

Astonishing Tales — of — **Content Marketing**



*A Visual History of Marketing Pioneers of
Modern Content Marketing*

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Find some inspiration and start your own story



I believe in the power of storytelling – and I know the history of content marketing is filled with epic tales of innovation and creativity. So I decided to put the two together. Astonishing Tales of Content Marketing is the result.

What you hold in your hands (or are scrolling through on your device) are epic tales featuring genuinely brave marketing heroes – and brilliant marketing minds. There are fewer villains – but there are lots of hair-raising challenges and daring plans to pull off the seemingly impossible.

I've pulled together the most fascinating tales of content marketing from past and present into one collection for your reading pleasure. They'll entertain you, they'll inspire you – and they'll help you to be a better content marketer.

Astonishing Tales of Content Marketing is a passion project. I just had to do it because I love hearing these stories. I hope you do too. I hope they add fuel to your own creative fire and inspire you to create your own astonishing tale. And who knows, you and your brand could be starring in Astonishing Tales of Content Marketing, Volume II.

Let's dive into our first tale, shall we?



Jason Miller

Group Manager, Global Content and Social Media Marketing, LinkedIn





Astonishing Tales of Content Marketing
**Metro Trains Takes Off,
with Dumbs Ways to Die**



There's a movement underway to add humor and personality to marketing. I'm a major supporter of that movement. There's no substitute for human emotion when you're trying to make a connection with your audience.

Surely, though, there are times when humor is strictly inappropriate. For example, say you work for a staid, buttoned-down industry like public transportation. Now imagine you're in that industry and need to get across a serious, life-or-death public safety message. You should absolutely avoid humor and personality in this context.

Unless, that is, you want to create a worldwide multimedia phenomenon, like Australia's Metro Trains Melbourne did with their video Dumb Ways to Die.



Those adorable, disaster-prone animated beans became a runaway viral hit in 2012. The video currently sits at over 100 million views on YouTube. The soundtrack tune cracked the Top 100 in the Netherlands and hit #38 on the UK Indie charts. Two spinoff games racked up millions of downloads.

So how did a public safety announcement become such a smashing success? Read on.

The Message People Need (But Don't Want) to Hear



Metro Trains Melbourne had an important message to get across: Be safe around trains, whether you're driving near tracks or waiting on a platform. In the past, PSAs about train safety could be downright grisly affairs. They were live-action, dead serious morality plays with much implied gore. The kind of message that made you change the channel, or hide your eyes when the teacher played it on 8mm film at school.

For their new train safety campaign, Metro Trains Melbourne decided to do something different.

Instead of starting with the message and crafting dire visuals around it, they wanted to create something people would enjoy watching, something that would compel them to like and share it. In other words, a Trojan horse that could sneak in their serious message to far more people than a blunt approach would reach.

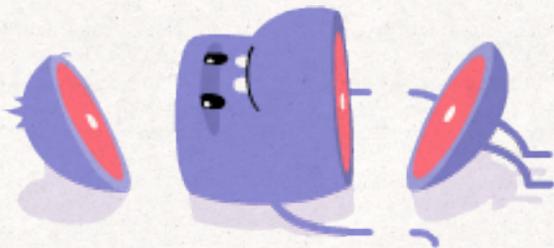
The company had a limited budget for their creation, far less than the cost of one TV ad. So they knew the campaign needed to be memorable and irresistible to create the viral boost they needed.

Gentle Tunes and Cartoony Gore

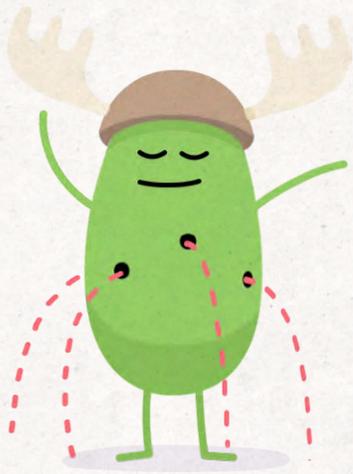
Metro Trains Melbourne turned to agency [McCann Melbourne](#) to create the ad. Their concept came from interviews with platform staff and drivers, who saw firsthand people taking foolish risks around trains. They quickly hit on a central idea: Trains are massive, make a lot of noise, and travel predictable routes in a straight line. Getting hit by one is a (say it with me) dumb way to die. So why not start with some exaggeratedly unrealistic other dumb ways to die? Why not suggest that death by train is

comparable to, say, donating both of your kidneys to strangers on the Internet?

The agency sweetened their gruesome premise with a simplistic, cute animation style. Even with the gory subject matter, it looks more like a children's book than a horror movie. To further raise the cute factor, they enlisted two local indie musicians to play the twinkly, twee tune that accompanies the ad.



A Viral Smash — And a Little Backlash



The combination of cute cartoons, catchy music, and gruesome subject matter was an instant smash hit. Just 72 hours after the initial upload, the video had nearly 5 million views. In the first two weeks, it racked up 30 million.

Metro Trains and McCann had captured lightning in a bottle. Fortunately, they were quick to react and help the campaign continue to spread. They released a single of the song onto iTunes, followed by a karaoke version for sing-alongs. Six months later, they gave the campaign another boost with the first Dumb Ways to Die game for iOS devices, followed by

a sequel in 2014. And they made sure the campaign's message was getting through with themed materials teachers could use in public schools.

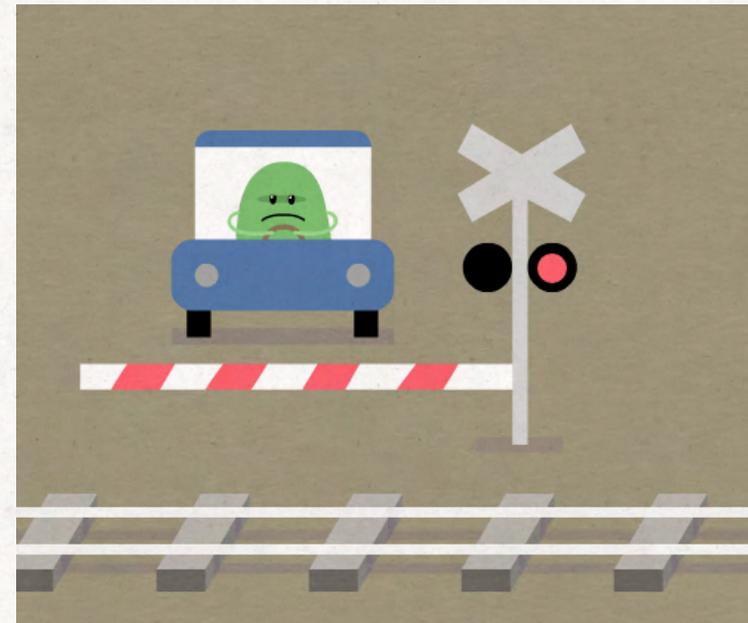
The runaway success wasn't without its detractors, of course. Some said the cute packaging wasn't enough to disguise the gory undertones of the campaign. Some claimed it took tragedy too lightly. But the negative press didn't have the numbers or the momentum of the initial campaign, and all it did was feed the publicity engine. All told, over 700 media outlets covered the campaign.

