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Be More Human: The Importance of Storytelling for Academic Publishers

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Content marketing is becoming increasingly important to businesses, offering an effective strategy for introducing storytelling to your communities. Storytelling can help you build loyalty and revenue by engaging your audiences and building brand awareness in a human, relatable way. To get started as an academic publisher, align content with your strategic business goals; select the right channels and medium for the message you want to deliver; establish goals and methods for monitoring and measuring success; and most important of all, put your clients at the center of your content, making them the heroes. TBI can help clients with the strategy and implementation of content marketing.

As a marketing and communication agency, TBI offers strategic insights and practical marketing solutions to publishers, societies, NGOs, and associations. Clients large and small will often ask the same question: "how can we tell our story?"

KEYWORDS
Academic storytelling, narrative science communication, scholarly brand engagement, plain language summaries, research impact narrative

The case for content marketing

The importance of business storytelling through content marketing is growing among brands within and outside of our industry. Here are three reasons why a content marketing strategy is relevant for academic publishers:

1. **The academic and research publishing space is increasingly commoditized:** When researchers have little to distinguish between the growing number of titles competing for their content and – increasingly – OA revenue – it becomes ever more important for publisher brands to showcase how they are different1.
2. **Brands are linking "trust" to revenue:** Outside of our industry, consumers are increasingly interested not just in the customer service they experience from a company, but they want to understand how it operates. A recent Salesforce report describes trust and company values as foundational to business growth: buyers want to understand that the company's values are trustworthy, beyond the products they purchase. In the meantime, negative or distrustful activity can impact long-term buying decisions in a significant way2.
3. **Researchers are actively consuming content marketing:** A Deloitte report published last month explored the increasing value of social media as a dynamic space where consumers can connect, gather information, and stay entertained. Researchers are no different, with evidence that social media and community platforms are heavily used to discover and engage with new research. Publishers can engage their communities in meaningful dialogue through these social channels3.

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In short, content marketing is becoming increasingly important, offering a strategic way to introduce storytelling to your communities. Storytelling can engage your audiences, build awareness and, in the long-term, build loyalty and revenue.

A closer look at stories

Storytelling is part of our nature; we are programmed to understand it. Neuroscience research shows that stories produce an actual physical response4: we are drawn into a story and feel connected to what we are hearing.

Stories are also memorable and easy to pass on. At a very young age, my children could grasp the principles of storytelling and write their own stories. That's because stories often follow a very formulaic approach: they start with a discovery or incident. This leads to confrontation or challenge, which results in a climax before the hero of the story is tasked with making a decision and we finally resolve. This formula works just as well in an epic story like Star Wars as it does in something very simple like a customer case study.

But it isn't just the formula that makes stories so important; it's the humanity at the center of the story; the 'why' – the challenge, or the problem – that drives the story and creates an emotional connection. By starting your stories with people – your team, or your customers – you showcase how you address customer goals and challenges in a very human, relatable way.

So how can you get started as an academic publisher?

1. Start with your strategic business goals. A content marketing strategy should use organizational goals to prioritize segments of your audience and support key business drivers: for example, the transition to open access, go-to-market strategy for new launches, or expansion into new markets.
2. Be strategic with your channel choices: look at where your communities spend their time through market research and analysis. Decide which channels offer the best opportunities by observing how these communities interact with content. To be engaging and relevant, each platform needs its own plan and appropriate use of content. Start with a manageable number of channels – perhaps even just one.
3. Choose the right content for the message you want to deliver: simple, non-technical language is easy to understand and remember in a blog or case study. Visuals are even more memorable, so an infographic or a video can help to translate a complex topic for your audience. Long-form content like a whitepaper can be powerful in explaining a position or sharing data but requires more time and effort to create. Live events are also time-consuming to plan and deliver, but offer brilliant platforms to deliver authentic human stories. A podcast or webinar gives you a similar impact, but without the pitfalls of live delivery.
4. Be reflective: set goals for monitoring and measuring the success of your endeavors. Measuring the impact of brand engagement takes time; a brand tracking survey and social listening can both be valuable strategic metrics to invest in.
5. Lastly, be more human with your content! Make your clients the heroes of the story: people are more likely to respond when they see their peers taking action. Testimonials, interviews, case studies, and events allow customers to speak in their own words. Be authentic in your voice, and don't be afraid to use emotion. It's what connects your readers, listeners, and viewers to your stories and draws them in. It is what they will remember about your organization, and what will convert them to engaged, loyal brand followers in the long term.

TBI supports clients with the strategy and implementation of content marketing, including brand research, audience segmentation and persona development, messaging frameworks, content calendars, blogs, whitepapers, infographics, video scripts, and more.

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CONCLUSION

Content marketing and storytelling can have a direct impact on brand reputation, maximizing visibility, profit, and impact. Publishers should increasingly look to content marketing strategy as a key lever in their long-term marketing strategy.

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