Storytelling: The Current State of Branded Content
Spend on Branded Content is Increasing

Change in Their Company’s Content Marketing Budget According to US Marketers

Despite Continued Investment, the Industry Still Struggles on How to Measure Impact

Biggest Challenges of Native Advertising According to US Agency and Brand Professionals

- Difficult to track/lack of reporting: 65%
- Too many moving parts/too customized: 64%
- Getting enough scale: 62%
- Difficult to measure ROI: 55%
- Too costly: 54%
- No actionable insights: 44%

Research Questions

1. How effective is long-form branded content?

2. What is the current consumer POV on branded content?

3. What are best practices advertisers should follow?
## 40 Distinct Test Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AD TYPE</th>
<th>BRANDED CONTENT FORMAT</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>DEVICE</th>
<th>INDUSTRY VERTICAL</th>
<th>STORY-TELLING TYPE</th>
<th>ARTICLE LENGTH</th>
<th>LEVEL OF BRANDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BANNER AD ONLY</td>
<td>ARTICLE</td>
<td>FORBES.COM</td>
<td>PC</td>
<td>CONSUMER ELECTRONICS</td>
<td>BREADTH</td>
<td>SHORT</td>
<td>LIGHT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRANDED CONTENT (WITHOUT DISPLAY)</td>
<td>VIDEO</td>
<td>BRAND WEBSITE</td>
<td>SMARTPHONE</td>
<td>AUTO</td>
<td>DEPTH</td>
<td>LONG</td>
<td>HEAVY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRANDED CONTENT (WITH DISPLAY)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AVIATION
Experimental Design

Recruited participants across PC and smartphone from relevant sections of Forbes.com and representative online panel (n=4,168)

Initial survey with demographic and media consumption questions

Randomized participants into test cells. Participants were driven to content that matches their real life consumption habits

Post exposure survey to measure traditional brand metrics (ad recall, perceptions, etc.), and qualitative feedback
Broad Range of Brands

SONY  MASERATI  BOEING
How One Small Change To Apple iPhone 6 Revolutionizes Photography

What drives success in brands, or in entire companies, for that matter? Big question, yes. But one of the most elemental answers is this: coming up with ideas that are different in kind, not different by degree. While most companies are forever locked into the mindset of pursuing incremental improvements—products that are slightly faster, slightly bigger, have slightly more pixels or slightly fewer calories—the most successful look for things that will essentially change the game in a way that solves a meaningful consumer problem. And, I think that’s exactly what Apple has done with the camera feature on the iPhone 6s, more specifically something it has branded Live Photos.

Anyone who takes pictures with their phones (which would be at least half the people on this planet), does so to preserve special moments. That’s what photography is all about, right? The dilemma, when it comes to capturing a special moment with your phone, however, is whether to take a still photo, or to take a video. A still photo captures an instant moment, albeit not always
Going Dark: 5 Tips For Nighttime Photography

By Jessica Gordon for Sony

Coming away with a satisfying image after a day of shooting is almost guaranteed with today's digital cameras automatically adjusting for sun exposure and movement.

Nighttime photography, however, presents a different set of challenges.

Image noise, unwanted blur and not being able to capture your subject clearly can be incredibly frustrating. But for photographers who know how to work after sunset, the experience can be gratifying.

"It's a fun time to work, but you have to know how to shoot in [low] light or you're not going to get very far as a professional," said Michael Rubenstein, a commercial photographer based in New York City who works for big brands and media organizations.

Aperture, ISO settings and lens choice can all work together to turn out artistic nighttime photos, but that's only if you understand how to use them.

"It's all about cameras with low noise, high ISO, a fast lens and available light," Rubenstein said. "That's my bread and butter."

Before you step out into the night, here are some tips that Rubenstein said will make you a better photographer after dark:

1. Mind Your Settings

It may seem technical, but understanding a few basic camera settings can give you a lot more control over your images.
Going Dark: 5 Tips For Nighttime Photography

By Jessica Gordon for Sony

Coming away with a satisfying image after a day of shooting is almost guaranteed with today’s digital cameras automatically adjusting for sun exposure and movement.

