



# Eight content marketing trends for YOU.

It's that time of year. The content marketing predictions are in.

And so they come... a million and one blogs. Bias, bandwagons and badly veiled sales attempts.

And we've got another one for you. So why should you care?

# Fortune favours the brave.

There are content marketing trends here you can't ignore - and some overlooked gems we think are begging for brave brands to exploit.

Not all of these trends will come to pass. At least not for your business, but this is a menu of some of the biggest opportunities on the plate.

We don't believe in predicting the future. We believe in making it happen. This is not a prescriptive list or vague prediction. It's a call to action.

**So cast your eye over the following - not like the fortune teller gazing into a crystal ball, but as a results-hungry marketer raring for action and determined to deliver against an ambitious set of objectives.**

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# Trend/01

## Blockbusters.

Wow-factor content, without the sly sell.

According to the Content Marketing Institute, 93% of B2B marketers use content marketing. *Everyone's at it.* Unsurprisingly, there's a lot of rubbish out there. And audiences are getting wise.

In 2018, content has to be genuinely worth engaging with in order to cut through. But hold on. Hasn't every content expert been saying that since day one? Why is this our top trend for the year ahead?

Because there are still so many brands getting it wrong. And the gulf is about to widen dramatically between the bluffers and the blockbusters.

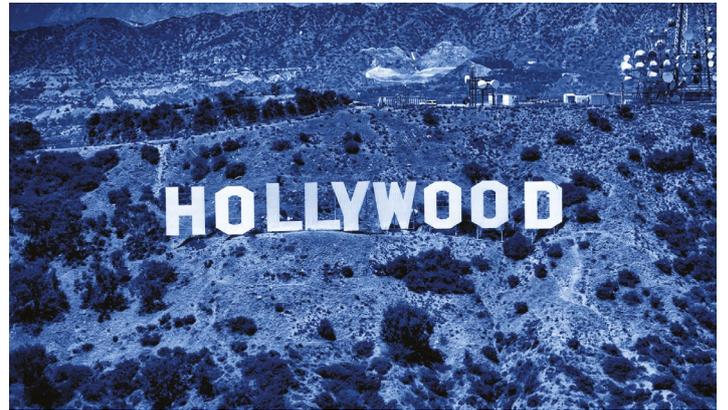
*Clicks aren't enough.* In order to attract attention and build a relationship with an audience to the point they purchase from you—and keep purchasing—you have to provide real value.

Most marketers accept this as gospel. Many preach it. But who actually lives it?

*Blockbuster content begs to be shared. Demands to be returned to and only sells by being brilliant.*

You don't have to break the bank to go big. It's ok for the Apple's and Pepsi's, but what about the brands who don't have multi-million pound global advertising budgets?

Fortunately, you don't have to rely on pyrotechnics to wow your audience. You can stun them with unexpected insights and inspiring thought leadership. And doing less.



*Bigger (and fewer) is better.* The industry is seeing a trend towards less content, higher quality. Take blogging. Over the last few years, the frequency of posts has decreased but the length has gone up.

The best writers produce in-depth posts that really answer customers' needs or solve a particular problem. This is especially relevant for B2B where the solutions tend to be more complex.

*Produced some blockbuster content? Great. Just don't sit there waiting for it to go viral.*

If you've lavished your love and budget on top-notch stuff then promote the hell out of it. Plug it into a multi-channel strategy that gets in front of the right people at the right time. *Repurpose your content to maximise your investment* – and adapt for different audiences.

Could your eBook be broken down into an e-course that drives email subscriptions? How many clips can you get out of your big video to drive engagement on social?

**Brands will create less content  
- but of a higher quality and  
relevance - with the aim of creating  
truly personalized marketing  
experiences.**

**Strategic, delightful content first,  
and then automation and  
personalization technology at the  
service of that content.**

**Brian Clark, CEO, Rainmaker Digital**

*Source: Content Marketing Institute*

## Trend/02

# Back in the room.

## Marketers say hello to Amazon's Alexa.

Of all the hype around the Internet of Things (IoT), it's voice assistants that really have marketers salivating. Devices like Amazon Echo and Google Home are changing the way we shop. In 2018, they will revolutionise the way we consume content.

