you understand how to create better content and use predictive scores to help you double down on your highest-performing channels in real time," says Edward Kim, founder and executive chairman of New York-based SimpleReach, a leading content data measurement company.

Uniform data matters

There are many reasons why the uniform measurement of content remains an obstacle for marketers. Fragmentation at the point of engagement is one. The systems used to track content engagement from one's own website are not connected to the tracking from social media channels, which is not connected to the

tracking of paid media networks or the systems of third-party publishers. Without a unified measurement infrastructure, it's almost impossible to compare content performance across channels.

Another obstacle is the divergent definitions used on all these different platforms. When it comes to measuring video content, for example, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have their own standards of what constitutes a view, while YouTube has another. And the definition from the Media Research Council—two seconds equals a view—remains controversial by almost anyone's standard.

When it comes to a published article, how do we really know whether a consumer has read through the entire piece or merely glanced at the headline? For video, did the user watch the entire video or wander away, distracted by something else?

The lack of standard measurement when it comes to both behavioral and attitudinal data across the funnel (e.g., consumer behavior and surveys) has been a major hurdle for



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marketers keen on driving the best results of their content-based strategies and ROI.

As content has become ubiquitous, creating the infrastructure to track data around all content being produced and consumed has become so complex that a solution has been practically unimaginable.

To track and input content performance data across platforms is time-consuming and laborious, and depends on the participation or integration of hundreds of partners. Then there's the fact that metrics vary across media types. What's more, measurement tools are designed for single channels or singular forms of media, echoing the history of these different marketing disciplines developing their own approach. Given the complexities, how does one even begin to think about such a framework?

And yet a unified measurement strategy is critical for marketers in understanding content that works. Unified measurement that connects standardized performance metrics to outcomes allows a brand to determine precisely what "value" means—i.e., what makes a piece of content valuable, and what makes its performance superior.

Once value is defined, a workable approach to determining what good content looks like and how to create it becomes a reality—as does what a brand will pay across the board for a view, a click or whatever action is required on the part of the consumer. The ability to standardize measurement results, being able to quantify the future return on investment for each dollar in marketing spend, is the holy grail for marketers. With marketing converging on content, then, a content measurement solution starts to converge on a comprehensive marketing ROI measurement solution.

"To win is not enough—you have to be methodical about how content is executed," says Kim. He points to B-to-C companies and how the ones that have seen the most impressive growth are those that are "utterly data-driven in their marketing."

"They started only on digital channels, as you would expect, but as they've grown they've moved into traditional channels as well and have maintained a data discipline and used

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that to figure out how to apply and measure every aspect of their execution,” he says.

Everything is measurable

Still, the task of unified measurement is daunting. The number of audience thoughts and actions that can be measured is immense. To take just one example, a video can be watched, it can be skipped, or it can be watched and then shared. But it’s not only engagement that differentiates content. There are various types of video to consider—long or short videos, those with dialog and those without. All those details must be tracked and brought under one roof—with the aim of building a framework, analyzing the data and, finally, beginning to understand which combinations of content drive optimum results for the marketer. Multiply this across all the different media platforms and content types, and most marketers are facing an insurmountable task. Plus, it’s not necessarily a one-size-fits-all issue.

“This is about finding your own unique content formula that drives the highest

ROI,” says Matt Levin, VP of marketing for SimpleReach. “What works for one brand is not necessarily going to work for another—you have a different product and a different audience than even your closest competitor. But if you can connect the dots between the outcomes and inputs, you can solve this equation.”

SimpleReach, for example, has designed what it calls a “content data cloud,” providing marketers with standardized measurement across a broad variety of content and more than 100 different data sources, including all major social platforms and premium publishers. Its goal is to help marketers learn what works and drives ROI.

By collecting behavioral and attitudinal data from across owned sites, publishers and social platforms, marketers can get a holistic view of all their content campaigns across written articles and video, analyze long-term trends, identify real-time predictive insights for paid content distribution, and verify they’re getting what they paid for with publisher partners.



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The ultimate goal is to get the right data about content to the right people for discoveries and decisions to be made. New forms of content are being rolled out all the time, Kim says—take the native video product recently launched by LinkedIn—“and it’s really tough to operationalize and create a foundation when the sands keep shifting.”

Your content portfolio

In the end, there is no magic bullet for measuring content effectiveness across content type and channel—instead, it’s about taking all available data on content, comparing the numbers, and figuring out what works most often in order to execute the most effective content and drive ROI. But it’s something that savvy marketers need to be working toward now.

Think of it as buying the S&P 500 versus sinking all your money into a single stock.

“As a marketer, you’re not betting everything on a single video—you’re trying to get the highest return for your portfolio,” Levin says. “The safe thing for the average investor is to buy the S&P 500—but no brand just wants to be average. Professional investors can beat the market routinely and consistently and find the advantage over the market year over year. ... We are tracking your portfolio of content over time, and helping identify the ways you can ‘beat the market,’ which means taking an outsize share of your target consumer’s share of time and mind.”

With global brands and billions of marketing dollars at stake, the best marketers increasingly are those that are now driving data as deeply as possible, moving toward that unified metric framework that will show them how best to spend their marketing dollars.

Marketers as a whole can learn a lot from such a strategy, Kim says: “If you are a company that doesn’t have that [data discipline] right now, it just means that in this environment, if you and a rival are going after the same consumer, if you are data-driven, your marketing dollars are being spent more efficiently.”

And for those marketers that are not yet on the data train? Kim has a straightforward answer: “You are losing.”

Key takeaways

- Content in all its forms—regardless of the medium that delivers it or whether owned, earned or paid content—has become the basic unit of marketing. But it’s not enough to create outstanding content. You also need to invest in data that will give you a consistent measurement across all channels so you know which content is actually working, why it’s working, and how to make it work over and over again.
- With the convergence of content as the primary input to marketing execution, unified measurement allows a brand to determine what value means for any piece of content across any strategy. Once value is defined, a workable approach to determining what good content looks like and how to create it becomes a reality—as does what a brand will pay across the board for a view, a click or whatever action is desired on the part of the consumer.
- Despite their enormous investment in content, marketers have been hobbled by a lack of infrastructure and tools to measure results across an array of content formats, types and channel—meaning they also have not been equipped to determine what’s working and use that knowledge to bolster their growing investment. But that’s changing.

With content channels and opportunities growing, marketers need to find a way to quantify the results of their content efforts. Simply spending money to produce great content is a good start, but it only takes you so far. Choosing the right partner to help you find the patterns in your content consumption and quantify the results with unified metrics will ensure that your content efforts will continue to thrive, reaching the customers you want while delivering on ROI.

Ad Age Custom Studio

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About SimpleReach

SimpleReach is the No. 1 way to help brands measure and improve content ROI. By bringing together hundreds of data sources across websites, social channels and publishers into the world's largest content data cloud, SimpleReach enables brands to understand how their content drives business outcomes everywhere.

Brands like Intel, Chase and Home Depot rely on the SimpleReach platform to generate actionable insights from both behavioral and attitudinal content metrics that improve the impact of their content creation and distribution.

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