Nighttime photography, however, presents a different set of challenges. Image noise, unwanted blur and not being able to capture your subject clearly can be incredibly frustrating. But for photographers who know how to work after sunset, the experience can be gratifying.

“It’s a fun time to work, but you have to know how to shoot in [low] light or you’re not going to get very far as a professional,” said Michael Rubenstein, a commercial photographer based in New York City who works for big brands and media organizations.

Aperture, ISO settings and lens choice can all work together to turn out artistic nighttime photos, but that’s only if you understand how to use them.

“It’s all about cameras with low noise, high ISO, a fast lens and available light,” Rubenstein said. “That’s my bread and butter.”

Before you step out into the night, here are some tips that Rubenstein said will make you a better photographer after dark.

1. Mind Your Settings

It may seem technical, but understanding a few basic camera settings can give you a lot more
Branded Content on Brand Website
How Effective is Branded Content?
Branded Content Works! It Impacts Awareness & Persuasion Metrics

Impact of Branded Content

- Unaided Ad Recall: 43% increase
- Aided Ad Recall: 14% increase
- Brand Favorability: 36% increase
- Intent/Consideration: 44% increase

Statistically significant difference between Branded Content vs. control at > 90% confidence
Control n=544, Branded Content n=579: Branded Content without display
After viewing branded content, people are more likely to seek out content from brand in the future.

Impact of Branded Content

45%  59%

Likelihood to search for content from brand

Statistically significant difference between Branded Content vs. control at > 90% confidence
Control n=229, Branded Content n=253; Branded Content without display
# Branded Content Just as Effective, 3 Years Later

## Branded Content Trended Over Time

### 2013

- **26%**
  - Unaided Ad Recall

- **49%**
  - Aided Ad Recall

- **9%**
  - Intent/Consideration

### 2016

- **46%**
  - Unaided Ad Recall (↑)

- **66%**
  - Aided Ad Recall (↑)

- **14%**
  - Intent/Consideration

---

* Statistically significant difference between test vs. control at > 90% confidence.*

* Statistically significant difference of difference between 2015 and 2016 at > 90% confidence.

2013: Control n=310; Branded Content n=345; 2016: Control n=414; Branded Content n=440; Branded Content without display, Web intercept only.

---

Often see decline in new ad products after consumers grow accustom to them. But, interestingly we see no downward trend in effectiveness here.
Content is More Memorable on Brand’s Website, Likely Due to High Level of Branding

Role of Location: Total Audience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Branded Content on Brand’s Website Δ</th>
<th>Branded Content on Forbes.com Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unaided Ad Recall</td>
<td>59% *</td>
<td>39% *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aided Ad Recall</td>
<td>70% *</td>
<td>55% *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent/Consideration</td>
<td>12% *</td>
<td>10% *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statistically significant difference between test vs. control at > 90% confidence

Statistically significant difference between BC on Forbes.com & BC on brand website at > 90% confidence

Overall Results: Control n=424, BC – Forbes n=455, BC – Brand Website n=329
However, Engaged Consumers Show Greater Purchase Consideration on Forbes

Role of Location: Engaged Consumers

* Statistically significant difference between test vs. control at >90% confidence

Icon: Statistically significant difference between BC on Forbes.com & BC on brand website at >90% confidence

Engaged Consumers: Control n=91, BC – Forbes n=98, BC – Brand Website n=99, Spend 100+ seconds with content

Intent/Consideration

22%*

7%

Branded Content on Brand Website

Branded Content on Forbes.com
How Does Branded Content Perform Compared to Display?
Branded Content is 2x More Memorable Than Display Ads

