

F#CK CONTENT MARKETING

**FOCUS ON CONTENT EXPERIENCE TO DRIVE
DEMAND, REVENUE & RELATIONSHIPS**

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DISCLAIMER

WE LOVE CONTENT MARKETERS (SERIOUSLY!)

Don't let the title of this book fool you. We love content marketing—and we love our content marketers even more. However, before you read any further, I want to be perfectly clear on a few points:

- This is not a book about content marketing.
- This is not a book about how to create great content—or how to create any content, for that matter.
- This is not a book written for content marketers, though if you are a content marketer, you'll love this book because (a) we have your back, and (b) it will give your organization perspective of what needs to happen after you click publish.

So, what is this book about, and who is it for?

- If you're working in the marketing department in roles like demand generation, digital marketing, or account-based marketing (and of course content marketing), this book is for you.
- If you're working in other departments within your organization—in sales, HR, even accounts receivable—this book is for you, too.
- If you use content in any way in the process of doing your job, this book is for you.

Whether we're shooting off emails, crafting training videos for new hires, or even putting together an invoice, we all need good content. And wherever there's content, there's an experience. The more intentional you are in creating that experience, the better you'll connect with your audience.

If you're interested in learning more about the content experience and what it can do for your marketing efforts, read on.

LET ME EXPLAIN MYSELF

WHAT THE F#CK IS UP WITH THIS BOOK TITLE?

I was sitting on the plane, waiting to head out to Salesforce’s annual Dreamforce Conference, a big sales and marketing event that draws professionals from every industry. As our plane sat on the tarmac, I was browsing around on my smartphone when I came across a stat courtesy of SiriusDecisions that I couldn’t believe was real:

Sixty to seventy percent of all marketing content goes unused.¹

¹ It’s worth noting that this statistic applies specifically to B2B marketers. For more information, see: Jessica Lillian, “Summit 2013 Highlights: Inciting a B-to-B Content Revolution.” *SiriusDecisions*. May 9, 2013. <https://www.siriusdecisions.com/blog/summit-2013-highlights-inciting-a-btob-content-revolution>

Talk about a scary number.

For years, marketing leaders have been investing in content marketing nonstop. The commonly accepted idea is that the more content you produce, the more you attract the attention of your target audience, and the more customers or clients you convert. But this data had just flipped that notion on its head. If most of the content we were producing was going unused, what was the point of creating it at all?

These thoughts had been crawling around my head long before I read that stat. The number just made the problem more real. At any rate, despite my concerns, I too had been relentlessly banging the content marketing drum the past few years. Anyone on my content team was used to hearing me running around the office asking for more content:

“We don’t have enough new posts this week. What’s up with that?”

“Why haven’t we put out any ebooks lately?”

“Where’s that podcast you promised we were going to launch?”

Our audience had to know we were still out there adding

value, so every week, I pushed our team to make X number of easy-to-consume posts on channels A, B, and C, come hell or high water. When I read that stat, however, it reminded me to hit the pause button and listen to what my inner voice was telling me: something had to change.

Now that I had some real numbers to help me give voice to my concerns—and free from all distractions on a flight without Wi-Fi—I had my Jerry Maguire moment. It was time to write my mission statement (not a memo!). By the time the plane touched down, I'd written a long, passionate blog post (even as the CMO, I still write blog posts) with a blinding title: “F#ck Content Marketing.”

This wasn't the first time I'd written an epically long blog post during a Wi-Fi-free flight. In fact, by that time, my team at Uberflip had come to expect the occasional several-thousand-word post. Usually, I'd send it off, and a few hours later, they'd reply with some gentle ribbing—“Oh, where were you flying to this time, Randy?” or “What, there weren't any good in-flight movies to watch?”

This time, however, there was none of that. As soon as I sent the post off, my team shot me an urgent reply: “There is absolutely no way we're going to let you publish this.”

“Hear me out,” I replied. “At least dig into this one a little

bit before you reject it. I need you to understand what I'm trying to say.”

I had their attention. Now I just had to convince them.

WHEN CONTENT MARKETING GOT F#CKED

From the moment it first became a buzzword, marketing leaders began the mad scramble to quantify and define the concept of content marketing. My favorite definition came courtesy of Joe Pulizzi and Robert Rose at the Content Marketing Institute (CMI), whose work more than anyone else's helped marketers to understand the value of creating content:

Content marketing is a marketing technique of creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience—with the objective of driving profitable customer action.

For Pulizzi and Rose, content marketing wasn't just about creating content, but also about *attracting an audience*. Over time, despite their advocacy for a holistic view, their message became distorted. CMOs began putting all their budget and focus into content creation, all but ignoring what happens to that content after—and whether it is, in fact, working to attract an audience. It was like a game of broken telephone, with the message—and value—of con-

tent marketing being obscured in the process. Ultimately, two key factors contributed to this unfortunate reality.

#1: UNCLEAR JOB DESCRIPTIONS

When CMI first put out their definition of content marketing, brands took one look at it and said, “Well, if we’re going to create something that bonds with our audience, we’re going to need content—and lots of it.” The question was, who was going to create all that content? Naturally, the content marketer!

