Stories
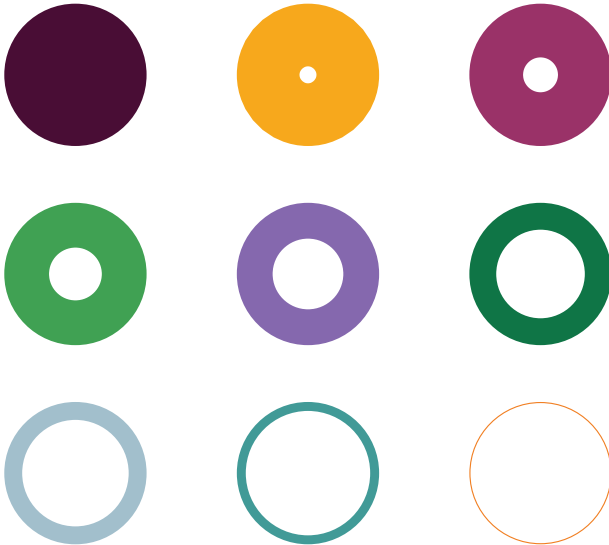# that scale

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How to develop your branded
content organisation

**Brilliant
Noise**

Contents

Introduction

Thank you for downloading or picking up a copy of *Stories that scale.*

Content strategy and earned media have huge potential to help brands better serve their customers, but many struggle to change old habits and ways of working. This means that content is underinvested in too often. It means that brands are evolving more slowly than they could, and losing opportunities to keep and gain customers as a result.

This book shares many of the things that we in the Brilliant Noise team have learned in recent years about three things ›

1. How marketing is changing, with content at the centre of those changes.

2. How to make the case for developing your organisation's ability to tell stories at scale.

3. Planning and preparing scalable content and earned media programmes.

The challenge and the opportunity for content at scale

Content on the front-line of digital transformation

The frustration of battling to get digital marketing, especially earned media, to be a priority in an organisation is intense. Teams doing this must take heart from connecting their challenge with the broader revolution that is happening in business.

Digital is disrupting every industry. A Forrester study found that 75% of organisations had a digital strategy - often called digital transformation - but only 15% of executives felt they had the right skills to execute on it. What this tells us is that most companies acknowledge the huge challenges of digital disruption, but fewer know exactly what it is that they should be doing.

Marketers have long been among the first to feel the impact of digital in the organisation, because customers and the media have been the first to be changed by the web. They are still often at the edge when it comes to seeing the need for change.

Major brands that have recognised this at a strategic level have been working hard for years to change. Burberry set its vision to become "the world's

first digital luxury brand" in 2008 and Coca-Cola, one of the world's biggest advertisers, announced in 2011 that it would put 20% of its budgets into inbound media (its term for earned media - i.e. social, content and search).

Those that have not changed are bemused or in denial about the declining effectiveness of their media habits. Brand managers sticking to old marketing habits explains why advertising is over-invested in versus other ways of communicating with customers.

New players in any market don't trouble themselves with old forms of marketing. Born digital, these companies ignore or de-prioritise advertising and go straight for the things that matter most to customers, that reach them fastest and most effectively. Online engagement, great service, point of sale and most importantly of all - great products.

Why content?

Content is everything. It's what you have to inspire the consumer, to answer their questions, solve problems, surprise, inform and delight them. Content needs to be at the core of marketing organisations work - content connects and flows through every discipline, between the customer, the product and the brand.

Paid media - advertising - still has a role to play, just not the central, defining role in marketing that is allocated 90% of resources.

" There used to be ads and then content. Now there is just good content and bad."

CMO of Diageo.

The marketing shift

Five ways content and marketing are changing

Campaigns	Programmes
Interruption	Engagement
Ads	Content
Reach	Utility
Acquisition	Retention

From campaigns to programmes

The campaign was the organising principle of marketing planning in the broadcast age. When content was temporary and reach was everything, we focused our resources on punching through to the attention of our audiences in a focused burst. Our entire industry - work processes, billing, teams - has been revolving on that single principle. Which makes it so difficult to move away from, especially for big network agencies.

Now content can live online for a long time, waiting for millions of audiences of one, rather than one audience of millions. We need to organise programmes that are always-on, always there when the customer needs it.