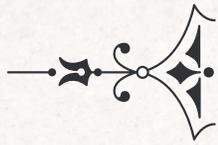
Death by the Numbers

It's safe to say Dumb Ways to Die was an unprecedented success. Here are just a few of the numbers:

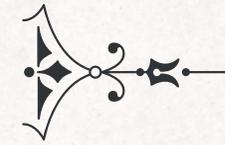
- Over 100 million views of the original video
- Song cracked the top 10 Downloads iTunes chart
- Game app hit number one in 17 countries
- Over 14 million downloads of the game app
- Campaign won seven Webby Awards, Best of Show at One Show in New York, and the Grand Trophy in the 2013 New York Festivals International Advertising Awards

What's more, Metro Trains Melbourne says the campaign got its message across loud and clear. They say it contributed to a 30% reduction in "near-miss" train accidents in the first year after the video's release.





Astonishing Takeaways: Metro Trains



What can smart marketers learn from Dumb Ways to Die?

Here are a few tricks worth borrowing.

Take Full Advantage of Rich Media

The video is a complete package: a funny premise, great animation, and a catchy tune. Without any one of those elements, it might have missed its viral status.

Take a Risk

McCann Melbourne wasn't afraid to court controversy to grab people's attention. Their bold, weird idea looks genius in retrospect—but it must have seemed like a massive risk at the time.

Use Multiple Channels

The campaign built on its early popularity by expanding into music downloads, games, even stuffed toys.

Put the Audience First

Metro Trains knew people didn't want to watch another dull

PSA about train safety. So they didn't force people to. They made something that was intrinsically entertaining, then brought in the message after they set the hook.

Stay on Message

As silly as the video is, it ties directly into the brand's central message. There's no non sequitur switch from the humor to the message; they're seamlessly integrated.



Metro Trains and McCann Melbourne made a PSA about train safety into a smash global hit. Millions of people who will never ride a train in Australia liked the video, shared it, and came back for more.

How good was this campaign? So good that it created Dumb Ways to Die as a new worldwide, multimedia brand that is still going strong four years after the first video. Now that's a truly astonishing tale of content marketing.

Astonishing Tales of Content Marketing

Volvo Gets Flexible



VOLVO

Remember that iconic scene in “On the Waterfront” when Marlon Brando drives up in his Volvo?

No? How about Arnold Schwarzenegger’s classic line in Terminator 2: “I need your clothes, your boots, and your Volvo?”

Surely you remember that classic Prince (RIP) song, “Little Red Volvo?”

Okay, so maybe if you listed Volvo’s exceptional qualities, “cool” would historically not be one of them. Their cars and trucks are safe, superbly-made mechanical marvels. But no one says they’re the hippest thing on the planet.

Now, combine Volvo’s somewhat staid reputation with B2B marketing, which is also not known for its thrill-a-minute coolness. Add an aging action star and some adult contemporary music, and it doesn’t seem like a recipe for one of the hottest viral videos of 2015, does it?

And yet...



So how did Volvo simultaneously make its trucks, Jean-Claude Van Damme, and Enya cool? Here's the story.



Closing a Generation Gap



It had been 20 years since Volvo released a major update to their line of commercial trucks. Back in 1995, print ads might have been the best way to reach Volvo's target audience. (Although it's true that Volvo Trucks did advertise on the Super Bowl in

1998). But for 2015, the company needed a new way to connect not just with commercial truck buyers, but the people who influence buying decisions: truck drivers and their families.

Volvo's target market is hard to reach with traditional advertising. They also had a budget to work with, so media

saturation via pricey television ads was out of the question. This traditional company needed to run a very modern campaign if they were to raise awareness of their new line.

Volvo tapped Swedish ad agency Forsman & Bodenfors to create a campaign that would stretch the company outside of its comfort zone, but without compromising their core branding.



Turning Features into Stunts



The new line of trucks had a solid list of features that directly addressed trucker's pain points: higher ground clearance, easier steering, and improved handling, among many others. Forsman & Bodenfors suggested it would be better to show these features in action than talk about them. What's more, they wanted the demonstrations to feature drama, suspense, even very dry wit. Ideally, the videos would

showcase the features in a way that would compel non-truckers to like and share as well as the target audience.

Under the agency's direction, each feature inspired a real-life stunt. The videos make it clear they were filmed live, with no special effects added.



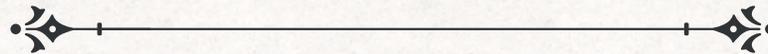
So to demonstrate enhanced ground clearance, Volvo ran a truck over an engineer buried up to his neck in sand.



They put a hamster behind the wheel of a truck to show how easy it was to steer.



And put a ballerina on a slack line between two speeding trucks to show the precise handling.



Each video is edited for maximum dramatic tension, not hiding the moments where the whole stunt almost goes off the rails. Each one is vastly entertaining for the casual browser, while still showing experienced truckers the value of each feature.

For the last video in the series, though, Forsman & Bodenfors stripped the concept down even further, reducing the complexity and run-time, but adding an undeniable human element.



**Retro Cool,
with
Genuine Heart**



As a general rule, driving a big rig in reverse is far more complicated than going forward. For their last video, Volvo had planned to demonstrate how smoothly their new trucks operated in reverse. But it took the spot's director,

Andreas Nilsson, to add the heart that makes the Epic Split video unforgettable.

Jean-Claude Van Damme was at least 15 years past his prime as an action star. Until the video, his recent appearances were mostly for comedic effect, full of self-deprecating humor. Nilsson saw another side of Van Damme, though. For Nilsson, Van Damme was an older man in prime physical condition, his body a precision machine. He was at peace with his place in the universe, but still able to teach young upstarts a thing or two. In other words, a perfect analogue for the Volvo brand.

Forsman & Bodenfors made the critical decision to make Van Damme the focal point of the spot. Rather than a voice-over about Volvo trucks, Van Damme would speak from the heart about his philosophy on life. Most critically, there's not a single wink or ironic nudge. It's just Van Damme, his face serene, glowing in the setting sun, casually performing an incredibly difficult stunt thanks to Volvo's engineering.

Even if you start watching with an ironic smirk, the actual stunt is jaw-dropping. It's genuinely beautiful, almost art. It's no surprise the creative team ended up with a full trophy case of industry awards.



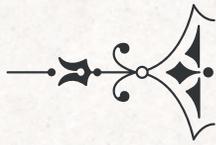
**Viral Video
a Victory
for Volvo**



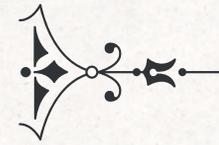
that wouldn't matter if it failed to do the one thing it was supposed to: spark interest in Volvo's new line of trucks.