*Adding 'innovation' to your shopping list"* We've barely scratched the surface of what these devices can do. Gone are the days of snickering behind poor Siri's back—nowadays the speech comprehension of voice assistants is unnervingly accurate.

*Some even predict the end of typing.* Amazon is using Alexa to become even better at selling us stuff. And Google Home is refining the search giant's algorithm to dish up ever more targeted ads.

Alexa is already halfway there to predicting everything you need, before you need it. Milk, toilet paper, birth control... But there's still a sense that voice assistants are yet to reach their full potential.

*Where else can they help aside from shopping, jokes and weather forecasts? This leaves room for brands to get creative.*

The American Heart Association uses voice assistants to give CPR advice and warning signs of heart attack or stroke. (Perhaps the odd walk to the shops would be better than a weekly Amazon home delivery...)

On the B2B front, marketing guru Neil Patel has enlisted Alexa to dispense marketing wisdom in 10 minute chunks. He's already everywhere (including here) so it makes sense.



### How can brands get the most out of voice assistants?

**1. Adapt for search.** Voice search is already rising fast. Last year, 20 percent of Google searches were conducted through voice search. By 2020, that number will hit 50 percent.

Voice assistants only read out the top few results.. This raises the bar for organic search and (surprise, surprise) puts the emphasis on paid content.

**2. Develop your brand voice.** Tone of voice becomes sound of voice. Who will be the voice of your brand? Can you find a subject matter expert who combines authenticity with a decent radio voice? Congratulations, you've hit marketing gold.

**3. Content that answers questions.** Be helpful and keep it simple - and conversational. The latter is critical so make sure you test your content out loud.

**4. Build towards a call to action.** Don't be salesy - but bear in mind the next step. Take your listeners on a journey and encourage them to follow your social media or sign up for offers.

## Trend/03

# Bound for glory.

### Printed books solve screen-fatigue.

Can you remember life before the internet? Do you ever have a craving to get back to how things used to be? No incessant updates. No pop ups. Talking to each other instead of staring at our phones. *Real human connection.*

We spend the working day in front of PCs, laptops, tablets, phones—then come home and throw TVs into the mix. Fear not. *We're already pushing back.*

Screen fatigue saw eBook sales plunge 17% in 2016. Meanwhile, printed book sales reached a five year high. There's something for marketers to digest...

Call me clever-ish. It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single brand in possession of a good budget must be in want of a premium piece of DM.

*Did your brand "write the book" on your service or particular area of expertise? No? You mean: not yet. If you've got something to say - put it in print.*

Grab attention. How do you achieve cut-through in a sea of blogs, emails and online ads? Go offline. A printed book can't be ignored in the same way a blog or eBook can.

Millennials and above will relish the nostalgia. And for members of Generation Z your book could be a genuine novelty...

*Easy to read (and remember).* Studies show that people comprehend and remember printed content better than digital content - for several reasons, but mostly because it feels real.

*Higher perceived value.* "Author" has a more impressive ring to it than "Blogger", doesn't it? You can't hold a blog. You can feel the weight of a book in your hands. Notice the texture of the paper between your fingers. Admire the tasteful font choice.

A book is a statement. Even before your audience reads it, it's done half the job for you. Automatically it says: this is not throwaway content. We invested in this. We researched it and designed it. We paid the postage. We have something to say and you'll thank us for it.