From interruption to engagement

Want we wanted in the broadcast age was cut-through, to get in front of the customer as they watched their programme, turned the page or turned a street corner and were stopped in their tracks by our big beautiful advertisement.

Now that the customer is in charge, they avoid interruptions at almost any cost. They pay for ad-free content, download banner-ad blockers, click the browser option to stop pop-ups. And when some interruption gets through - they resent it, they think less of the brand and less of all brands. A study by Havas Media last year of 134,000 consumers around the world found that a majority wouldn't care if 73% of brands disappeared - the number was even higher in Europe and America (93%).[1]

From ads to content

Because ads worked so well in the broadcast age, they became the centre of the marketing world. For lay people "advertising" and "marketing" are still synonyms. The ad, usually a 30-second spot, was the bright light that the rest of the marketing mix swirled around, trying to serve, to amplify, to complement.

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[1] http://www.economist.com/news/business/21595412-brands-are-finding-it-hard-adapt-age-scepticism-we-want-be-your-friend

From reach to utility

Some started talking about "being useful" as the prime directive for marketing in 2006. Now the idea has entered the marketing mainstream, blessed by the analysts of Forrester. It chimes with a sense of "ask not what the customer can do for you, but what you can do for your customer".

When everything is ignorable, telling stories and creating content that is useful and has value for the customer has become far more important than a notional number of impressions or people who happened to be on a website at the same time as your ad (when they were 99.8% likely to ignore it anyway).

From acquisition to retention

Where marketing has focused solely on acquisition, brand marketers are beginning to understand the power of retention. The rise of advocacy-focused metrics, and rising direct marketing

costs - for instance, when cost per acquisition rises close to the profit from that sale - means that loyalty and life-time customer value become more of a priority. According to analysts, still only 20% of CMOs prioritise retention. Expect that proportion to rise.

The customer decision journey

The place to start in planning how content should work for your brand is with the customer. In its 2010 article published in the Harvard Business Review, 'Digital Branding: You're Spending in All the Wrong Places' - McKinsey & Co rejected the sales funnel as unsuited for the digital age and offered us instead its version of the customer decision journey, dubbed "the loyalty loop".

In place of the funnel's sole focus on getting to the sale, the customer decision journey is about getting the customer to become an advocate, by winning their trust and delight at each stage of their journey to purchase and on into becoming an advocate.

Consider

Evaluate

Advocate

Bond

Enjoy

Buy
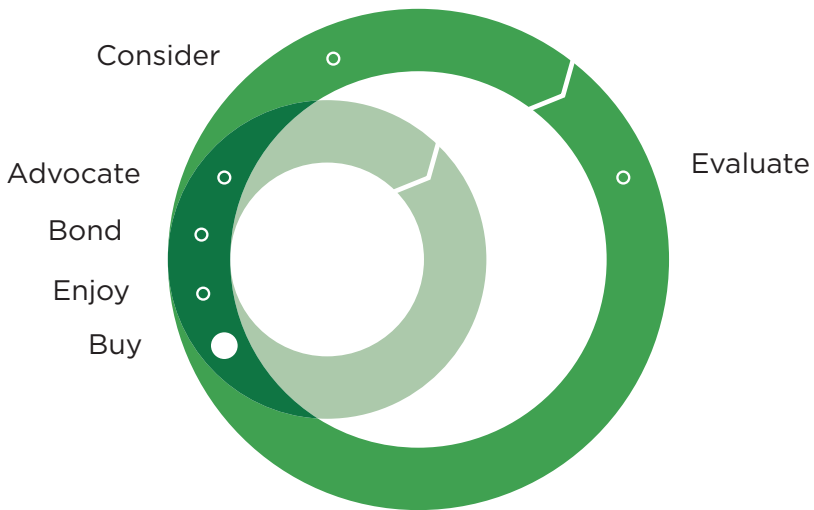
Buy, beg or borrow a copy of the original article if you've not read it, but in summary the stages of the customer decision journey are:

- **Consider:** Customer is aware of their need and of some brands that might meet it.

- **Evaluate:** They are comparing options.

- **Buy:** They make a decision and go through the purchase process.

- **Enjoy:** Using the product.