The Epic Split video stands at over 86 million views. It quickly became a pop culture touchstone, parodied, passed-around, and discussed on late-night talk shows. But all of

Volvo [conducted a survey](#) of 2,200 commercial truck owners and buyers to gauge the video's impact. They found that almost half of those who saw the videos said they were more likely to choose Volvo for their next purchase. A third of the respondents had already contacted a dealer or visited Volvo's website after watching the videos.



Astonishing Takeaways: Volvo



Keep your message relevant.

The stunts may have been dramatic, but they weren't random. Each video clearly demonstrated a feature relevant to Volvo's audience.

Bring some drama.

Each video has edge-of-your-seat moments, and each tells a triumphant story in five minutes or less.

Be genuine.

Part of what makes the Epic Split video so compelling is it treats Van Damme with dignity and respect. The lack of ironic detachment makes it easier to connect with the story being told.

Bring your personality and passion.

The reason Van Damme ended up on those trucks is the director was a genuine fan of the actor. Nilsson lobbied for including Van Damme and treating the action star with the respect Nilsson believed he deserved.



With a minimal budget, an eye for a good story, and a flexible actor, Volvo got the entire Internet talking about commercial trucks. They pulled in casual viewers for viral success while still engaging their target audience with relevant information. That's a truly astonishing feat of content marketing.



Astonishing Tales of Content Marketing

**Have Michelin Guide,
Will Travel**



Though the term “content marketing” is a fairly recent invention, marketers have been using useful, informative content to drive brand loyalty for decades—even centuries. For this installment of *Astonishing Tales of Content Marketing*, we’re going all the way back to 1900. Read on to see how Michelin promoted their brand with innovative content for road trippers worldwide.

1900

Promoting Automobile Travel in the Early Days



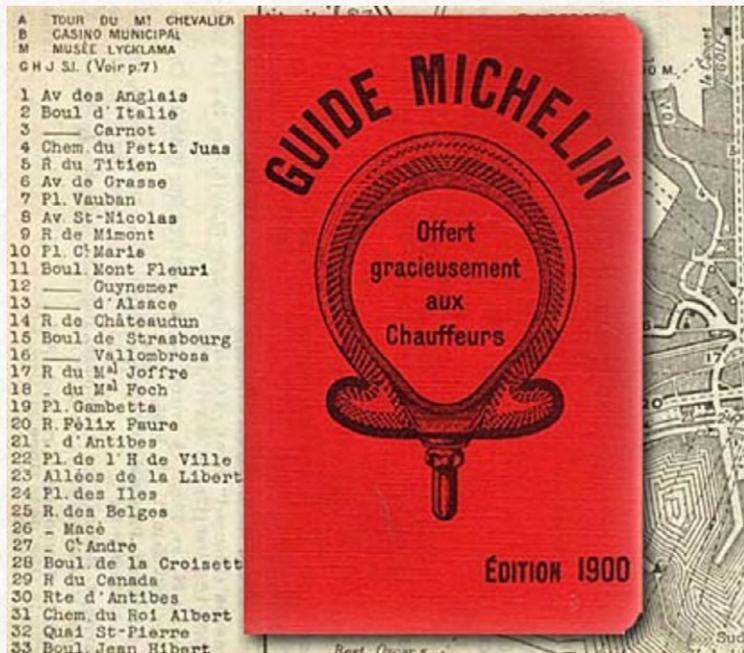
In 1900, Michelin was known for its innovative work with replaceable bicycle tires. They were just starting to produce tires for automobiles, and needed a way to promote their brand and increase demand for their product.

There were only 3,000 cars in France when the first Michelin Guide was published. Michelin had a chance to shape car culture while it was in its infancy. The Michelin Guide's purpose was to create demand for cars—and thus tires—by providing a useful resource for French car owners to use on their journeys.

Michelin printed 35,000 copies of the guide and gave them away for free. The first guide had listings for restaurants, maps, and advice for trip planning. Over the next two decades, Michelin gave away a new guide every year, only interrupting their publishing efforts during World War I. They expanded their initial French offering, adding guides to Italy, Sweden, Northern Africa, and more.

1920

Building a Reputation for Quality Advice



In 1920, Michelin made major changes in the guide that would make it a marketplace force to be reckoned with for decades to come. First, they eliminated advertisements within the guide and began charging for it, reasoning that “man only respects that which he pays for.” Then, they expanded their restaurant listings, which were the most popular part of the guide. Michelin employed a team of inspectors to dine incognito throughout France and rate their experience.

Michelin quickly established a reputation for reliable information on restaurants, and the guide’s reviews were more detailed with each edition. In 1926 they introduced a single star next to restaurants who provided an exceptional experience. By 1936, they had expanded to a three-star system.

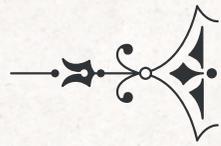
These star ratings, reviewed and revised with each yearly edition, became a sought-after status symbol for restaurants throughout France. To this day, a restaurant’s fortune can rise or fall depending on Michelin’s trusted recommendation.

2015

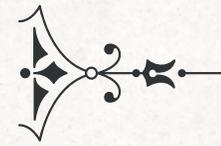
Still Going Strong

Fast forward to today, and Michelin has capitalised on their sterling reputation by taking the guide online, adding hotel and travel booking functionality. But even in the age of Yelp and Hotels.com, the printed versions of the guide remain popular. Michelin publishes 14 guides each year, covering 23 countries, and sells them in 90 countries.





Astonishing Takeaways: Michelin



Be useful.

Michelin's guides quickly gained a reputation as indispensable travel companions, thanks to the quality and thoroughness of their work.

Evaluate and adjust.

When Michelin saw their restaurant listings were the most popular part of the guide, they expanded and improved that portion of the guide.

Inform, don't promote.

The value of the guide as a marketing tool only increased when Michelin took the advertisements out and made it into a consumer product.

Grow strategically.

Rather than publishing shallower guides for more cities, Michelin expanded their coverage slowly, keeping the high standard of quality people expected from the guide. In fact, they didn't publish an American guide until 2005's guide to New York.

So if you've ever wondered why the tire company with the inflatable mascot shares a name with a prestigious restaurant guide, now you know. Though they started with the simple goal of selling more tires, Michelin established themselves as a knowledgeable advisor for travelers worldwide.

