

# Who owns content marketing?

Professional services firms are increasingly publishers in their own right. It is time for marketing teams, and specifically heads of content, to decide on what is published, when and how, argues **Dan Gray**.

This article originally appeared in PM magazine. For further details go to [www.pmforum.co.uk](http://www.pmforum.co.uk)

**C**ontent marketing should be the beating heart of every professional services marketing strategy. Professional services is a relationship-led industry and trust between clients and their advisers is essential. While some firms may have strong brands in the market that attract potential clients, ultimately people buy people. Therefore, to win new business, you need to showcase your people and what they know to the market.

The most effective way to achieve that is through thought leadership-led content marketing.

For professional services firms, content marketing should be about creating and supporting conversations upon which new relationships can both be built and, just as importantly, maintained. Let's face it, unlike many of the more transactional B2B industries, a client's relationship with their key advisers, such as their accountant or lawyer, could potentially last years or even decades.

When done right, content marketing:

- Forms an emotional connection between you and your target audiences;
- Creates cut-through;
- Helps attract potential new clients;



- Arms your frontline people with the insights and tools to have consultative selling conversations;
- Improves existing client relationships by offering up a steady stream of pro bono insights;
- Helps convey your culture and values to potential recruits; and
- Creates a sense of pride amongst your people.

### Managing the tension

In thought leadership-led content marketing, there typically exists a tension between the time-poor subject matter experts who have the insights that clients find valuable and you, the marketing team, who need those expert insights, but want to review, curate and share them as part of your overarching strategy.

In professional services marketing this tension is often magnified, where those subject matter experts are partners that have their own departments and agendas. They may wish their latest piece of content to be published without necessarily considering if the topic, timing, or tone is right, if the insights have been packaged up or communicated in the right way, if the piece aligns with the marketing (and therefore business) strategy, or if there are any other sensitivities or considerations that should be considered before publishing.

People, of course, consume information in a variety of ways, so to make sure that your stories resonate with as many of your audience as possible, you need to use a range of channels – whether that's the written word, audio or visual – and map them to your clients' buyer journeys. Not only do you need to tell your stories in the right way, but you also need to tailor the experience for each person based on who they are and where they are in their buying journey with you.

This is not something a subject matter expert is likely to consider. When content is led by subject matter experts, rather than the marketing team, it will almost always result in an untargeted 'spray and pray' approach, with little to no strategic oversight or plan, which can be confusing for clients, prospects and the market.

I believe that it is the marketing team's responsibility, and more specifically the head of content's role, to be the ultimate arbiter of what is published and what is not. And just as your subject matter experts are the masters of the technical detail, you are subject matter experts in your own right, and your area of expertise is what makes good content and how to shape and share it for your various audiences.



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### Firms as publishers

I view the role of a head of content as a bit like a managing editor responsible for overseeing and driving the creative direction of your content, as well as deciding what is published, when and how.

The reality is that businesses (with successful marketing teams) have effectively become publishers in their own right, serving a steady stream of content to their audiences. In the same way that people go to their trusted news outlets for information, they should also turn to their trusted brands for insights and guidance.

One example of this was the content marketing we did at Blick Rothenberg during the pandemic. Our clients and prospective clients were crying out for information and support to navigate the unprecedented times. Through our Practical Guidance campaign, we served up daily pro bono advice and insights on how people and businesses could more effectively manage their cash and access funding so that they could better weather the storm.

Notably, the content on our digital hub drew upon the insights from tens of different subject matter experts across the firm, many of whom were partners. However, it was all planned, curated and managed by the marketing team, who had editorial oversight to ensure consistency of message, of delivery and quality.

Unfortunately, at the same time, I remember several peers in other professional services marketing teams being frustrated that subject matter experts had taken control of what content

was published and subsequently they were sometimes accused by clients of being tone deaf to the sentiments of the market at that time.

Clearly, if your firm is going to be a content publisher, then you really need that managing editor/head of content to ensure that what you say and who you say it to is properly managed.

### Post-pandemic pointers

So, what, if anything, has changed post-pandemic?

The last two years have put marketing teams under even greater pressure and scrutiny, but they have also demonstrated the value you bring. Marketing not only supports business development to drive growth but also makes your brand stand out and be heard in an ever more competitive world. The pandemic resulted in marketing teams having to diversify and utilise new skills. But now that we are post-pandemic, you also need to dust off some skills you haven't used for some time.

We are already seeing a movement back toward face-to-face events. As a relationship-led industry, physical events have always been important to professional services firms. Unlike webinars or online conferences, physical events are fundamentally about making human connections and showcasing the talents and personalities of your subject matter experts. However, with people spending less time in the office, it is more important than ever to ensure the content of events is properly planned and curated to entice people to attend.

Digital may have been 'king' during Covid's heights, but I believe that was borne of necessity rather than desire. I also believe that the exponential increase in digital interactions has contributed to the potential erosion of the B2B customer experience. Thanks to digital saturation and many firms adopting a 'spray and pray' approach, there is a lot more noise out there and you now have to find a way to break through it.

I believe that in the post-pandemic world, successful firms will therefore be the ones who adopt a content strategy aligned to their marketing and business objectives, view themselves as a publisher and allow you, their marketing team, to own and manage their content.



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