- **Bond:** Developing trust as the product is reliable and problems are well dealt with.

- **Advocate:** Active recommending of the product to others.

Content has a role throughout the customer journey. Ask yourself, what does your customer need in terms of content at each stage of the journey?

The other powerful question a marketer can ask is: where in the journey are we spending most of our resources? The answer for incumbent brands in markets is usually that most is being spent at the awareness / consideration phase. Sometimes no money at all is spent at or past the point of purchase - the marketer's job is done. A brand is a promise kept, the saying goes, but somehow marketing has drifted into just making promises.

How to transform your brand's content organisation

There are six steps to consider to get change underway with your content. We will walk through each one's considerations and share some tools and examples, but in summary they are:

1. **Know where you are.** Understand what stage of the digital journey your company is at, and what your content organisation looks like.

2. **Make the case for change.** How to get backing from leadership, your colleagues and partners.

3. **Pilot and scale.** Rapidly evolving the content organisation your company needs.

4. **Discovery.** Understanding your customer's needs and how to connect your business with them.

5. **Designing your content organisation.** Creating a team with everything it needs to succeed and scale.

6. **Telling brand stories at scale.** Stories for and by customers, content for now and the long-term. Connecting content to offers and sales.

First, know where you are

Understanding your company's
level of digital sophistication.

Types of Content Organisation

- **Trickle-down:** Strong global creative direction, purpose and principles, light touch governance with independent markets executing.

- **Federated:** Strong central and regional hubs creating content and localising for each market. Dedicated editors/community managers are part of a regional team.

Trickle-down

Europe

Africa

Global

Asia

America
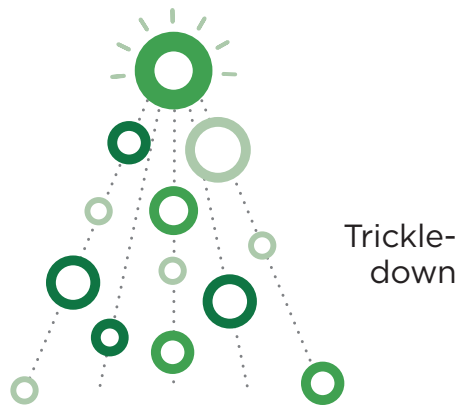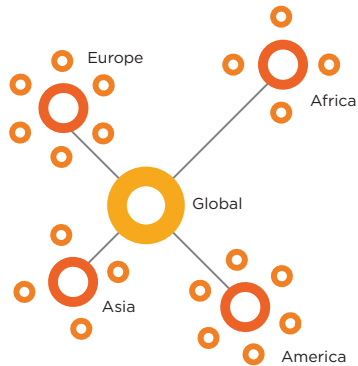
Federated

- **Central:** Strong global team and light local resource to implement / localise content

- **Networked:** Central resource enables sharing and governance between strong local / regional teams - best practice and content travels in all directions.

You may recognise these roles and structures as existing in your organisation at the moment, or as being ways to organise in the future. The approach that is right for your organisation isn't something you need to be clear on immediately - the recommendation may be something to decide after you have run a pilot.
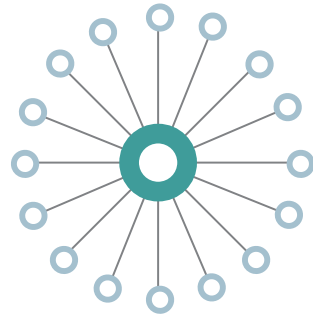
Central

Centre
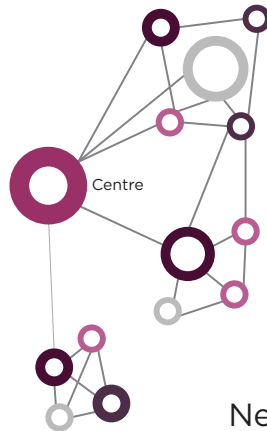
Networked

Making the business case for content

Depending on the leaders and colleagues you need to win over there are three types of cases you need to make. Sometimes you will need to make all three.