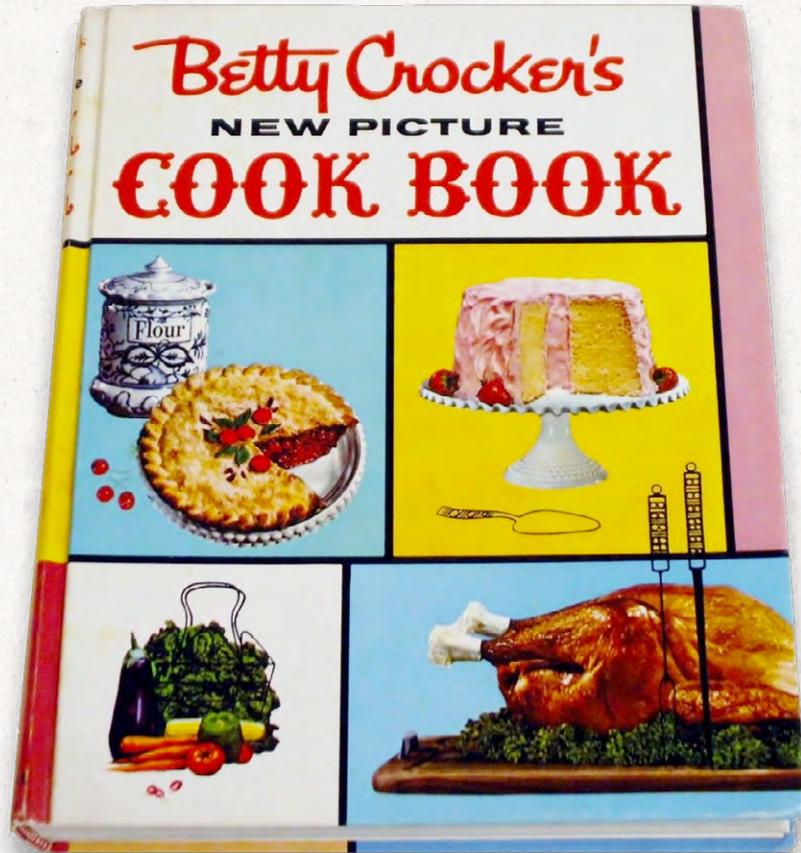
That's a truly astonishing tale of content marketing.





Astonishing Tales of Content Marketing

**Betty Crocker's
Sweet Ambitions**



Before content marketing had a name, there were brands using content to connect with their audience in innovative ways. As content marketing becomes a more crucial part of the marketing mix, it's helpful to look back at these proto-content-marketers for inspiration and advice.



In the service of selling flour and other baking ingredients, the Washburn Crosby Company inadvertently created a cultural icon who is still going strong, 90 years after her first appearance. Read on to learn the history of the Queen of the Kitchen, the Countess of Cakes, the Duchess of Dessert: Betty Crocker.



1936



1955



1965



1968



1972



1980



1986



1996

1921
A Star Is Born



Betty Crocker’s origin story starts with the Gold Medal Flour Company, a subsidiary of Washburn Crosby. In 1921, they ran a contest for their customers: Complete a jigsaw puzzle, mail it in, and receive a pincushion shaped like a sack of flour.

Gold Medal received thousands of responses. Unexpectedly, many of the responses came with cooking questions from struggling homemakers. The all-male management team at Washburn Crosby thought their audience would better relate to a woman giving cooking advice, so they created a character who could relate to their audience.

Washburn Crosby named their new spokesperson Betty Crocker. “Betty” because it seemed like a wholesome all-American name, and “Crocker” after Warren G. Crocker, a recently-retired director at the company.

Betty Crocker answered thousands of letters, giving expert advice sourced from the women on Washburn Crosby’s payroll and the stay-at-home spouses of the men on staff. At the bottom of each letter, she signed a signature chosen through an office-wide competition.

1924
Betty Takes to the
Airwaves



Washburn Crosby bought a struggling radio station in 1924, and used it as a platform for “Betty Crocker’s Cooking School of the Air.” The show was so popular locally that they syndicated the scripts to other stations, with a different actress reading Betty’s lines in each local market.

Three years later, the NBC radio network picked up Betty’s cooking show, where it ran for a quarter of a century. Over a million listeners tuned in each week for recipes and cooking tips.

1941
Betty at the
Grocery Store



To keep Betty stocked with good advice, Washburn Crosby employed a team of home economists. They tested recipes, came up with new ways to use the company’s products, and made sure Betty’s reputation was ironclad.

In 1941, the first Betty Crocker branded foods hit grocery stores. Betty lent her seal of approval to easy-to-make soup and cake mixes. With her sterling reputation to back them, Betty’s line of products flew off the shelves. A survey at the time found Betty was the second most well-known woman in America, second only to Eleanor Roosevelt.



1945
Betty Helps the
War Effort



The U.S. Office of War Information enlisted Betty to help homemakers cope with war rationing in 1945. She hosted a radio program called “Our Nation’s Rations” for four months, supplemented with leaflets full of

ration-friendly recipes. In addition, the Office distributed seven million copies of a Betty Crocker-branded ration recipe booklet called “Your Share.”

1950 – Present
Betty Rules
the Media



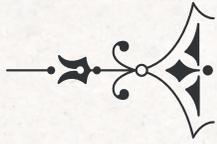
The first Betty Crocker Cookbook was published in 1950. It is currently on its 11th edition, with over 250 other branded cookbooks published since then. Betty began publishing a recipe magazine in the 1980’s as well, and new issues hit supermarket checkout stands every month.

and Gracie Burns, among many others. Her own cooking show ran for two seasons.

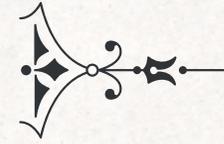
Betty—played by a number of different actresses—made guest appearances on TV shows throughout the 50’s and 60’s, cooking for George

Today, Betty is still going strong, with over 200 grocery products bearing her name and iconic red spoon. Betty also has her own website and YouTube channel, where her instructional cooking videos have over seven million views.





Astonishing Takeaways: Betty Crocker



Be Helpful.

The initial letter-writing campaign that established Betty's reputation was based on sound cooking advice. As her brand grew, the company made sure the advice stayed useful.

Think Bigger.

Without the vision to amplify her brand, Betty may have never evolved beyond answering letters. When new technology emerged—television, the Internet—Betty always had a presence.

Stay Relevant.

As the picture up top shows, Betty has undergone several makeovers throughout her career, to make sure her image still resonates with the changing times.

Be a Good Citizen.

Betty's wartime efforts did a great deal to build the brand's reputation, even though they weren't directly promotional.





Betty Crocker has been around longer than Mickey Mouse, but her name still sells cookbooks and cake mix to this day. From her humble beginnings, Betty became a household name and an enduring cultural icon. That's a truly astonishing tale of content marketing.



A Blendtec blender is shown from a top-down perspective, with a smartphone placed inside the clear plastic jar. The blender is centered in the frame against a dark, textured background. The text is overlaid on the image.

Astonishing Tales of Content Marketing

**Blendtec Crushes it
at Content Marketing**



blendtec

Come along with us through the mists of time to the distant past: Specifically, to October 30, 2006.

