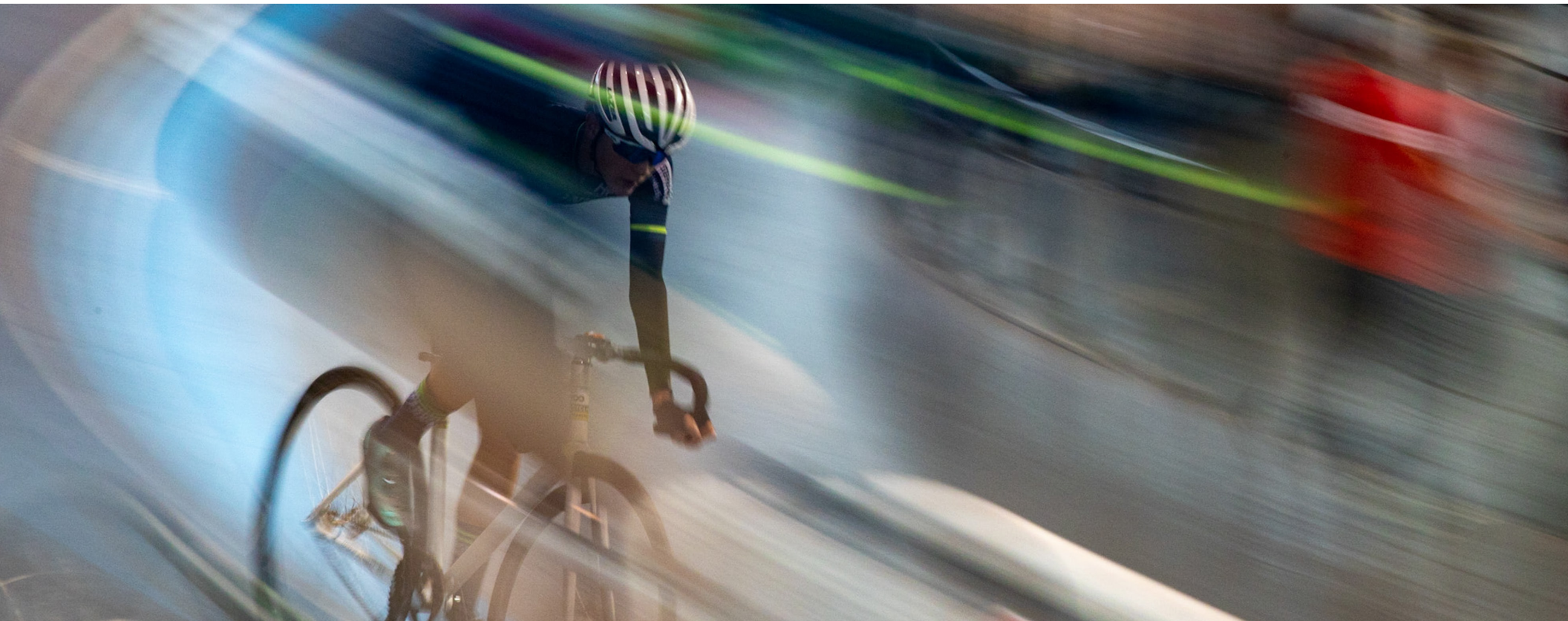


BRIGHTSPOT EBOOK 2022

Content & Communications Trends: 8 Ways to Stay Ahead of Your Competition



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Be Insightful, Get Personal and Solve Problems

Businesses everywhere are experiencing a domino effect. The challenges of 2020 swept through 2021, and that impact inevitably will be felt in 2022 and beyond.

We're seeing leaders still grappling with hybrid and remote work environments, while also attempting to keep their workforce feel safe, informed and part of a community. And, as online activity never slowed down from the initial spike at the start of the pandemic, businesses continue to tackle increasingly demanding consumer expectations for always-on, always-accessible access to information.

While challenges may seem to be piling up, the good news is that innovative thinking and cutting-edge technology has created just as many opportunities to help organizations get to the next level.

It's more important than ever, however, that content strategies and the stories brands tell resonate with their audiences. To help with this, there are various trends and approaches to communication and content management that are emerging. Whether you adopt one or all of them, it'll be essential to create content that's insightful and provides a unique point of view; that's personal and human and that solves a problem or provides a solution. In short, if you care for your audience and their needs, then they will care for your business.

Many of the approaches that we'll see gain in popularity tie back to this notion of care and community. The content that embodies that, while meeting readers where they are, will prevail.

Let's dive into what's ahead.

Content Trends to Watch & Adopt

Storytelling Gets Personal

How organizations tell their story has always been at the heart of content creation and delivery, but the need to engage your audience on a more personal level and bring people together will be a top priority moving forward.