In making a clear case for change you need to remember two things about what you know and the way you think that will get in the way. Steven Pinker describes the "curse of knowledge" that gets in the way of a lot of business communications.[2] We use jargon without knowing it, not because we want to sound clever, but because we literally forget that other people don't know what we know. As a digital marketer, most people won't understand two things that you have a deep grasp of: the extent to which digital is disrupting business and how marketing's organising principle has shifted from advertising to content.

The business case

This is senior leadership, perhaps as high as the board. It needs to be a strategic case, but led with the most clear and tangible numbers possible. When you talk about things that matter to you as a content or marketing professional, remember the sales axiom - always append your point with "which means that" (WMT) to translate it into a business outcome or benefit that will make sense to others in your business - especially leadership teams.

- **Revenue.** How will better content strategy lead to more sales and higher customer lifetime value? Find out what the numbers that matter to your leaders are - what are the targets or key performance indicators (KPIs) that they look at first, that they measure their own performance by. Your own view of why to invest in content may be guided by gaining customer advocacy - but what does that mean in terms of sales. Find colleagues or analyst partners who can help build a model to project sales, if you haven't got one already.

- **Strategic priorities.** Less important, but a supporting argument, can be connecting your case for investment in content and earned media to strategy or initiatives being championed by your leaders. If there is a customer-centric or digital programme being worked on, your content project can be explained in that context.

- **Competitive threats.** Business efficiency can also be an important number, but it won't grab the attention of leaders like sales and revenue. Connect your approach with their priorities, and revenue and sales are likely to be high up the list. This is sometimes hard to do, but if you can't connect your vision for content strategy with revenue, you don't have a solid business case.

[2] The Sense of Style, by Steven Pinker http://stevenpinker.com/publications/sense-style-thinking-persons-guide-writing-21st-century

- **Third party validation.** As well as data from your business, use third party analyst and business press commentators to emphasise your case - but make sure you're talking about things that connect to revenue, not concepts like engagement or share of voice that will feel softer to a business leader.

Hit them with your big numbers first then step back to show the strategic trends and your workings-out separately. It's the big revenue numbers that will be what they remember and that will frame their conversations with other people who have a stake in the decision or an influence on their thinking.

Capex vs. campaign

Organisations, like many marketers, think about budgets in terms of campaigns. So when we use metaphors like "infrastructure" and "supply chain" in connection with content, there is more than a useful parallel in organisational terms. When you develop infrastructure or build supply chains you invest for the long term, not for a twelve-week campaign cycle. The change that is needed in content and digital marketing organisations isn't something that can be squeezed into a campaign budget.

When you are putting together a detailed business case, it is important to point this out and to separate out the infrastructure investment (tech, creating new ways of working, etc.) and the campaign investment - content that will go through the system to test it out or as part of usual activity.

The operational case

Forrester talks about the need for operational excellence (OEX) to support customer experience (CX). This is very relevant to scaling content in an organisation - great ideas and content will not reach customers at the right times and in the right media unless things are running smoothly operationally.

Because most organisations developed their structures in the age of broadcast media and communications, there is no global or organisation-wide system for this to happen.

When creating the operations case for investing in content at scale the main argument and data points will be efficiency. Content happening in pockets, or being pushed out from the centre to different products, audiences and territories will be inefficient in several ways that you can measure and improve.

- **Cost of creating and distributing content.** The cost of creating a piece of content and distributing it is likely hidden. Test your systems by tracking content from planning to its distribution to customers. How long does it take and how much time in agency fees, licences and people's time is involved? Cost per unit of content can be surprising and be a compelling piece of data in arguing why things need to change. It also provides a comparison for you to measure.

- **Use and re-use of content.** If content is being created in central or regional centres and then shared with local teams to use, then measure how much is actually used. Large amounts of content not being used shows that there are efficiency gains to be made.

- **Content lifetime value.** How long are major pieces of content useful for once they are created? While "flow" content like tweets and Facebook posts will only last a short while (see Robin Sloan's stock & flow model for content), higher value content on your website and elsewhere will have value to customers for far longer. Is this measured? Are there content assets that are hidden and therefore under-used?

The creative case

So we've made the case for persuading the organisation's head about the need to invest in the content infrastructure to be able to tell its stories at scale, but what about its heart? The creative minds in-house and in agency partners need to be onboard to be able to tell compelling, true stories about the brand.