**The short attention span is over.  
Very high-quality, long-form content is  
the way forward.**

**Not just 2000 word blogs, but 5000 and  
10,000 word e-books. Short, but complete  
“how-to” guides offering deep insights.  
Well crafted thought pieces.**

**It's all about quality. Print them up.  
Write a series. Share them out.  
Collect the set.**

**Dan Hatch, Managing Editor,  
Lush Digital Media**  
*Source: Content Marketing Institute*

## Trend/04

# This time, it's personal.

### Hyper-relevance takes hold.

Attention is the most valuable commodity in the engagement economy. And brands are fighting for an ever decreasing share of it.

*73% of B2B customers say that brands must have a "deep understanding" of their needs in order to successfully engage them.*

66% of customers expect their interactions with brands to be personalised. *Source: The State of Engagement. Marketo. 2017*

What's more likely to stand out and grab your audience's attention? Mass mailers and generic content or personalised, highly targeted and contextual comms?

Take email, for instance. According to Campaign Monitor, emails with personalised subject lines are 26% more likely to be opened. Email personalisation can boost conversion rates by 10% and increase click-through rates by 14%.

*In 2018, more brands will move away from volume, virality and vanity metrics – like views, comments and likes – to focus on forging connections and optimising conversions through hyper relevance.*

*The path to personalisation.* The techniques may have evolved, but the underlying principles remain the same. Listen and learn. Analyse the data and figure out what your customers really want. (Try asking them, too.)

*How do they interact with your brand on social media? How do they navigate your website? Which emails trigger the best response? What's the feedback from customer services?*

Craft customer personas and map the customer journey – identifying opportunities to engage at every stage from awareness to conversion and advocacy.

*Will it take a robot to really understand us?* What began with A/B testing and segmenting content for different audiences will end with true 1:1 engagement.

*The ultimate goal is to provide the right content to the right person at the right time. Even before they realise they need it.*

This is where machine learning and AI come in. The brands that can leverage this level of connection at scale will achieve a huge advantage.

**Impersonalized email blasts and ads are going the way of the fax machine. Becoming hyper - targeted and focusing on personalizing every interaction is becoming increasingly important.**

**Personalized landing pages should be connected to every one of your advertising campaigns. Attention is a currency, and building a personalized connection with prospects will be critical for digital marketing in 2018.**

**Twila Grissom, Acorn Digital Strategy**  
*Source: Content Marketing Institute*

# **Predict the future. Or make it happen.**

Fortune favours the brave.

## **Gain perspective in 2018**

Seek out an agency that goes above  
and beyond to break through the content 'noise'!

Call Malin Cunningham on 07572 443111  
or email [malin.cunningham@wearehattrick.com](mailto:malin.cunningham@wearehattrick.com)

**hättrick**

Seek beyond the obvious.

## Trend/05

# Going global.

## Brands build borderless audiences.

The world has shrunk. The internet has brought us all closer together – personally and professionally.

*Social media and instant messaging have changed our conception of long distance relationships and made it easier to keep in touch with family and friends across the globe.*

In the business world, video conferencing and project management tools like Trello make physical distances disappear and underpin a remote working revolution. For brands that means global marketing is no longer just the preserve of Coke, McDonalds & Co. Even small businesses have the means to grow international audiences and explore exciting new revenue opportunities.

**Can you afford to stay local?** Even if you're not expanding, foreign competitors could be encroaching on your territory. If you have a product or service that's valuable beyond your borders, it could be time to reconsider.

### The first steps to world domination:

1. **Conquer your fears before you conquer your next target market.** Acknowledge upfront that you're embarking on a significant logistical undertaking but it doesn't have to happen overnight.
2. **Incorporate international influencers on your campaigns.** Even if you're not seeking to sell abroad, chances are you can enlist prominent figures on social media to support your product.
3. **Fling open the gates.** Ungated content will help you build bigger audiences quicker and foster reciprocity.
4. **Distribute the love.** Marketing automation will become even more important when you're scheduling content for different time zones.
5. **Go native.** Use partners and employees who understand the local culture.
6. **Stay on message.** Ensure consistency while tweaking your message for diverse audience (a Big Mac tastes the same everywhere, but you can only get a McArabia in the Middle East).