President Bush is midway through his second term. The most sought-after cellular phone is the Motorola RAZR, with its 2.2” screen and fashionable clamshell design. For the first time, you don’t need to be a college student to join Facebook. And Blendtec Founder [Tom Dickson](#) uploads the first video in what will become a series of viral hits on an up-and-coming site called YouTube (which launched less than a year ago).

The First Video: Losing His Marbles

The first [Blendtec video](#) instantly establishes the feel of the series. It has the on-the-cheap look of a late night infomercial, with deliberately cheesy titles and game-show quality music. But instead of a slick, polished pitchman, the star of the video is Dickson himself, looking slightly uncomfortable to be on camera.

“Will it blend? That is the question,” Dickson says, and pours 50 glass marbles into a Blendtec blender, reducing them to powder in under a minute. When he peels off the blender lid, finely-pulverised particles swirl up like smoke. “Glass dust. Don’t breathe this,” he deadpans.



This first video set the template for the 140+ that followed it. The series is remarkable for what it *doesn't* have, almost more than for what it does: There is no product pitch, no mention of model numbers or prices. There's no touting the benefits and features of the blender, no indication what you might actually use the blender for in the kitchen, or even pointing out that the blender is powerful.

There's not even a call to action. An unconventional item goes into the blender, Dickson smiles at the camera while it blends. Then he pours out the pulverised remains, points out that the object did in fact blend, and scene.

That first video currently has over 6.5 million views on YouTube. Blendtec's more conventional promotional videos average around 50,000–60,000 views.



Marketing Gold: Blending Apple Products

Apple's announcement of the iPhone in 2007 captured the public's imagination. People lined up for blocks to get their hands on one. The iPhone was hard to find in stock, and was amazingly expensive for a cell phone. So for some, it seemed like an act of sacrilege for Dickson to [drop it into a Blendtec](#) and turn it into powder and smoke.

"iSmoke. Don't breathe this," he quips at the end of the video, before revealing he has a backup iPhone to keep for himself. Tech bloggers were amused and angered in equal proportions, and the video quickly climbed to over 12 million views.



Three years later, Blendtec scored even more views with an even more coveted Apple product: the original iPad. Again, the blogosphere exploded and the video racked up more than 17 million hits. For anyone who thought the device was overhyped, or desperately wanted one but couldn't justify the expense, there was an odd catharsis in watching Dickson smash the screen, fold it in half, and blend it into powder.



Since the success of the first two Apple videos, Dickson has blended every new iPhone and iPad. Recently, he's taken to doing side-by-side blending tests with Android and Apple products, to see which lasts longer in the blender (currently Samsung is leading by 5 seconds).

Expanding the Empire

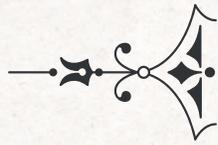
Usually a viral video is a one-off success. It comes out of nowhere, hits hard, then fades into obscurity. But Dickson turned the success of the initial videos into a community with over 800,000 subscribers on YouTube, and a Facebook page where fans can suggest themes for new episodes. Blendtec responds to most comments on the Will It Blend Facebook page with the dry wit fans expect from the series.

While the videos were initially intended to promote Blendtec's product line, they are now a revenue generator in their own right. Other brands actually use Will It Blend as a content marketing platform for their products. Among others, GoPro sponsored a "blendercam" that featured an inside view of the blending process, PayPal promoted its Bill Me Later service with a "Man Cave" themed video, and Ford touted the durability of boron steel, by showing it wouldn't blend.

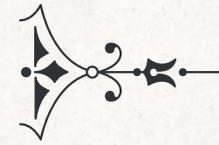
A Blend of Product Demonstration and Top of Funnel Marketing

Nine years since he blended marbles into powder, Dickson keeps the YouTube channel going with a new video every month. The 140+ videos have a combined total of over 265 million views. Dickson has become a minor celebrity in his own right, bringing Blendtec blenders to the Tonight Show and the History Channel's Modern Marvels series.

In a 2007 interview with Squid News, Dickson spoke to the strategic marketing purpose of the videos: "The campaign is all about brand awareness, helping us to build top-of-mind awareness and establish Blendtec as the premier blender manufacturer," he says, adding, "We have definitely felt an impact in sales. Will It Blend has had an amazing impact to our commercial and our retail products."



Astonishing Takeaways: Blendtec



Have Personality.

Part of what made the series successful is its irreverent, purposefully retro-feeling tone, combined with Dicksons' folksy, dry humor.

Get Creative.

Blendtec could have created a series demonstrating how to make smoothies, yogurt, or any of the dozen things their blenders are actually made for. Instead, they opted for an over-the-top approach that drew viewers in.

Build Community.

Blendtec expanded the Will It Blend brand from YouTube to Facebook to its own microsite on Blendtec's website. Blendtec interacts with the community, accepting suggestions for videos and replying to comments with personality and wit.

Co-create and Cross-Promote.

Blendtec leveraged the video series' success to partner with other brands, without compromising the format that made them famous.



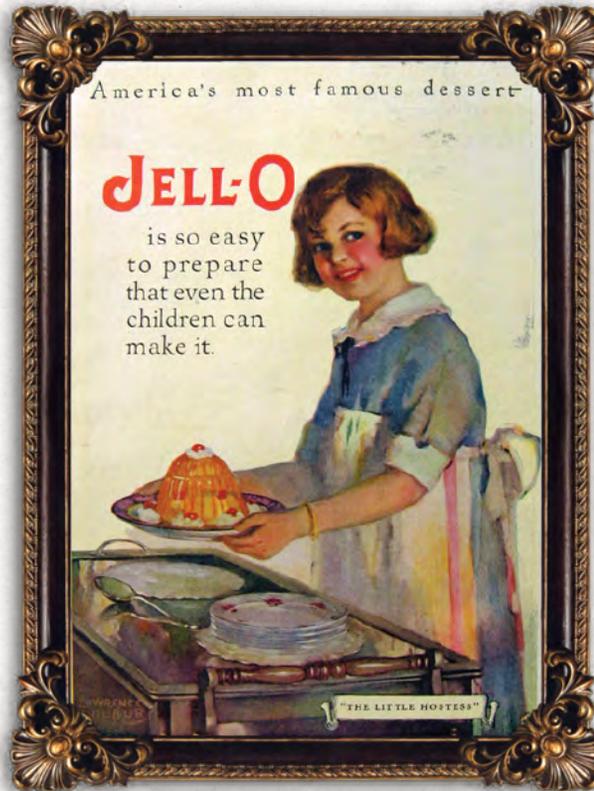
The Will It Blend series has been steadily turning out viral hits for nine years—or approximately 300 years by the short attention span of Internet fame. By showcasing their product in a unique and gleefully destructive way, they continue to entertain millions of people, two minutes at a time. That’s a truly astonishing tale of content marketing.