Unsure of where else to turn, these brands went out, hired a bunch of eager young journalists and storytellers, and told them to start producing content. It was a good start, but ultimately a flawed one. For one, these content marketers may have had a mandate, but they had little to no guidance or support from the organizations who hired them. Even today, if you go to LinkedIn, Glassdoor, or any other of the many recruiting sites out there, the job descriptions for “content marketer” all look about the same, with each describing a role that is almost exclusively focused on producing content. Very rarely do these descriptions go beyond content creation, and for good reason: they *shouldn’t*. Content creation is a full-time job, not something you squeeze out in between other tasks. (Even writing a book like this one creates zoning in for long stretches.) Unfortunately, many organizations don’t

see it that way, loading their content marketers up with a whole range of other tasks—managing the content life cycle, attracting an audience, and guiding them through the buyer’s journey, converting prospects into customers, and so on. I’m not saying one person doesn’t have all these skill sets, I know many content marketers who do, but the question is, should they be expected to balance this all?

It doesn’t take an organizational expert to understand that this is a less-than-ideal scenario. When you fail to support your content marketers and push them to complete tasks for which they have very little expertise or bandwidth, just about everybody loses—the brand, the content marketer, and the audience.

#2: CMP CONFUSION

While all these organizations were snapping up journalists left and right and converting them into content marketers, a tsunami of software companies rose up from the ocean, each offering solutions for streamlining the content marketing process. “We are a content marketing platform (CMP). You can’t create and distribute content without us,” they boldly declared, and organizations accepted what they were selling, no questions asked.

To be fair, this isn’t to say that platforms like NewsCred,

Kapost, or Contently aren't or weren't valuable. It's just that they only solved for half of the content marketing equation: create the content. The other heaping half of the equation—packaging and distributing the content at scale—was largely ignored. As a result, the promise of content marketing as first envisioned by CMI went only half-fulfilled, and brands everywhere were forced to settle for an approach that stressed content creation and all but ignored the crucial next step of audience engagement.

THE F-BOMB HEARD 'ROUND THE MARKETING WORLD

This was the argument I laid out in my blog post—and the one I made again as I begged my content team to publish it. As I saw it, the promise of content marketing had yet to be fulfilled. Sure, (some) brands were great at creating content, but by and large, they sucked at mapping that content to the buyer's journey or other measurable outcomes.

As I explained how content marketing had gone wrong and my dilemma over process and terminology, I realized I had a choice to make. I could rally against it, or just let it be and accept that content marketing, as practiced today, is about creating content—nothing more, nothing less. I chose the latter. It was best for everyone if I waved the white flag and left content marketing to the creators.

My conclusion, however, was that I was unwilling to surrender.

If we're just making content for the sake of making content, then f#ck it.

If we're going to waste 60–70 percent of our content marketers' hard work, then f#ck it.

If we're not going to fulfill the promise of content marketing, then f#ck it—and f#ck content marketing.

Just as I was working myself up into a frenzy and running out of creative ways to drop F-bombs, my team slowly started to come around.

“You know what?” one of them said. “I actually kind of agree with you now. F#ck my job if all the content I created is going to go unused. What's the point of me sweating over creating all this stuff if no one sees it?”

Finally, they understood. I didn't write that post—and now this book—to throw content marketers under the bus. Quite the opposite—I think content marketers are often undervalued. I wrote them as a way of *jumping behind* content marketers everywhere and giving them the support they deserve.

Now that I'd earned their permission to publish that post, only one question remained: did I really have to use the F-bomb?

Okay, maybe I didn't have to, but none of the other alternatives hit the mark in quite the same way. "Stop content marketing" was misleading. We didn't want anyone to stop or slow down their content output. "Screw content marketing" was softer, but it also lost something in the translation—and in some ways, it felt more hostile than I'd intended it. "What's the point of content marketing?" was just cumbersome and awful. We tossed that option out as quickly as it was suggested.

Suggestion after suggestion was floated by one person or another, but no substitution proved as versatile, nuanced, and, yes, eye-catching as a good old-fashioned F-bomb. Somehow, I'd have to explain to my three kids that I wrote a book and the title wasn't quite as soft as *Goodnight Moon*. Anyway, we weren't saying "f#ck content marketing" as a way of dismissing it, but rather as a way of supporting it, and I was willing to bet that other marketers would understand exactly what I meant.

WHY YOU SHOULD SAY "F#CK CONTENT MARKETING" TOO

Admit it: if you're the CMO or the CEO of your company, you've probably thought of saying, "F#ck content

marketing!” once or twice yourself. And why shouldn’t you? So much of your budget has gone toward creating content, toward investing in an abundance of software, and toward countless hours of head scratching as you try to get that content in front of your audience. Content marketing has long been hailed as the great fix-all of the digital age, and yet, you’re just not seeing the returns you think you should.