People are seeking the comfort of community and familiarity, so establishing the right tone for your content is a critical factor in ensuring your storytelling feels personal, authentic and relevant. Instead of talking about a scientific advancement or a new software development, for example, organizations could profile the scientist or developer and have them delve into what makes the subject so important to them. Audiences still find out about the discovery or development, but it's delivered in a more personal, easy-to-digest manner.

With a modern CMS, executing on conversational and approachable content can be easier than you might initially think.



Putting a Personalized Touch on Storytelling

- 1 Microsites can help you appeal to different communities, though it's key to have the ability to publish to multiple channels from one system so you can easily reach multiple sites or platforms that different groups might use.
- 2 Localizing content through translation can help make people in other countries and those who speak different languages feel included and catered to.
- 3 Content creation tools that can be easily used by different people—those who have different roles and responsibilities within the business—can help ensure you're producing content backed by a variety of voices and perspectives.
- 4 It's important to enhance your storytelling by incorporating multimedia—whether that's images, video, audio or interactives; these visual and audio tools make it easier to tell great stories with a personalized touch.
- 5 Leverage the power of modular content, which keeps messaging consistent across audiences (if desired) and allows purposeful reuse, greatly accelerating the speed at which experiences can be customized and deliver the right messages to the right audiences.

Site Journeys Won't Be Linear

Over the years, a common marketing goal has been to shepherd visitors through a specific digital experience that results in an action taken, but this is changing. Visitors aren't always moving through intended sequences. Their journeys are all different, and this isn't something organizations can necessarily control—nor should they try to force one path.

Allow your visitors the freedom to roam and to continually receive content that's relevant to where they are in the buyer journey. They don't tend to arrive at websites by accident, so they want content recommendations that are right for them—in that moment. If organizations provide visitors the opportunity to act faster and more easily without friction, they'll be able to more quickly develop stronger relationships with their customers, have more meaningful exchanges, and convert unknown users to known ones (i.e. visitors who provide their information to your business).

This also means your most powerful channels need to create a seamless, insightful experience for your audience. The top channel in terms of quality engagement, of course, is an organization's website—over email, over social, over display ads, via search. When visitors come to your website, they're actively seeking out information from you. They're ready to learn and potentially engage. To this, we'll see organizations start to get more creative and try new things on their site to inform and delight their readers upon arrival.

Forrester's 2021 B2B Buying Study showed a dramatic 59% increase in the number of meaningful interactions that buyers engage in throughout the buying process compared to just two years ago. There's more self-guided research and more personal interactions with vendors and third parties, meaning buyers are becoming savvier about gathering information.

Source: Forrester, The Buyer's Journey Is The Portfolio Marketer's Key To Planning For 2022

“Websites are dynamic, evolving machines, and they change on a day-to-day basis. Knowing how people are engaging with your website allows you to respond and make sure that you're always optimizing to deliver the experience that your audience is looking for.”

– Rob Irvine, VP of Content, Brightspot

Aligning Content Types to Audiences Will Be Key

The physical restrictions created by the pandemic drove organizations to take a step back and assess how they were engaging with their different audiences. Take known visitors versus unknown visitors, for example—known visitors are likely to have sessions on your site that are twice as long as unknown visitors. Once you've built a stronger, trusting relationship with your audience, you can serve them longer-form content that goes deeper into the story than you might for someone who is a new visitor or simply perusing your site based on a display ad they were served. Those newer visitors will

more likely engage with shorter, concise content that gives them a quick snapshot into your story, your products and your solutions.

Because different audiences have different wants and needs, no organization should use a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, teams need to embrace a wider swath of content types as well as new distribution channels today and in the future.

The global email marketing market was valued at \$7.5 billion in 2020 and is projected to increase to \$17.9 billion by 2027.