Here are some insights that help make it clear that the industrial metaphors and business-speak needed for a business case don't mean that creative will be held back.
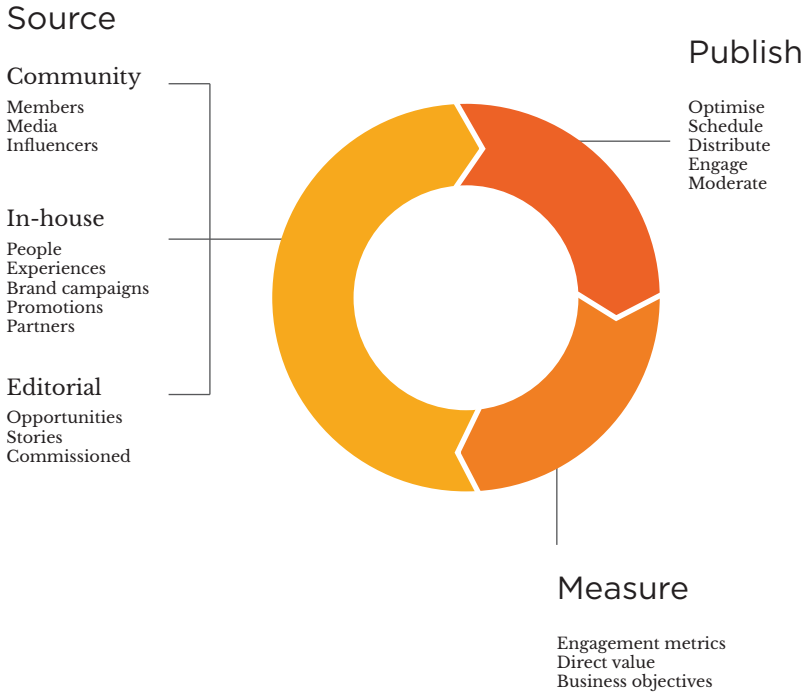
- **Better briefs.** No creative is scared of constraints - they love them. The looser the brief, the harder it is to be successful. The clarity that developing a customer-focused, content infrastructure of systems, teams and ways of working makes for better briefs, then better ideas and ultimately content that resonates with customers. Because it has been designed for the customer and their needs.

- **Customers > Cannes.** When the customer is too distant, or too general and ill-defined, other considerations creep in - other ways of getting validation for your work. Like awards. Awards are great boosts for confidence, but creating content for awards panels means you're aiming at the wrong audience. The test of great creative is whether customers love it, use it and share it.

- **Closer to customers.** All of these points are about getting creative and editorial teams closer to the customers. Better planning processes also bring better insights about customers and more frequent feedback. Ideas can be improved upon with audience responses coming through direct to creators.

Discovery

The content supply chain

Source

Community

Members
Media
Influencers

In-house

People
Experiences
Brand campaigns
Promotions
Partners

Editorial

Opportunities
Stories
Commissioned

Publish

Optimise
Schedule
Distribute
Engage
Moderate

Measure

Engagement metrics
Direct value
Business objectives

We are used to hearing the phrase "supply chain" connected with manufacturing and logistics more than the world of media, marketing and content. It's a useful way of thinking about how content works in organisations, as it makes us think about the processes in new ways. Marketers will think about story, customer, creative and campaigns more easily than the complex systems for creation and delivery, especially on the web.

This model describes at three elements of the content supply chain:

1. **Source.** All of the different teams and activities that produce content - from your actual editorial team or agency, to customers and media.

2. **Publish.** How does content get to the customer? We tend to think in terms of push activities, like advertising and email, but search engines, social media and your websites are also ways to distribute. How are all of these optimised and used to get content to the customer at the right time?

3. **Measure.** How are you evaluating and understanding how customers are using your content? Does it connect to business outcomes and loop back into the planning process for creation elements?

"A supply chain is a system of organisations, people, activities, information, and resources involved in moving a product or service from supplier to customer."

Wikipedia definition.

Map out your content supply chain to understand:

- **Opportunities for making more of content.** Starting with the simple model above, naming all of the opportunities for creation.

- **The true cost of content creation.** Test how much it costs to create content today. The costs of time for multiple sign-offs, meetings and reviews can mount up.