Impact of Format Type on Recall Metrics

Unaided Ad Recall

- 19%*

Aided Ad Recall

- 25%*

54%*

* Statistically significant difference between test vs. control at >= 90% confidence
† Statistically significant difference between display & branded content at >= 90% confidence
Control n=315, Display Ad n=336, Branded Content n=226; Branded Content without display
In 2016, Recall of Branded Content Appears to be Growing

Effectiveness of Branded Content Compared to Display Ads Trended Over Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount Branded Content is More Memorable Than Display Ads In That Year</th>
<th>Unaided Ad Recall</th>
<th>Aided Ad Recall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1.2x as effective</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.6x as effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>3x as effective</td>
<td>2.4x as effective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2013: Control n=310, Display n=320 Branded Content n=345; 2016: Control n=221, Display n=236, Branded Content n=229. Web Intercept Only
Branded Content Less About Selling & More About Education

Content Market Scale By Format Type

On the scale above, where does the [display ad/article] you just saw belong? The [display ad/article]...

Intention for Creating Format Type

- Display Ad
- Branded Content

To sell a specific product: 37% Display Ad, 26% Branded Content
To educate: 22% Display Ad, 4% Branded Content

*Statistically significant difference between display & branded content at >= 90% confidence
Display Ad n=285, Branded Content n=288; Branded Content without display
Branded Content More Memorable When on a Larger Screen, but Device Doesn’t Impact Ability to Persuade

Impact of Device on Effectiveness of Branded Content

- **Unaided Ad Recall**
  - Smartphone: 34%
  - Desktop: 45%

- **Aided Ad Recall**
  - Smartphone: 43%
  - Desktop: 56%

- **Purchase Consideration**
  - Smartphone: 8%
  - Desktop: 6%

*Statistically significant difference between test vs. control at ≥ 90% confidence

†Statistically significant difference of difference between smartphone & PC at ≥ 90% confidence

Smartphone: Control n=75, Test n=74; PC: Control n=240, Test n=252; Branded Content without display
So, What Happens When Display is Added?

ADDITIONAL BRANDING:

Exact same branded content article except for display ad

• Low branding: Page with house display ad

• High branding: Page with brand’s display ad
Additional Branding Improves Recall

Impact of Format Type on Brand Metrics

- Aided Ad Recall
  - A: 54%
  - AB: 60%
  - 25%

- Purchase Consideration
  - Display Ad (A): 3%
  - Branded Content (Without Display) (B): 6%
  - Branded Content (With Display) (C): 11%

* Statistically significant difference between test vs. control at > 90% confidence.
† Statistically significant difference between groups at > 90% confidence.
Control n=315, Display Ad n=336, Branded Content (Without Display) n=326, Branded Content (With Display) n=327
Adding Display Doesn’t Negatively Impact Perceptions

Impact of Format Type on Perceptions of Brand

- **Appealing**: 85% (Without Display) vs. 85% (With Display)
- **Trustworthy**: 85% (Without Display) vs. 86% (With Display)
- **Educational**: 41% (Without Display) vs. 46% (With Display)

*Statistically significant difference between branded content (without display) & branded content (with display) at > 90% confidence. branded Content (Without Display) n=227, Branded Content (With Display) n=227.*
Does the Level of Branding Impact Performance?

LEVEL OF BRANDING:
Same article, but with more branding

- Low branding:
  Original level of branding

- High branding:
  2x number of brand mentions, 2 additional references to specific details about the brand’s product
The More Branding the Better for Recall
Impact of Level of Branding on Recall Metrics

Unaided Ad Recall

41%*
Low Branding

47%*
High Branding

Aided Ad Recall

46%*
Low Branding

54%*
High Branding

* Statistically significant difference between test vs. control at >= 90% confidence
† Statistically significant difference between low & high branding at >= 90% confidence
Control n=195, Low Branding n=409, High Branding n=402
Article With Stronger Branding Seen as More Educational & Honest

Impact of Level of Branding on Brand Perceptions

While more salesy, no downside in trust

- 88% Low Branding, 91% High Branding (Trustworthy)
- 56% Low Branding, 63% High Branding (Educational)
- 39% Low Branding, 44% High Branding (Honest)