Source: Statista

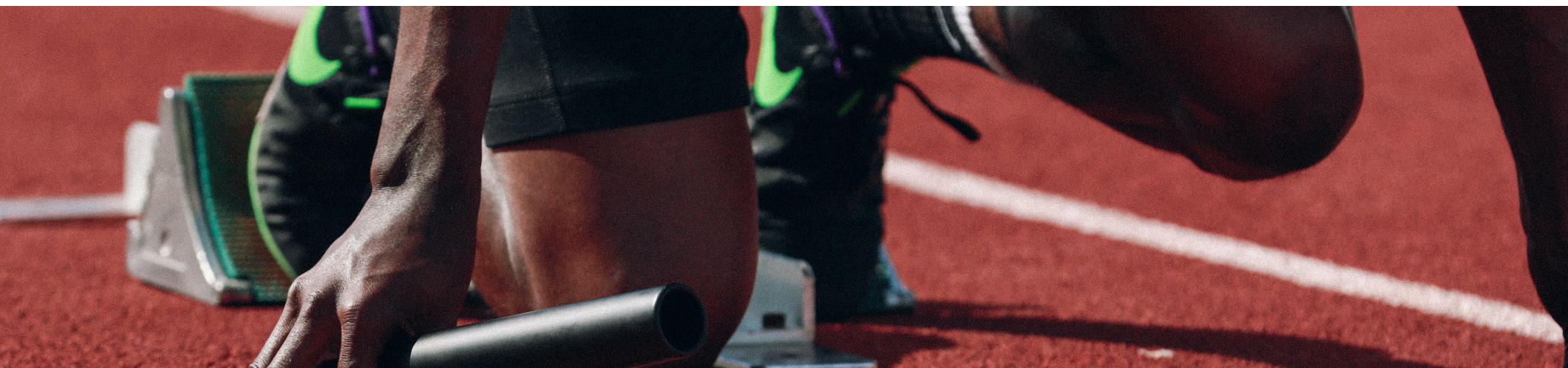
The pandemic also generated a massive jump in the number of webinars produced, as in-person meetings and in-person events were put on hold. This type of content will continue to be leveraged even as restrictions ease, however, because webinars often deliver high engagement and can be edited, repurposed and distributed across multiple channels even after they're over.

Deep, Insightful Context

eBooks and white papers can establish a point of view on your industry and the benefits of a product or solution by diving deeper and providing a more holistic stance on a subject matter. They're educational assets that allow you to feature the smart people—the experts—who work at your organization, giving them a voice and platform to engage with interested readers. This style of writing is best suited for familiar audiences who already have a baseline understanding of your company and are willing to spend more time engaging with your content.

Quick, Digestible Snapshots

Articles, blogs, emails and newsletters are the workhorse content types that allow readers to react quickly and digest information easily, which is ideal for visitors still assessing your brand and deciding whether to dedicate their time and money to your business.



Audio & Visual Will Shine


There are social snippets, how-to videos and product demos. There are podcasts, infographics and the emergence and domination of platforms like TikTok. Audio and visual elements are everywhere, and brands will continue to leverage new channels and strategies to attract and engage visitors.

Video

Whether it's longer-form webinars or short video snippets for social media, video has been and will continue to be an essential component in any marketing playbook. A modern CMS system can allow teams to create, clip and reuse video more effectively and ensure that video can be easily incorporated into any type of content or section within a site, including different landing pages, articles or blogs.

Since video reigns supreme, marketers will increasingly adopt systems that have capabilities to support and elevate their video marketing strategies—from robust native video support and editing and overlay options, to video playlist capabilities for easy search and audience-specific variations to prioritize video over other assets when it makes sense.

86% of businesses indicated that they were using video as a marketing tool, and 93% of marketers who use video say that it's an important part of their marketing strategy—an increase from 92% in 2020 and the highest percentage of any year since 2015.

A silhouette of a person standing on a platform, holding a checkered flag. The background is a solid orange color. The person is wearing a helmet and a short-sleeved shirt. The flag is black and white checkered.

**Video in an email
leads to a 200% -
300% increase in
clickthrough rate.**

Source: Precision Marketing Group

Audio

Digital audio marketing has gained traction in recent years, with podcasts and audio ads around every corner and on every streaming platform. Although podcasting has gained significant traction in the B2C space over recent years, we'll start to see more and more B2B companies adopt this medium into their strategies as well.

Here's Why

1

It's not a one-and-done tactic. One recorded conversation can turn into numerous pieces of content if you create snippets for social or a blog series from it.

2

It can help with brand awareness and provide an avenue to insert your experts into the conversation—notably, in an environment that's relatively low risk and controlled.

3

It's a good alternative to video marketing, as it's less expensive and takes less effort and resources.

4

It can allow you to build trust with your audience, and it provides a space to have new, insightful conversations with people interested in your brand and your story.

60% of marketers said podcasts were most effective for sparking awareness and interest, while only 9% said they found podcasts to be most effective in the later stages of the buyer's journey.

Source: Content Marketing Institute

The number of Americans listening to a podcast each week has grown 120% over the past four years, and 90 million Americans listen to a podcast every month.

Source: Buzzsprout

Personalization Will Scale

The maturity of an organization's personalization approach depends on the tools and technology available to them. For those who have mastered segmentation, it's less about knowing who your audience is and where they're coming from (as you already know this), and more about understanding how to deliver personalized recommendations to them based on what they have engaged with in the past.

85% of businesses say they are providing a somewhat personalized experience to customers, but 60% of consumers agree with that.

Technology has a major part to play when it comes to scaling personalization. Instead of creating personalized journeys for every single visitor, marketers are increasingly leveraging tools and capabilities like AI and machine learning and high-quality engagement data to do so.

A modern CMS can also allow you to take in more data to start building more relevant experiences. You don't want Canadians, for example, to get offers only valid in the U.S., and you don't want to offer up content specific to sales people to developers. Those aren't good experiences, and technology can help you avoid these blunders.