Astonishing Tales of Content Marketing
Jell-O Shapes its Future

JELL-O



-
- Step 1** Boil cow and pig hooves to extract connective tissue.
 - Step 2** Let connective tissue dry into sheets, then grind into powder.
 - Step 3** Add artificial flavor.
 - Step 4** Profit?
-



The Jell-O brand took an unlikely journey from animal by-product to omni-present side dish. The little packets of powder that became wobbly desserts (and occasionally main courses) dominated American cuisine in the first half of the 20th century.

Today, families are still finding room for Jell-O. The brand embraced social media, with nearly a million followers on Facebook and a recipe-sharing homepage that encourages user participation. Not bad for a brand once considered so worthless by an owner that he nearly sold it for \$35.

Read on to learn how Jell-O used truly astonishing content marketing to win the hearts and minds of America's housewives.



1845 Its Humble Origins



In the 18th and 19th century, gelatin desserts were considered a luxury. The time and effort it took to boil and strain the gelatin meant only households with a full kitchen staff could offer it to guests.

In 1845, an inventor named Peter Cooper patented a way to mass produce powdered gelatin. He sold the powder to restaurants and professional chefs, but had little interest in marketing it further. Years later, failed cough syrup manufacturers Pearl and May Wait bought the patent. They revolutionised the product by adding flavored syrup to the usually bland dish.

The resulting product was named “Jell-O,” a combination of the words “jelly” and “gelatin.” But Pearl and May lacked the marketing knowhow to capitalise on their invention, and in 1899 sold the brand to the Genesee Food Company for the princely sum of \$450.

Genesee’s owner, the excellently named Orator Woodward, started with a direct sales approach for the brand, with salesmen offering samples to grocers and even going door-to-door. But sales stayed flat, and Orator tried (unsuccessfully) to unload the brand for as little as \$35.

1904 A Marketing Juggernaut Is Born



In 1904, Orator hired marketer William E. Himmelbaugh, and invested heavily in his hire's new-fangled ideas. Under Himmelbaugh's direction, Jell-O took out full-page ads in the Ladies Home Journal, with homemakers in immaculate kitchens declaring Jell-O "America's Favorite Dessert."

The Ladies Home Journal ads took sales through the roof. A second round of ads featured pantries stocked with Jell-O and adorable tykes digging into their favorite dessert, each one a hand-illustrated work of art.

1924-1961 Jiggly, Wobbly Domination



In 1924, the Genesee Food Company became the Jell-O Company, and their marketing efforts continued to expand. The company hired an up-

and-coming artist named Norman Rockwell to illustrate their ads.



Jell-O was an early adopter of radio advertising in 1934, sponsoring the Jell-O Program with Jack Benny. Jell-O cookbooks of the time capitalised on a trend for savory gelatin salads. For example, this [Chicken Mousse Recipe](#) calls for lemon Jell-O, chicken, pimento, vinegar, and whipped cream.

Delicious!

(... continued)

Like Betty Crocker, Jell-O was front and center with great content for rationing-restricted housewives. Between 1942 and 1945, they released the “Bright Spots for Wartime Meals” recipe books, designed to help women make the most of limited resources—by using plenty of Jell-O, of course.

In 1956, Jell-O leapt on another emerging marketing medium: television. They recruited megastars like Johnny Carson, Lucille Ball, and Roy Rogers to introduce new flavors and deliver quick recipes.

Jell-O released a definitive cookbook in 1961 called the Joys of Jell-O, featuring over 250 recipes. The book’s savory section relied heavily on Jell-O’s new savory flavors, celery, Italian, and tomato (which have since, sadly, been discontinued).



1990 Don't Call It a Comeback



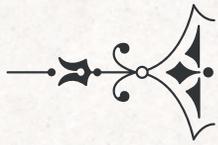
In the late 70s and 80s, sales of Jell-O began to slip. The trend of congealed salads with floating vegetables gave way to a health-food trend for fresh, tossed salad. Jell-O dug deep into their old cookbooks to find a way to reverse the decline.

Fortunately, instead of bringing back the chicken mousse, they rediscovered a recipe for thicker, more concentrated Jell-O kids could cut into shapes and eat with their hands. Even better (for the company), the recipe called for twice the Jell-O

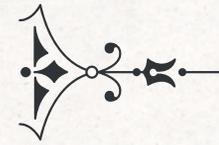
per serving. Dubbed Jell-O Jigglers and promoted with recipes on Jell-O boxes, magazine ads, and TV spots, the creation boosted Jell-O sales 47%.

Today, Jell-O may not be “America’s favorite dessert,” but it’s still in high demand. Jell-O continues to repurpose old recipes and create new ones. They also feature user-generated recipes on Instagram and maintain an active Facebook presence with nearly a million followers.





Astonishing Takeaways: Jell-O



Educate your audience.

Jell-O's recipe books helped household cooks explore the possibilities of the product, while reinforcing Jell-O's place in the kitchen.

Explore new channels.

Jell-O started in print media, but expanded to radio and television while both technologies were in their infancy.

Partner with influencers.

Jell-O recruited the top talent of the day to create useful content, like the Johnny Carson recipe ad above.



Jell-O turned a packet of boiled cow hooves, sugar, and flavoring into a must-have dessert for over a century. Along the way, they shaped how generations of Americans prepared and presented their meals. That's a truly astonishing tale of content marketing.



Astonishing Tales of Content Marketing

HSBC Makes an Elevator Pitch to Small Businesses



HSBC UK engaged agency [Grey London](#) to rewrite the conversation between financial institutions and small businesses. Could the agency convince entrepreneurs that HSBC genuinely cared about their success?

The Ground Floor

Grey London started their campaign by listening to their target audience. They held a series of workshops to talk with small business owners to learn what motivated them, what they valued, and what they needed.

That research led to the discovery that business was about more than profit forecasts or interest rates. For small business owners, it's a passion. It's intertwined with their personal lives, and it's a calling that motivates them beyond making money. In

other words, as the tagline Grey London developed puts it, "It's never just business."

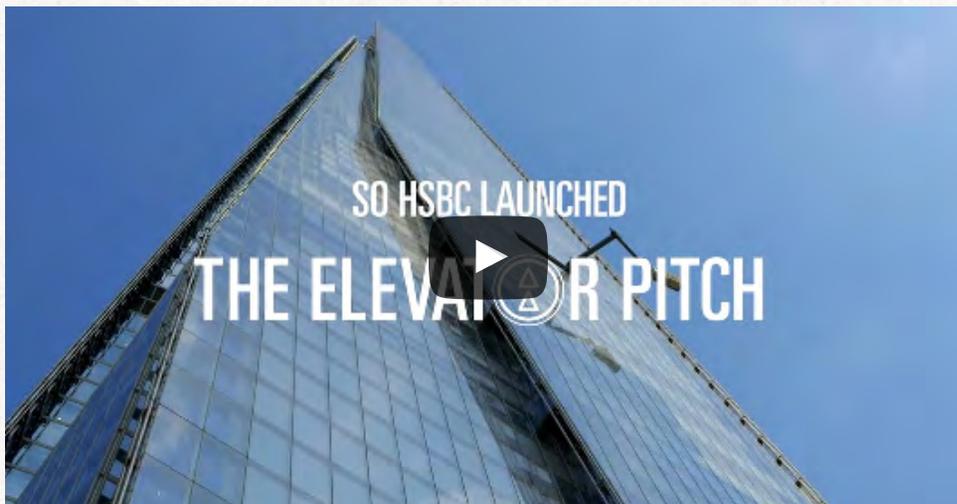
Grey London had the audience intel and the concept to start their campaign. But they didn't go straight to an audience yet. First, they launched an internal campaign to explain the concept to employees. Everyone from tellers to board members received tools and training to promote the idea.

