

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONTENT MARKETING**

OPENING ACT BY:  
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From podcasts to social to digital video, content marketing is attracting a lot of attention of late, but this “it” marketing tactic is actually one of advertising’s more enduring traditions. Like a classic novel or a beloved movie, advertising that emphasizes storytelling is proven to be both memorable and effective. While new media choices and new gadgets have expanded how Americans can consume content, branded content endures because it engages the audience. At its best, it also spotlights a brand in unexpected ways.

From print to video to audio, in a cluttered media landscape, branded content elevates a brand from commercial to stand-out. Through the history of advertising, the most effective examples of branded content have been audience-centric, rather than an extended commercial. These campaigns have created value for consumers, whether that is informational, entertainment -- or both. The secret sauce has been content that feels less like marketing and more like exclusive, original programming, no matter the medium.



### **WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN**

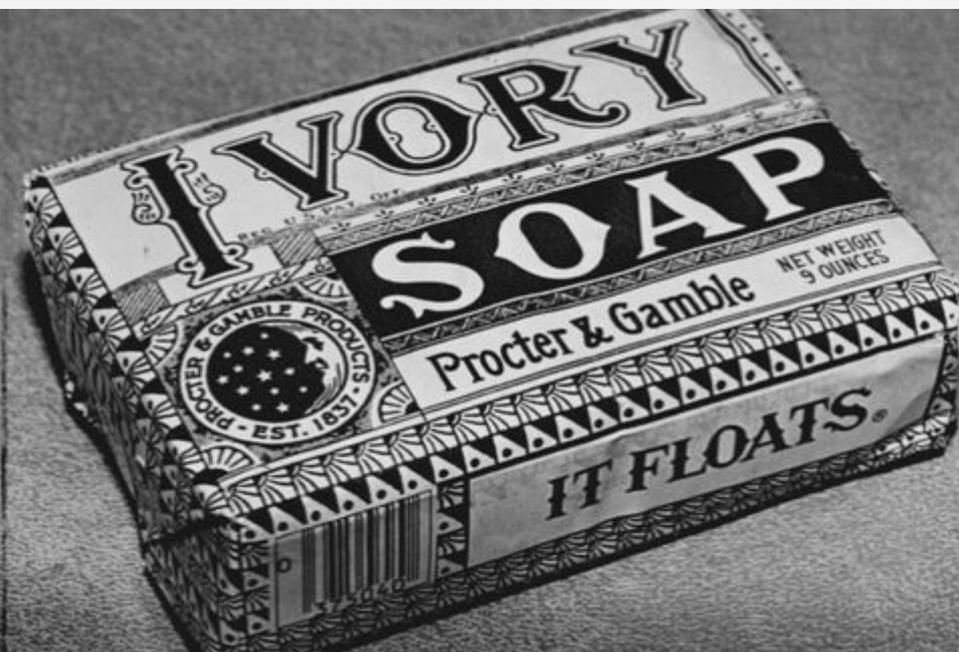
The art of sponsored content has a rich history that dates back to the country’s agricultural roots. In the 1850s, John Deere, the iconic lawn mower and farm equipment company, launched a print magazine, *The Furrow*, to be a resource for its farming customers. Another pioneering example was all about taking consumers on a journey. In 1900, French tire company Michelin created a travel guide, *The Michelin Guide*, for French motorists. It encouraged drivers to go on adventures and -- no surprise -- wear out their tires from their travels. Four years later, they expanded to neighboring Belgium and, nearly a century later, in 2005, Michelin published the first American edition. Michelin stars are now the gold-standard for restaurants worldwide. How’s that for an enduring campaign? And, yes, Michelin still sell tires.

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### THE SOAP OPERA

Some of the best content marketing projects are subtle, but highly effective. Did you know that soap operas got their names from the consumer packaged goods companies, including soaps, that sponsored them? In the 1930s, Procter & Gamble created audio dramas, called “soap operas” that were sponsored by its household products. In 1950, P&G expanded its work to video with the first television soap, *The First One Hundred Years*. While the direct connection might between these shows and products may have faded over time, some of these “soaps”, as generations of mostly female fans have called them, are still on the air today. Although many viewers may not know the direct connection with cleaning products, they still see female-targeted ads during breaks.



### THE WORLDS LARGEST STORE

In another testament to branded connections in media, Chicago's venerable radio station WLS, pays homage to its original owner Sears-Roebuck through its call letters, short for “The World's Largest Store”, the retailer's nickname. The station launched in 1924 with a variety of programming that included music, arts and farming information. The relationship between the station and its owner was symbiotic: Sears marketed its products on the air and sold radios in its catalog to boost listening.