*Statistically significant difference between low & high branding at > 95% confidence

Sell Product/Honest: Low n=355, High n=350; Trustworthy/Educational: Low n=254, High n=209
High Branding Especially Important When People are Reading an Article with Small Text

Impact of Level of Branding & Device on Aided Ad Recall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Device</th>
<th>Low Branding</th>
<th>High Branding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desktop</td>
<td>44%*</td>
<td>45%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smartphone</td>
<td>49%*</td>
<td>67%*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statistically significant difference between test vs. control at > 90% confidence

PC: Control n=120, Low Branding n=258, High Branding n=245. Smartphone: Control n=75, Low Branding n=151, High Branding n=157
Is There an Impact Based on the Type of Storytelling?

FOCUS OF CONTENT: Does the content focus on familiar aspects of the brand or introduce broader elements?

- Breadth: Content focuses on lesser known parts of the brand
- Depth: Content focuses on the distinctive parts of the brand
Introducing Diverse Parts of Brand Drives Interest in Seeking Out Content

Impact of Storytelling Type on Ad Recall and Intention Metrics

- Unaided Ad Recall: 57%*
- Aided Ad Recall: 75%*
- Likelihood to search for content from brand: 53%

*Statistically significant difference between test vs. control at >= 90% confidence

Control n=120, Breadth n=131, Depth n=132
Breadth = Informing Broadly About Brand
Depth = Educational Deep Dive into Brand

Impact of Storytelling Type on Perceptions of Brand & Intentions for Creating Content

- **Useful**
  - Branded Content - Breadth: 25%
  - Branded Content - Depth: 17%

- **Created To Inform**
  - Branded Content - Breadth: 42%
  - Branded Content - Depth: 31%

- **Created To Educate**
  - Branded Content - Breadth: 10%
  - Branded Content - Depth: 18%

*Statistically significant difference between Breadth vs. Depth at >80% confidence
Breadth n = 105, Depth n = 99
Does Content Length Matter?

**ARTICLE LENGTH**
Same content but varying article length
- Short article: On average, 535 words
- Long article: On average, 743 words
Article is Able to Persuade Regardless of Length

Impact of Article Length on Brand Metrics

- Unaided Ad Recall: 54%*
- Purchase Consideration: 12%*

Delta (Test-Control):
- Short Article: 11%*
- Long Article: 60%*

* Statistically significant difference between test vs. control at > 90% confidence
** Statistically significant difference between short & long article at > 90% confidence

Control n=412, Short Article n=411, Long Article n=416
## Article Length Performance Doesn’t Vary by Device

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Short Article</th>
<th>Long Article</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aided Ad Recall</strong></td>
<td><strong>59%</strong>&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt; <strong>Desktop</strong></td>
<td><strong>62%</strong>&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt; <strong>Smartphone</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purchase Consideration</strong></td>
<td><strong>9%</strong>&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt; <strong>Desktop</strong></td>
<td><strong>8%</strong>&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt; <strong>Smartphone</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>17%</strong>&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt; <strong>Smartphone</strong></td>
<td><strong>14%</strong>&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt; <strong>Desktop</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>*</sup> Statistically significant difference between test vs. control at > 90% confidence

<sup>▲</sup> Statistically significant difference between short & long article within device at > 90% confidence

PC: Control n=240, Short Article n=240, Long Article n=250; Smartphone: Control n=172, Short Article n=171, Long Article n=166
Branded content is here to stay! It’s still highly effective in 2016

Branded content provides a good platform to truly connect in a way that feels consumer centric

Running content on trusted news sites such as Forbes can help establish reach & boost performance among particularly engaged consumers

Stay true to your narrative – Content should be as long (or short) as makes sense for the story

While we believe there is a tipping point, don’t be afraid to mention your brand as long as it makes sense for the narrative. For articles, more branding is especially important on smartphone