The First Story

Once HSBC's employees were on board with the new mission, Grey London introduced the new mindset to the public with a short film riffing on the idea of an "elevator pitch." In the 60-second spot, an entrepreneur in the 1970's gets in an elevator to his new office space. As the elevator goes up, 40 years of business development plays out, all within the confines of the elevator:

The film interweaves personal moments with scenes about building the business (including weathering setbacks). It deftly gets across the idea that HSBC understands how entrepreneurs' home and business lives are never separated, and that the bank cares about helping small business owners succeed.

To really get the message across, though, HSBC took the "elevator pitch" concept even further.



The Continued Ascent

The Elevator Pitch contest got viewers' attention with compelling storytelling and practical advice. To hold that attention, HSBC partnered with UK newspaper The Telegraph to build a [content hub](#) for small business owners. The hub features the Elevator Pitch short videos, but also long-form video and blog content. Blog posts cover everything from [expert](#)

[business advice](#) to emerging trends in specific sectors.

After entrepreneurs soak up the content, they can use [interactive tools](#) to create a business plan, plan for financing, and project their earnings. These tools let visitors directly benefit from HSBC's financial expertise in a low-pressure setting.



The Penthouse Suite

The final piece of HSBC's strategy was a series of live streaming videos, the [Elevator Talks](#). These 90-minute sessions featured advice from creative businesspeople with a wide variety of experience, from sports figures to architects.

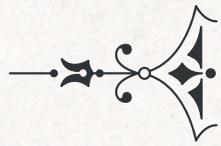
For those who couldn't make the live event, HSBC created short highlight videos for each talk, and even uploaded four of the six sessions in their entirety. The resulting [YouTube playlist](#) is a content marketing asset in its own right, with over 21,000 views since the start of the year.

The Results

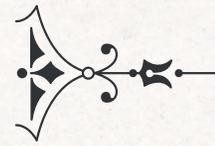
HSBC attempted to change the way banks talk to small business owners, and in turn the way entrepreneurs think about banks. The initial results from the campaign show that their audience appreciated the switch:

- Over 150,000 views on Elevator Talk videos
- Over 100,000 views on Elevator Pitch videos
- Ads on the Elevator content hub have 36% higher CTR than previous benchmarks
- Increased leads from the campaign created a £9 million increase in profits





Astonishing Takeaways: HSBC UK



How did HSBC make a connection with their audience, rebuilding trust and establishing a new, more human brand identity? Here are a few key strategies to steal:

Listen before you speak.

Instead of telling their audience about their new small business friendly accounts, HSBC listened to learn what small business owners really needed to hear. HSBC learned what their audience valued, which made it easier to show that HSBC shared those values.

Change comes from within.

Grey London took their campaign to HSBC employees before they took it to the public. They knew that to make a lasting change in the way HSBC interacted with small business owners,

every member of the company needed to be on board.

Tell a story.

HSBC made the Elevator Pitch contest meaningful and memorable by focusing on their 10 finalists' stories.

Provide real value.

The Elevator content hub proved HSBC's claim that they cared about helping small businesses succeed. The articles, videos, and live events were all aimed at providing sound business advice, with little to no overt brand promotion.

HSBC set out to redefine their relationship with small business owners. The stories told through the Elevator Pitch contest built an interested, relevant audience; the value provided afterward kept them engaged. All in all, HSBC succeeded in humanising their brand, establishing thought leadership, and building a lasting resource for their target audience. That's a truly astonishing tale of content marketing.





Astonishing Tales of Content Marketing

LinkedIn Marketing Solutions Creates an Owned Media Empire



Throughout the [Astonishing Tales of Content Marketing](#) series, we have traveled through space and time to bring you inspiring examples of [content marketing](#) done right. We visited the early 20th century to see how [a tire company](#) got into the travel guide business. We explored America's obsession with [Jell-O](#), from the dessert plate to the main course (and back again). Most recently, we learned there are plenty of [dumb ways to die](#) in Australia, but thanks to clever content, playing around trains doesn't have to be one of them.

There will be other astonishing tales to tell from distant times and places. But for now, I'd like to focus on a story closer to my heart: The creation of the [Sophisticated Marketer's Guide to LinkedIn](#). Sure, it's no "Jean-Claude Van Damme doing the splits for [Volvo](#)," but it's an inspiring story of just how powerful a piece of Big Rock content can be.

Jason Miller
Group Manager, Global Content and
Social Media Marketing, LinkedIn





CRASH COURSE

CONTENT MARKETING

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

#SophisticatedMktg

Why Don't We Own this Conversation?

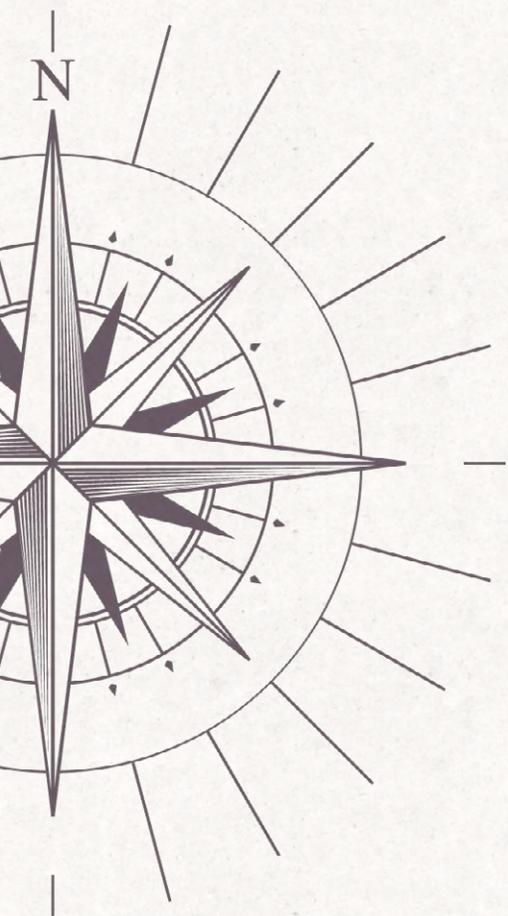
The Sophisticated Marketer's Guide to LinkedIn changed the game for the LinkedIn Marketing Solutions brand. In fact, The Sophisticated Marketer has become its own brand, an owned media empire including [four crash course booklets](#), full guides to [content marketing](#) and [thought leadership](#), [webinars](#), and a [podcast](#). Not to mention the [#SophisticatedMktg](#) movement.