## Trend/06

# Keep it real.

Authenticity is obligatory.

There's too much fake news out there. But don't take our word for it...



President Trump may have a very selective view of what constitutes "the dishonest media" (i.e. anyone who challenges him) but he taps into a genuine and growing anxiety in the Western world. *There's too much junk out there.*

Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter enable users to share questionable, unattributed content that reverberates in echo chambers. And brands have a lot to answer for. Some marketers think this will only get worse:

*Just like "fake news," we will see more "fake content" in 2018 – essentially, intriguing content that looks credible and gets social traction and eyeballs, but ultimately is false and misleading.*

Pawan Deshpande, CEO, Curata  
Source: Content Marketing Institute

Others (correctly) realise this opens up an opportunity for responsible brands to champion the truth:

*In a world of increasing scandal (think Wells Fargo) and people slapping "fake news" labels on content with increasing frequency, success will come from telling the truth. Always.*

David Meerman Scott, marketing strategist, Freshspot Marketing LLC  
Source: Content Marketing Institute

Honesty is not an option. With the imminent introduction of the EU's GDPR privacy laws, brands will have to become truly transparent in how they collect and use audience data. This could be seismic.

**(GDPR) means marketers will have to work even harder to ensure regulatory compliance, as well as to provide content experiences that consumers will consider to be suitably truthful, trustworthy, and valuable.**

Jodi Harris, Consulting Director,  
Editorial Content and Curation,  
Content Marketing Institute

*Source: Content Marketing Institute*

Consumers are already getting stingy with their emails and other data. GDPR will create a new reality in which people simply expect businesses to inform them exactly how their data will be used.

*Beyond list cleansing... what's the short-term impact on B2B marketers? Gated lead-gen content - in which users exchange contact details for downloads - will have to include an explicit opt in for future comms.*

This puts the emphasis on multichannel promotion and a supporting ecosphere of content to hook and hold the audience's attention—and make them want to exchange their email addresses.

There will be no room for simple 'transactional' relationships as the industry embraces the shift to long-term engagement built on consistently demonstrating value.

## Trend/07

# Speak up.

### Voice becomes channel of choice.

Video gets a lot of attention - but we think marketers are overlooking one of the most personally satisfying and effective channels of all. *The human voice.*

In an era when people crave real human connection, voice - if you'll excuse the pun - speaks to us like no other medium can.

Voice is more inclusive than video (and easier to listen to while you're going about your business without staring at a screen).

And the relaxed format of the podcast lends itself to both entertainment and exploration of complex subjects (perfect for B2B audiences).

### Listen up - the benefits of the spoken word.

*Cheap.* It's a lot more cost effective to record a professional sounding podcast than video.

*Fast.* If you have the right people it can be as simple as sticking them in front of a mic and pressing record.

*Easy.* It's much harder to interview a bunch of people and trawl the internet for research to pull together a piece of longform content.

*Emotive.* You don't need Stephen Fry or David Attenborough to sell your message. People connect to real people. In fact, an unpolished approach can be endearing.

*Authentic.* There's nothing more compelling than listening to true experts explain or discuss a topic.

*Repurposable.* A long session in front of the mic can yield multiple episodes and material for voiceovers.

*Rhyme time?* The spoken word has enjoyed a renaissance of late, and brands have taken poetic licence to sell everything from banking, to broadband and burgers.

Consumer research specialists Canvas8 identified the potential of rhyme for brands. The rhyme-as-reason effect means we perceive sayings to be more truthful simply because they rhyme.

