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The Opportunity (and Challenge) of Content Marketing within

WALLED GARDENS

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Content Marketing within Walled Gardens and Across the Open Web

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Marketers face many challenges, foremost of which is achieving a single view of their customer. The challenge they too often face is how best to track consumer behavior across a broad digital ecosystem spanning search, social, shopping, multimedia, email and instant messaging in order to make better informed marketing decisions.

From a purely content marketing perspective, this fragmented consumer behavior can make it difficult for marketers to decide how best to structure their content marketing activities in order to achieve maximum reach and ROI, whilst at the same time reducing redundancy and inefficiency.

Content Discovery - the process of getting the right content in front of the right audience at the right time - has recently emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments of the digital ecosystem. But while the category is expected to generate

\$21 billion in U.S. ad spend by 2018, many marketers remain unsure about best practices for getting the most from their content.

Underpinning some of this uncertainty for brands is the recent shift of social companies like Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter becoming closed 'walled garden' environments. The walled garden challenge for marketers is simple: the platforms want users to linger on their properties as long as possible, whilst marketers want to drive users to their owned assets to drive ROI.

A path forward for marketers is to accept that their content has to exist on the social platforms *and* across the open web if they're to reach the widest audience possible. The real challenge for today's marketer, however, is how best to deliver content into both environments in a cost efficient way.

Digerati sat down with Taboola's

CEO Adam Singolda to discover how brands can develop robust content discovery strategies that work within walled gardens *and* across the open web.

Q What's the opportunity for brands as you see it?

A The opportunity present within walled gardens owned and controlled by social behemoths like Facebook and Twitter is obvious. With one billion active daily users, Facebook is a content discovery powerhouse, a caveat being that brands fishing in their pond have to play by their rules.

However, the opportunity for brands across the open web is equally enormous. Taboola now reaches over one billion unique monthly users across our network of publisher sites, so marketers have the opportunity to achieve a similarly massive scale outside and around these walled gardens.

Q So walled gardens are a good thing then?

A Yes. And no. I believe that while social companies do offer meaningful opportunities for brands, the risk marketers take is being too dependent on them as a means of content discovery. This can keep your customers at arm's reach. Marketers need to know their users and customers, and build relationship with them by talking to them directly, and not through someone's wall.

Q So you think marketers need to take a wider view of where their content lives?

A For a long time social was the place people discovered things. It drove people away from Facebook and into your own blog, website or app, but now things are changing. Facebook's 'Instant Article' is changing the rules, and people will never leave Facebook. So, given this change, the answer is a resounding yes.

Marketers should absolutely diversify where their content appears. They should be aiming to have their content appearing in multiple environments, including on publisher sites as there's a lot of credibility and added value in being discovered there. So yes, it's important to diversify, but also to build experiences on your own website that allows you to build relationships with consumers. You can then leverage a publishers close relationships with their audiences to drive discovery.

Q Marketers have a range of options to them to drive content discovery, how should they prioritize between them?

A People spend about 22% of their time on social, 21% on search and 20% of their time consuming content, which means that the opportunity for content discovery is broad and varied. So marketers need to spread the net, so to speak, and make the effort to be where their target customers are.

But before any content discovery happens there needs to be serious time spent dedicated to strategy. There must be a long term strategy first, and it absolutely must start with a clear goal in mind. That is, a consideration of what exactly it is that is trying to be achieved as well as defining what success looks like. Content for the sake of content is a mistake.



There are some really good examples of brands that are taking a longer view to their content. American Express have Open Forum, a website that exists away from Americanexpress.com, where they write really high quality content for small businesses in America. This project is driven by the notion that if you can

drive really high value to small businesses, such as how to manage your cash flow, then over time people build trust and become loyal, long term customers.

Q What role can content play in driving sales, ROI?

A When marketers are creating their content optimization strategy, most of them understand the value of engaging audiences through content, but aren't sure how to tie their efforts back to sales. While some marketers expect content to lead directly to transactions, others see content as a means of strengthening brand perception. The actual ROI of content, however, is in the middle.

It's true that most content does not lead directly to a purchase, but when done correctly, every story you publish should lead consumers

closer to buying your product. Content marketing isn't a sales tool, but it isn't a brand-building tool either. It's a platform for building relationships at scale.

Once you've developed a relationship with your potential customer, it's

possible they might give your product a try. However, just because they're in the evaluation stage doesn't necessarily mean they're going to choose your brand. Your goal is simple: establish, deepen, and nurture relationships with your audience. This simple perspective will yield an uptick to your conversions.

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