- **Time to market.** How long does content take to reach the customer from being planned in the first place, then briefed? The answer can be shockingly long and reveal inefficiencies that need to be removed.

- **Content as an asset.** Measure the value of different types of content. For content which lasts a long time, how does it grow or decline in value? Is content under-used, or not measured at all beyond a campaign?

Designing your content organisation

The content organisation planning canvas

We developed a model based around six vital elements of a strong content marketing organisation - nicknamed "the 6Ps" - which we've used with Brilliant Noise clients to audit and plan content programmes and the teams that run them.

It's proved so useful that we now use it in the style of a planning canvas, inspired by the lean product and business model canvas approach. This is ideal for teams or pairs of people planning together to get to the challenges around their content strategy faster. There's a version of the canvas in the appendix, but you can also download an A3 canvas from *brilliantnoise.com/contentcanvas.*

The six Ps of the model are:

- **Purpose.** The overarching reason why your content exists. Purpose applies to every piece of content, not just specific campaigns. What is it for? Who is it for? What is the vision for the project? What benefits will it create?

- **Principles.** The fundamental propositions that form the foundations of your content and the ways of working to achieve them. Variations of "customer first" and "be useful" are often to be found here.

- **Platforms.** The places online (and off) that you will be publishing on or distributing content through. Also important - and too often overlooked - are the collaboration tools that will be used between partners, teams and agencies to keep the workflow as efficient as possible.

- **Processes.** The systems and workflows required to create, publish and evaluate content. These need to be carefully designed to reduce friction, while managing risk. Each sign-off and review adds to the costs of the content. Planning cycles need to be developed that

allow you to look far ahead but give creative and editorial teams the flexibility they need to respond to opportunities in the short term.

- **People.** The people involved, the amount of time, the skills and the way they are organised. Design the roles you will need, including project management, data and community managers. Often there will need to be team members connecting you to legal and other departments in the company to speed up processes.

- **Performance.** Metrics, outcomes, and ways of evaluating the project. How real-time insights can be gained.

When we audit content teams' ways of working and effectiveness there is usually one or more of these elements missing. Working carefully through each to build a pilot project gives us a sturdy base to start working from. Interestingly, it is usually Purpose, Principles and Performance that are weakest in cases where there are problems. It makes sense: people aren't sure why they are doing what they are doing beyond ticking a box marked content in the marketing mix, they aren't clear and agreed on how they should be doing it, and their measurement isn't telling them what value they are creating.
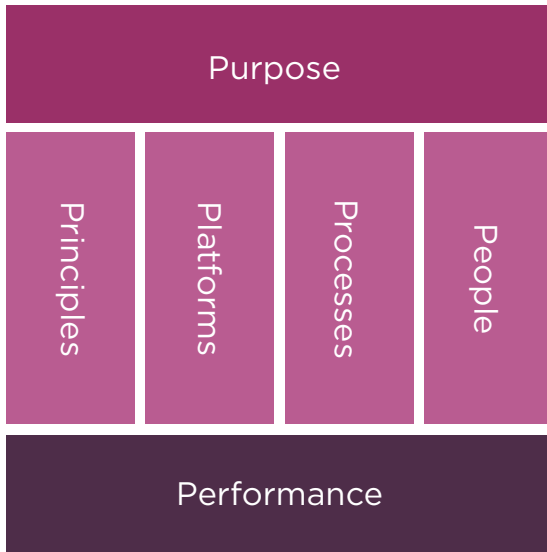
Pilot and scale

There aren't many brands that have built digital marketing organisations that can tell stories at scale. A pilot and scale approach can be the best way to understand what approach, systems and ways of working are going to be best for yours.

At Brilliant Noise we adopted the "pilot and scale" principle after studying major brands that have gone furthest, fastest in digital, like Burberry, Coca-Cola, Starbucks, LEGO and Zappos. Among the things we saw they had in common was that though they had visionary leaders, they didn't have a grand plan for their digital transformation in content. They started trying things out and when they found approaches that worked, they scaled them, repeating them around the world.