*'Authentic' poetry inspires an emotional response that's comparable to hearing a moving piece of music.*

Some commentators think brands walk a risky line when they experiment with poetry. We have to agree, but while 'punk poet' John Cooper Clarke recites an international ad agency's reasons to eat McCains chips for tea, we think there's plenty of potential for brands prepared to embrace what makes real spoken word so compelling:

*Depth, authenticity and emotional response.*

**I think brands should consider doing a podcast. Audio is a great method of captivating your audience.**

**My new podcast, Bad Crypto, has received over 450,000 downloads in the first 90 days. This can happen in many industries. A podcast could potentially help you build credibility in any industry.**

**Travis Wright, Chief Marketing Technologist,  
CCP.Digital**

*Source: Content Marketing Institute*

# Trend/08

## ‘We’re Live.’

### Live outstrips recorded for video engagement.

Ok, so we know we just told you to focus on the spoken word. But video is going nowhere either. *It's huge.*

By some accounts, YouTube is the biggest search engine – bigger than Google search based on the number of users per month (according to the comScore panel via Ofcom). But we’ve got our eye on live video in particular. According to a survey by Livestream:

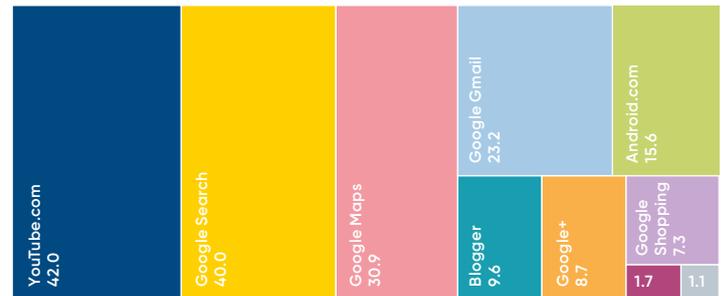
*80% of people would rather tune into a live video than read a blog post.*

82% of us are more interested in watching live video from a brand than reading social media posts. However, while around 60% of marketers are currently investing in video, only 14% have dipped into live broadcasting... So, there’s everything to play for in 2018:

- Facebook Live Stream search usage has risen 330% since rollout (Source: MediaKix)
- One in every five Facebook videos is live (Source: Daniel Danker, Facebook product director at IBC 2017 keynote address)
- Facebook Live watch time has quadrupled in the last year (Source: Daniel Danker, product director at Facebook, IBC 2017 keynote address)
- 20% of all Facebook videos are broadcast live (Source: Fidji Simo, Facebook’s head of video)

Lots of brands are reporting bigger levels of engagement for their live broadcasts. Search Engine Journal discovered their average Facebook Live engagement was 178% higher than average post engagement. Plus the average reach of posts more than doubled for live videos. (Source: Search Engine Journal).

#### Unique audience (millions)



Most-used apps and services within the Google Sites property, by unique audience March 2017

Source: commScore MMX Platform, UK, March 2017

What this suggests is that the opportunities for live video are big enough for the brands that get it right. And content wise, it’s best to focus on education and exclusivity as Business Insider confirms:

*Live video’s value comes from its unique ability to add an authentic human element to digital communications.*

*As a result, brands are leveraging three main streaming methods to connect with their viewers: tutorials, product launches, and exclusive behind-the-scenes footage.*

However, many people are nervous about going in front of the camera. Neil Patel offers some words of encouragement:

**“Even though I’ve been on live video countless times, it’s still not a natural thing for me, but you know what the benefit is to that?**

**You’ll appear way more authentic to your audience, and that’s what they’re looking for.**

**They want that real human connection behind the brand, and you can give them that much without being a superstar director or professional actor.”**

**Neil Patel, Co-founder Neil Patel Digital**

*Source: Neil Patel Digital*

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# So that's the future. Now go make history.

Are you suitably fired up for the next 12 months? What's grabbed your interest? Where are the open goals? Why haven't you started already?

Perhaps you're eager to adopt a new approach, but unsure how. Maybe you know exactly what you need and you're just looking for the right partner. Get in touch and together we'll make it happen.

**Call me on 07572 443111  
or email [malin.cunningham@wearehattrick.com](mailto:malin.cunningham@wearehattrick.com)**

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