

# Content marketing comes into its own

By Carl Friesen CMC, MBA

*It's the end of the world as we know it, and I feel fine*  
– R.E.M.

For well over a century, most people have gotten their information through advertising-supported media. Early newspapers carried advertising mixed in with editorial copy. Magazines continued the trend, so that many of today's fashion titles carry more ads than copy. Network television and broadcast radio were and are provided free to users – along with the advertising payload that made it all possible.

Now, we're seeing the withering of that advertiser-supported model as mass audiences splinter, craigslist eats classified-ad revenue, and DVRs let TV viewers skip commercials. With fewer ads, newsroom and freelance budgets are being slashed. There is less money to pay professional journalists to fill the news hole, as it's called in the trade.

Back in “the day” – in my case, the mid 1980s – when I was a “real reporter” on newspapers and magazines, I'd receive sheaves of news releases from companies wanting to get their message to our readers. If they contained useful information, I could use them as a starting point for a story I'd write. Since turning to The Dark Side as a PR person, I've often been both horrified and delighted to find the

news releases I've written, printed intact in a newspaper or magazine. Today's newsrooms are so stretched that they don't have the luxury of time I did in the '80s.

What this spells for thoughtleaders is “opportunity” in the form of content marketing. This means providing genuinely useful information relevant to the reader, listener or viewer, as a means of demonstrating their expertise and ability to provide solutions.

Business and professional magazines have long relied on “expert-written” articles to provide leading-edge content that they don't have to pay a journalist to write. Now, they're growing desperate for good, relevant, FREE content, not just to fill their print pages but increasingly, their websites too.

Hard-news media such as television, radio and newspapers also rely on “expert” sources to help their reporters understand the trends and explain them to readers – and in today's tightly-stretched newsrooms, they don't have time to go looking for sources. They'll rely on the same sources over and over if they're reliable.



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Replacing the advertiser-supported model is a gaggle of new media, where people get their information from YouTube, professional associations have turned into publishers through their websites, and basement-based bloggers can have a huge impact in their niche readership.

But the nasty underside to this new world is that there's not much money in it. Old-style newspapers were famously lucrative – a one-paper city had a monopoly on reaching mass markets, a must-buy for department stores, car dealerships, supermarkets and others wanting to reach the public. Today's media exist without much cost, but also without much revenue. You can read The Economist online for free – so why pay for access or a printed copy? Same with many other magazines, providing much of their content online at no charge. Bloggers do it for fame, love, passion but little if any money. YouTube makes money only because (big surprise here) they put ads beside the cute-dog and political-rant videos.

This means that while “expert” content is provided to the medium for no cost, the provider of the content expects to eventually be able to turn on the meter when a client, who was influenced by the content, calls and commissions the provider to do work for a fee.

So – insert drum roll – the world is finally catching up to what Emerson Consulting Group, Inc. has been preaching for years. We've been all about content marketing, even though this may be the first time we've actually used that term. Emerson Group's role is to help people be seen as thoughtleaders – and in most cases, this involves helping them develop information that helps them be seen as knowledgeable about the issues affecting their market.

I've been glad to see that many publications still demand good writing. I contribute frequently to several magazines that exist without any “real” journalistic content at all – it's all expert-written articles – but the editors keep the standards commendably high (hey, they'll

publish my stuff, so I can't not like them).

That may be the future of print business media – good-quality, relevant content provided by business professionals with inside knowledge. Sure, those professionals have an axe to grind – it's a marketing opportunity for them – but there is no need for a hard-sell sales pitch in the article. That would just turn off the readers anyway, even if it did get published.

It's clear that for thoughtleaders with content to provide, the future's bright.