For instance, Coca-Cola took its first steps in social media with a blog about its heritage, side-stepping the potential for online critics to attack its content. It worked so well that it quickly began to allow other social media and content initiatives. Its UK corporate website was the first to try a storytelling based approach to content, with a front-page looking more like a magazine than a stuffy business - which was then followed by its incredible Journey website.[3]

Take the following steps to get your pilot project underway:

- **Find a defined topic.** Don't try to change everything - start with a product, or territory or customer group that will be fast to work with.

- **Find a leader.** You'll need support from someone senior in the organisation to be a sponsor and give you a mandate to try new things.

- **Cross-functional team.** Getting even part-time support from across different teams will increase the chances of success, finding unexpected value and reduce bureaucratic hurdles.

- **Focus on one hero metric (but don't forget to measure everything you can).** Just winning on one metric can show that it is worth extending the pilot or taking it to the next stage. Showing an efficiency gain or a rise in engagement can show the idea has promise.

- **Tell the story.** You need to be an internal marketer for your own pilot - tell the story every way you can, to anyone who is interested. Let the word spread and you will build momentum.

[3] http://www.coca-colacompany.com

The fantastically successful LEGO social media content team have taken pilot and scale to a logical extreme with $100 campaigns. It allows a budget of $100 for campaigns to make the team members think harder about the idea than the execution. Letting a thousand $100 campaigns bloom is a much smarter way of finding great ideas than one $100,000 idea that you're not sure will work.

Every aspect of developing a content organisation benefits from a pilot and scale approach. Zappos, one of the most highly regarded customer-focused companies around, has managed to get to an incredibly granular level of detail when it comes to measurement. According to Businessweek ›

And that was in 2012 - Zappos will only have got better at measurement since then. This enviable adeptness with social content data doesn't make them all about the numbers though, Zappo loves its people to try new ideas, and is happy for them to "fail fast" so they can learn and get to the next - possibly winning idea faster.

Will Young (no relation to the British pop star) is now head of Zappo's innovation efforts and proudly says that it tries ideas the team thinks will appeal to customers, but "that we don't know how to scale". It wants to find content ideas that work and then work out the business case for them. For all their scale and success, Zappo's keeps those pilots coming.

Zappos users were 13 times more likely to share a purchase on Pinterest than on Twitter and 8 times more likely to share on Facebook than Twitter, [Will] Young said. Even so, posts on Twitter brought in the most revenue -- an average of $33.66 an order -- while Facebook posts garnered $2.08 per order and sales from Pinterest were 75 cents on average, he said.[4]

[4] Amazon's Zappos Combines Pinterest and E-Commerce in New Site
http://goo.gl/kJYXMJ

Conclusion

Content is a complex topic and growing ever more complex. Part of the reason is that while the shift in marketing is clear, the disruption is undeniable, there is uncertainty about the future - about what content at scale will look like. We cannot afford to wait for the proven models and case studies to be presented to us - we need to write them ourselves.

There are two quotes that inspire us and we hope will inspire you as you develop your scalable content systems at your company >

" The best way to predict the future is to invent it."

Alan Kay, computer scientist.

" The best way to do it, is to do it."

Emilia Earhart, aviator

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Appendix

Content Planning Canvas

Purpose

The overarching reason why your content exists.
Purpose applies to every piece of content, not just
specific campaigns. What is it for? Who is it for?
What is the vision for the project?
What benefits will be created for which people?

Principles

The fundamental propositions
that form the foundations of your
content. Ways of working to
achieve them.

Platforms

The place for the tools that you
create, publish and amplify your
content with. e.g. collaboration
spaces, work flow and
publishing tools.

Processes

The systems and workflows
required to create, publish and
evaluate content.

People

The people involved, the
amount of time, the skills and
the way they are organised in
relation to it.

Performance

Metrics, outcomes and ways of evaluating the
project. How real-time insights can be gained.

Download a larger version of this at: brilliantnoise.com/contentcanvas

Content strategy and earned media have huge potential to help brands better serve their customers, but many struggle to change old habits and ways of working. This book shares many of the things that we in the Brilliant Noise team have learned in recent years about developing and scaling a branded content organisation.

Brilliant Noise is a strategic digital agency that works with organisations to see and make their future. We pilot and scale new approaches that create long-term value.

www.brilliantnoise.com