But I'm not here to brag. Like every Astonishing Tale, this is about learning how we did it, so you can do it for your brand. With that in mind, let's go back to where it all began.

It was 2013. I had just left Marketo to join LinkedIn Marketing Solutions as the Senior Manager of Global Content Marketing. At Marketo, we had enjoyed success with long-form, authoritative content. With my new team at LinkedIn, I wanted to

do something really extraordinary. Something to demonstrate LinkedIn Marketing Solutions' thought leadership and provide a massive amount of value to our audience. In short, I wanted to make a definitive, mic-dropping guide.





It was easy to pick the perfect topic: Marketing on LinkedIn. Who knew more about the tools and tactics for LinkedIn Marketing than the team that lives and breathes it? Despite our in-house expertise, we had yet to really own the conversation.

I wanted to go beyond writing just a guide to our platform. I wanted our brand to express a point of view on digital marketing as a whole, its present and future. What kind of qualities does a marketer need to be successful in an ever-evolving, always-on digital marketplace?

After much discussion, we found our point of view: Marketers need to be multi-talented, hyper-aware, and endlessly improving. We should take advantage of all the information available to us and go deeper. Deeper into understanding our potential audience. Deeper into analytics to improve. Deeper into tactics to get our content seen. In short, it's time for the modern marketer to get sophisticated.

We had our topic. We had our point of view. All we had to do was create the content. But we couldn't do it alone.



Assembling a Marketing Dream Team



When you're looking to make the definitive guide to anything—be it marketing or potato farming—you can't be limited to a single worldview. We decided to bring in experts from across the marketing world to expand our content.



Some were people I've known for years, others we just knew from their writing. We ended up with an all-star cast including [Brian Clark](#) from Copyblogger, author [Neal Schaffer](#), and TopRank Marketing CEO [Lee Odden](#). As with all good influencer marketing, their participation accomplished four things:



1. It made the content more valuable to the reader
2. It lent credibility to our team's content
3. The experts helped promote the piece when it published
4. It was the beginning of several awesome ongoing relationships

It turns out that if you want to get to know someone, asking them to help you build something cool is a good way to connect. We made sure to generously cross-promote, too—by featuring the experts in blog posts, social media posts, you name it. Some of the folks in that original document are still my go-to experts for content today.

Repurposing, Refreshing, and Expanding

Shortly after its launch, the Sophisticated Marketer's Guide to LinkedIn achieved an ROI of roughly 18,000 percent. It quickly became the most successful revenue and awareness driver in LinkedIn Marketing Solutions history. To this day, it's still our number one asset.

But we didn't just sit back and watch the leads roll in. We followed up the launch with a webinar, then got to work on a series of crash courses. And, of course, we set about carving as many [turkey slices](#) out of the content as we could. Blog posts, [SlideShare decks](#), infographics, you name it. We even printed up physical

copies of the guide to hand out at marketing conferences.

To celebrate the guide's first anniversary, we put out a new, refreshed edition. And we took the movement global. As of 2016, the guide is available in seven different languages. We refreshed the guide again this year. And the train keeps rolling with my podcast series, a refreshed [Sophisticated Marketer's Guide to Thought Leadership](#), and plenty more on the horizon.



Success by the Numbers

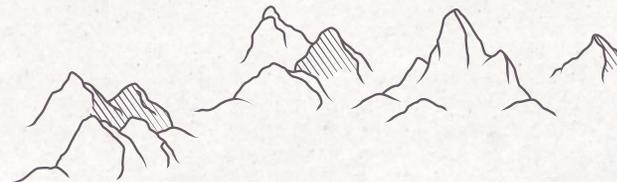
To date, the Sophisticated Marketer's Guide to LinkedIn remains our No. 1 driver of MQLs. It owns the conversation for marketing on LinkedIn, and is the cornerstone of an owned media empire.

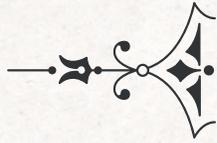
99,000+

downloads of the guide

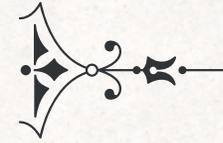
35,000+

views of the [webinar SlideShare](#)





Astonishing Takeaways: LinkedIn Marketing Solutions



Pick the right topic.

Choose a topic for your Big Rock that's right at the intersection of your knowledge and your customers' needs.

Be thorough.

Make your content the definitive statement on the topic you're addressing. Cover all the angles and touch on corollary topics, too.

Add influencers.

Outside experts can make sure your piece covers all the bases, add credibility, and help with promotion.

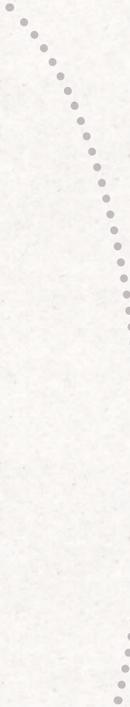
Carve that turkey.

Drive your audience to your gated asset with blog posts, infographics, webinars, etc.

Make it a brand.

If the theming of your Big Rock resonates with your audience, keep using it in future assets. The Sophisticated Marketer is now 100 percent associated with LinkedIn Marketing Solutions; and it has a reputation for quality content.





The Sophisticated Marketer's Guide to LinkedIn was always meant to be more than an instruction manual. We wanted to help people use our platform, of course. But we also wanted to elevate marketing in general. We wanted to embrace and endorse a new kind of inbound marketing, driven by valuable content that pulls people toward your brand. The guide was our way of practicing what we preach. Its success proves we were right about what modern marketing can be.

Thanks to a dedicated in-house team, advice from the experts, and all of you who read it, The Sophisticated Marketer's Guide to LinkedIn launched a brand that became a movement. Not only did it get results for LinkedIn Marketing Solutions, it has helped thousands of marketers get results on our platform. And that's a truly astonishing tale of content marketing.

Ready to create your own astonishing tales?

Download [The Sophisticated Marketer's Guide to Content Marketing](#).



For the first time in the history of media, you can reach the world's professionals—all in one place. More than 450M people worldwide gather on LinkedIn to stay connected and informed, advance their careers, and work smarter. Together they comprise the largest global community of business professionals. These are the decision-makers, influencers, and the leaders of today and tomorrow—precisely the people you want to target.

For more information, visit marketing.linkedin.com.

The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly leather or a similar material, with a fine, pebbled grain. In each of the four corners, there is an ornate, embossed decorative element. These elements feature intricate scrollwork, floral motifs, and circular designs that resemble stylized leaves or flowers. The overall aesthetic is classic and elegant.

Linked in