

Customer first thinking.



The Content Experience

An Interview with Randy Frisch, President and Co-Founder, Uberflip

Randy Frisch:

Randy Frisch is the President and co-founder of the content marketing platform Uberflip and the author of "F#CK Content Marketing".



Over the past decade, as brands aspired to become media publishers, the volume of content has grown to the point where it may have reached a saturation point. Today, no matter how good that content may be, the chances of it being noticed are remote.

Seventy percent of brand content reportedly goes unnoticed. Which is probably why 86% of companies say that their content marketing efforts aren't generating much business value, according to Forrester Research. Nevertheless, marketers are undeterred – content marketing budgets are expected to keep growing. But that means the content glut will only get worse.

The solution, according to Randy Frisch, is to say "F#CK to Content Marketing", which also just happens to be the provocative title of his recently published book. Despite the attention-grabbing title, he's been an ardent proponent of content marketing ever since he and his partner Yoav Schwartz (CEO) founded their company Uberflip in 2012. Uberflip competes in the hotly

contested arena of content marketing platforms. But unlike a lot of its CMP competitors, which function as publishing workflow engines, Uberflip prefers to optimize what it likes to call the "content experience": allowing marketers to offer a more personalized and interactive way for people to engage with content.

The main thesis of Randy's book is that marketers have spent too much time worrying about content scalability and not enough about content discoverability. Even the best content can get buried in a chronological scroll. And often the content is too elementary or generic to be of much value to prospective buyers who are deep into self-education. Marketers should be thinking about how to map the content journey to the purchase journey, Randy argues, and design a dynamic experience that aligns with the varying knowledge level and decision stages of individual buyers.

SS

Stephen Shaw (SS): The state of content marketing reminds me of CRM back in the '90s, when its effectiveness was being universally challenged due to one epic failure after another. Is the title of your book shorthand for, "nobody's getting this right yet"?

RF

Randy Frisch (RF): Exactly. It's funny. My team wanted me to go with the title "Stop Content Marketing" at one point. But I said, "No, I don't want people to stop creating content. I just don't think there's a point creating it if it goes unused – if it's never seen by anyone".

SS

Is the core thesis of your book that content is only useful to someone if it's relevant and useful to them at a point in time?

RF

I think that's part of it. I think delivering the right content to the right person at the right time is a big part of being more strategic about content creation. But it goes beyond whether the content is good or bad – beyond the quality versus quantity debate. When we create content, we have to ask ourselves: What are we creating it for? To serve what purpose?

SS

Part of the issue may be that the definition of content marketing has become quite fuzzy. Does content marketing encompass all forms of marketing communication? For example, some argue that ad copy is content. Or is the definition narrower than that?

RF

That's a great question. Content marketing is content that is relevant, valuable and consistent to attract an audience. We need content at the top of the sales funnel which is different than the middle and bottom of the funnel to drive profitable customer action. What we need to be aware of though is the sequencing of the content. Just think how content typically gets organized on a web site: by format or chronologically by date. When was the last time you went to a website and said, "I'm going to figure out what these guys do by looking at their e-books"? Instead, what if we organized content by the different challenges that people have? It's all about rethinking how we organize content. It's about thinking about how we tee up that next asset in a more systematic way. IDG states that a buyer typically consumes seven pieces of content before they're ready to buy. But how do you get people to consume all seven assets in one session or two? My book is not about how to create the right content. It's about how to serve up the right content when you have it.

SS

In B2B, sales people today are being shut out of the conversation with buyers early in the decision cycle because they're not providing sufficient value. Is the onus now on marketing to shoulder the burden of that dialogue with potential buyers?

RF

Yeah, there's a Gartner stat on that. Across the entire buyer journey 82% of a buyer's time is now spent doing research versus speaking to sales.

SS

Let's talk about your own personal journey. What was your inspiration to start Uberflip?

RF

What Yoav and I recognized was a growing need for marketers to leverage content in a more meaningful way. We looked at the content marketing platforms at the time and said, "They're only solving for creation." At the time I had joined Yoav at his company Mygazines where we were working primarily with media publishers and marketers, helping them create interactive PDFs. Some customers were using our "Flipbook" technology for their e-books. They told us it'd be really nice if we had a web page where we could organize all our e-books. They also talked about all these other content formats like their blogs, the latest YouTube videos and so on. We realized that it wasn't so much about a page for e-books: it was about a way to expose their huge repository of content.

SS

How would you describe the state of the content marketing software industry today?

RF

First off, I think it's all very confusing to marketers. The definition of content marketing software is still very much around creation and workflow. You've got Kapost, NewsCred, Contently - they're creation tools. You have us, Path Factory, other companies like that - they're focused on experience. And then you've got other solutions like Outbrain and Tabula who help with distribution of content. Inevitably, though, there will be convergence.

SS

If you're talking to a company starting from scratch with content marketing, what would your advice be?

RF

Usually you would start with a content creator to lead that team. But that's not always the best answer. You end up with a brand journalism team. If you're trying to map content to a buyer journey, I would argue that you need a demand generation marketer. We've also seen a lot of people start to use the term content experience manager. That individual should be someone who's created content but more importantly understands the buyer path and where content is going to be used. It should be someone who understands the complexity of integrating the different touch points.

SS

Which companies today would you point to as reference examples for success in content marketing?

RF

There's a SaaS company called Snowflake [data warehousing software] that I like to reference. They practice account-based marketing – focusing their content efforts on a select group of target accounts. They create content of interest to all of their accounts but then they handpick specific content assets that might be more relevant to a particular account. It's like the Spotify experience. Spotify is not composing new music for me. I simply get the best songs in their library that match up to my individual preferences and tastes.

SS

Do you make distinctions in the different types of content marketing? For example, brand story-telling versus conversion content where the goal is to move someone through the sales funnel?

RF

We need both. The corporate marketing team are the brand storytellers: "This is what our brand stands for, this is our rally cry". But then the demand generation team is responsible for the buyer journey.

SS

How do you make the business case for content marketing?

RF

Just tracking "likes" or social shares is no longer enough. I think what we really need to do is understand if it's actually driving the outcomes we're looking for. The tricky part is, who's responsible for that? Is it the responsibility of the content creator? The demand generation marketer? I would argue it's actually the marketing team as a whole.

SS

Are we about to enter a "the trough of disillusionment" where companies give up or cut back on content marketing because they can't justify the expense?

RF

When I use Spotify or Netflix, they always know what I want – there's no such thing as having too much content. The question is, how do we serve up what's next? Because that's what leaves us stranded. How do we emulate LinkedIn and Instagram and Facebook by keeping people engaged? Where people want to stick around because everything you offer them is relevant and worth their time to explore.

SS

In an ad-free world, if that ever comes to pass, will content marketing become the only option for brands?

RF

We just need to make sure that at some point we've got to convince people to buy our products. And we've got to lead them there without them feeling like they're being led. That's the real benefit of content marketing.



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