Personalization can be as simple as changing a headline on an article or as complex as serving up a completely different landing-page layout for a certain user. For marketers to be able to accommodate any and all needs, there will be greater adoption of CMS systems with powerful in-built personalization tools so they can create digital experiences tailored to individual end users' needs and interests.

60% of consumers say they are likely to become repeat buyers after a personalized shopping experience, and almost half say they are less likely to make a purchase from a brand after an un-personalized experience.

Source: Forbes, Twilio Segment Report

Modular Content Will Become a Best Practice

As organizations become increasingly complex—and as customer expectations become more intense—we'll see the adoption of modular content skyrocket. Modular content is an approach to reuse what already exists to implement efficiencies throughout the business, and it'll soon become not just common practice, but a best practice.

What It Is

Modular content is essentially content reuse, stemming from a need to deliver content on multiple devices and screens to a desire to present variations of content to different audiences based on location.

Previously, without modular content capabilities, publishers would typically focus on creating content for one single medium or single audience.

Now, the expectation is that content will be available across all mediums (print, desktop, mobile, apps, email newsletters) and that it will be catered to all locations and languages.

When organizations hit their stride with content reuse—when they're able to truly deliver across all channels and audiences—teams gain greater control with the ability to break down content and follow it through various revisions and variations for local use, appropriately and compliantly.

How It Works

Stack several small sentence "blocks" together, and you've created an article that can be displayed on a website.

Deliver a smaller set of those blocks for use in the print version of that article (to accommodate for the space restrictions inherent in print).

Designate a handful of blocks for use as pullquotes that can be styled differently and pushed to a reviews section.

If your business's definition of modular content is, literally, modules, then stacking several of those "blocks" together builds a page that might be used for your desktop website as well as your Apple, Android and Roku apps.

Internal Storytelling Will Be Vital

Hybrid and fully remote workplaces have opened the door for companies to hire top talent who live further away from their offices, which can make feeling a part of a culture and community difficult at first. This is why digital communication and corporate storytelling is more important now than ever before, as companies need to convey who they are to a broader audience digitally—externally and internally.

Connecting via the Intranet

Companies have relied on various platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams to maintain connection over the past couple years and will continue to do so. But company intranets have been the glue that keeps the workforce feel informed and connected as everyone is physically dispersed, and more companies will put effort into making their intranet a more seamless experience for anyone using it. Intranets need to provide that place where employees can tell their story and feel empowered to share their experiences and hear from their colleagues as we continue to navigate the uncertainty in our world.

Frequency of Communication

There has been and will continue to be a significant increase in the frequency of company-wide communication. This can occur on the company intranet, during town halls or at lunch-and-learns. Why? The workforce wants to hear from their leaders, but they want to hear from each other as well. Celebrating wins across departments and within teams is and will continue to be just as important as transparency with the company's performance and new initiatives.

To bridge the gap between the desire to continue working remotely and the benefits of an office environment, today's organizations need to recognize what keeps employees engaged virtually and understand how to foster community and culture among their people no matter where they are located.

A key part of integrating remote work with in-person advantages will be the successful use of intranets, better thought of as 'community and culture experiences.'

These experiences provide greater personalization, bringing company culture to life at a time when employees need it most and giving them new ways to connect with their work and each other.

– David Gang, CEO & Co-founder, Brightspot

Your Measurement Approach Should Mature

Understanding what your content needs to achieve and then measuring its performance is important today, but companies need to evolve their measurement approach and adopt higher-quality data into their analysis to better inform their strategies.

As the first step, marketers need quality data, but then they need to be able to stand back and apply a qualitative lens to it in order to come up with opportunities or action items to make an improvement. No matter the maturity of your measurement needs and capabilities at the moment, there are key questions to always consider to help understand what's working and when to pivot.

Then, report out on your findings—whether it's campaign reporting, story-level reporting, weekly, monthly or quarterly metrics reports. You may learn you can sunset certain types of content and make room to invest in new kinds of content in which your audience is more willing to engage.

Regardless of the approach you take, and no matter which content trends you adopt and which you leave behind, the bottom line is that everyone needs to get a return on their spend, so ensuring the right metrics and analytics are in place is imperative. This means making measurement a daily discipline in 2022 and beyond.

5 Key Questions

1

Are people interested enough in this piece to stick around and go on to consume more content in the same session?

2

What are they going to consume next?

3

Are the recommendations that you're giving them working?

4

What was the content asset or campaign trying to achieve?

5

Did it have an impact elsewhere?

Stay data-driven, data-informed— and stay competitive.

If you need support in assessing which communications and content approaches to adopt to get you, your teams and your company to the next level, contact Brightspot today.

We're here to support you along every step of your journey.



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