The good news is, if you’re investing in content marketing, you *are* on the right path. Today, most CEOs have bought into the idea of content marketing and understand its value, which is why, every year, about 70 percent of B2B marketers expect they will create more content (similar numbers exist for B2C).² But as the Gartner Hype Cycle teaches us, sometimes the process of buying in alone leads to inflated expectations. Whether it’s email, social media, wearables, artificial intelligence, or, yes, content marketing, whatever new trend over the years we hitch our wagons to, we expect it to lead the way to revenue.

When we inevitably realize that isn’t the case, we quickly plummet from our idealistic perch and become deeply and terribly disillusioned. “Holy sh#t,” we say, “this isn’t as easy as I thought. It turns out I can’t just write a blog

² Joe Pulizzi and Ann Handley, B2B Content Marketing: 2017 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America, Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs: 2017, https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/2017_B2B_Research_FINAL.pdf.

or start a podcast and expect my audience to find it. This content marketing thing is actually going to require some serious effort.”

It sure is. But done right, it’s also incredibly worth it.

So, if you’ve reached this point with content marketing, right now you have a choice. Throw your hands up, say “F#ck it,” and walk away, or dig in and actually think about when and how your content can help you win.

WELCOME TO THE CONTENT EXPERIENCE

Content marketing has served us well over the past decade or so. Today, however, more and more organizations are realizing that’s not enough. Content alone isn’t some magic cure-all. This isn’t *Field of Dreams* where if you build it, they will come. Here, once you have it, you have to *use it*. And to do that, you and everyone in your organization must join together to say, “F#ck content marketing!” and then turn your focus to what we call *content experience*.

So, what exactly is content experience? At my company, Uberflip, we define content experience in the following way:

A content experience is (1) the **environment** in which

your content lives, (2) how it's **structured**, and (3) how it compels your prospects and customers to **engage** with your company.

Ultimately, mastering the content experience involves three elements:

1. A strategic approach toward creating the environment in which your audience consumes your content.
2. Structuring your content for easy discoverability within that environment.
3. Encouraging your audience to engage with you—and ultimately convert—as you lead them through the buyer's journey.

In our day-to-day as consumers, brands like Spotify, Amazon, and Netflix have understood the value of experience for years, masterfully shaping how we as consumers enjoy our “content.” In the B2B world, however, we tend to think that what works in the B2C world doesn't apply to us. That couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, according to Salesforce, 82 percent of B2B purchasers expect the same level of personalization in B2B environments that they get in their consumer world.³ (It makes me laugh to think what the other 20 percent of buyers expect.) I try not to differentiate between what B2B or

3 Vala Afshar. “New Research Uncovers Big Shifts in Customer Expectations and Trust.” *Salesforce*, 2018, <https://www.salesforce.com/blog/2018/06/digital-customers-research.html>

B2C would do and focus on what it takes to close a complex or considered purchase. Either way, you can't tell me that personalization wouldn't be a key factor in the time to close a sale and customer loyalty. With the framework outlined in this book, here is your chance to deliver on that expectation, providing your target buyers with the content they need when they need it.

BEGINNING THE CONTENT EXPERIENCE JOURNEY

It's probably not a great thing to say to start off a book, but here's the truth: I'm not the biggest book guy. Like many readers, I don't finish many of the books I start. Every now and then, though, I pick up a book that I can't put down. Then, once I'm done with it, I immediately set out to find someone else I can pass the book along to so it can change their life as well.

Naturally, I'd love it if this were one of those books that you can't put down, that changes the way you see marketing and your role within it (even if you're not on the marketing team), and that inspires you to share it with others. If you're just in it for a few chapters and some good lessons, that's okay, too. You'll get value from the experience either way.

To make things as easy-to-follow as possible, I've divided this book into three parts:

- **In Part I**, we'll start by taking a look at what's going on in the consumer world, dissecting the approaches that make brands like Spotify and Disney so successful at creating immersive experiences. Then, we'll look at how to apply those tactics as marketers to create an immersive content experience—whether our go-to-market strategy is inbound, demand generation, account-based marketing (ABM), or sales enablement.
- **In Part II**, if I've managed to hook you into the idea of content experience and you want to know how to scale content experience within your organization, I'll walk you through our Content Experience Framework, step by step. Don't worry, I'll try to make this as anti-textbooky as possible. No going into the weeds here—just a nice, solid approach designed to help you execute.
- **In Part III**, we'll talk about how you can rally your entire organization around content experience, helping to unite your messaging and carry your buyers and customers through a journey.

Finally, at the end of the book, you'll hear from my partner in crime, Uberflip co-founder Yoav Schwartz, who will offer you a look to the future of content and the content experience. Throughout the years, Yoav and I have always had each other's backs—me, the marketer with a thousand ideas struggling to find the perfect software

platform, and Yoav, the user experience expert and product visionary capable of making the lives of marketers like myself (and you) easier so we can actually get sh#t done. Ultimately, this book is the result of that journey and partnership. Important to note: this book doesn't pimp our product, but why we created it.

And so, with all that out of the way, it's time to get started. As you move through the following chapters, always remember these words: if you're not going to use the content you produce, then f#ck content marketing. However, if you're ready to begin leveraging your content to connect with your audience and move them along the buyer's journey, then it's time to focus on content experience.