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### LEGOS AND DOVE

Despite the declining audience for print publications, there are some success stories for print branded publications. Toymaker Lego, for instance, publishes a quarterly magazine that feels editorial, but is essentially a catalog for the latest Lego products. The magazine offers kids building inspiration, and likely sends them begging their parents for new sets. (In a sign of shifting consumer trends, in 2017, the company added a corresponding app.)

The Lego Life app is just a single example of the explosion of content marketing opportunities on digital. As digital video streaming explodes, there's fertile ground for brands to make video series that can reach a large and highly-engaged audience. Legions of Americans, particularly younger consumers, stream videos on their smartphones and scour YouTube for content, allowing marketers to produce video branded content beyond traditional -- and expensive -- TV campaigns. Take Skincare brand Dove's "Real Beauty" project with veteran TV producer Shonda Rhimes, who partnered on a series of stories about real women -- the type who might use Dove products. The series of short videos featuring real women defining what makes them beautiful. The brand connects with women through honest, relatable content created for women, by women.

### SOMETIMES THE BRAND FINDS YOU



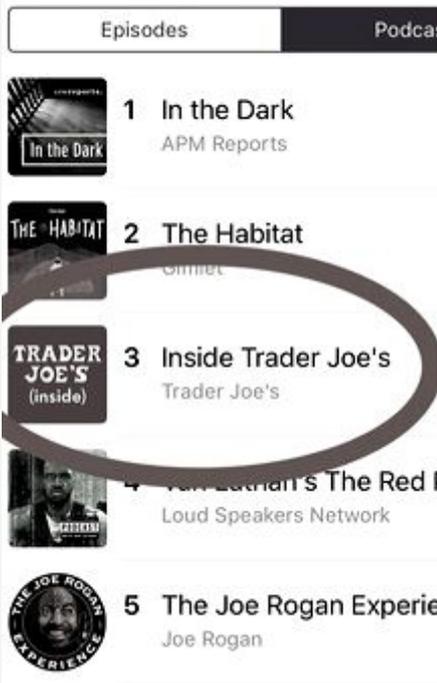
Some brands connect with content once it already finds an audience. Since his eponymous TV show went off the air, comedian Jerry Seinfeld launched a web series "Comedians in Cars", that started on comedy streaming service Crackle and then moved to Netflix. Along the way, carmaker Acura signed on as the exclusive sponsor, but Seinfeld retains full creative control. The show isn't about Acura, or even about cars, but rather there was a subtle connection between high-brow comedy and automobiles, and that made Acura look good.

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### PODCASTING AND JOHN DEERE

#### Top Charts



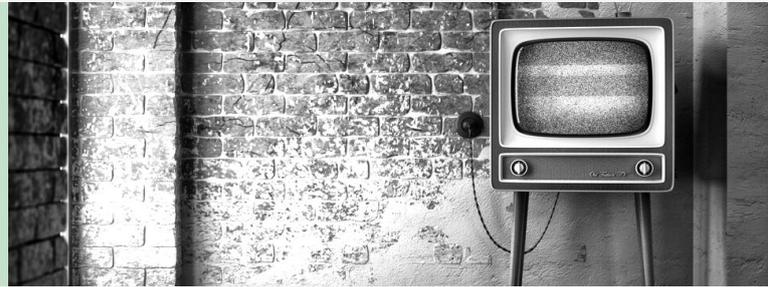
The rapid growth of podcasting is similarly inspiring a new generation of audio content marketing. One-quarter of Americans listen to podcasts weekly and marketers want to reach them. Beyond sponsoring a podcast or inserting pre-roll ads, branded podcasts unite a brand with a passionate audience, creating a sense of community. Just like their predecessors, these podcasts shouldn't feel overtly commercial, even if it is created by or funded buy a brand. An effective podcast -- regardless if it is branded or not -- must offer the audience value or they'll abandon it for one of the 700,000 other podcasts in the Apple podcast app. If a podcast doesn't deliver something of value for the consumer, it will miss its mark.

More than a century after its print branded content, John Deere launched a podcast, "On Life and Land", about agriculture, rural life and farming history. Like the company's magazine before it, John Deere's podcast doesn't explicitly talk about their sponsors; In fact, the brand might only be mentioned a handful of times, but the audience and the brand are united by common interests.

### TRADER JOE'S

At its best, branded content can make its way into mainstream entertainment. On cult food retailer Trader Joe's "Inside Trader Joe's" podcast, foodies and loyal customers get a peak behind the curtain, with executives and staffers dishing out insider information. Want to know how the company's secretive taste kitchen works or where they travel to source new products? How about why staffers wear those colorful Hawaiian shirts and how bananas can cost just 19 cents each? The podcast answers these questions and more. The podcast is such a hit that it soared to no. 3 on the Apple podcast charts -- a significant achievement for any podcast, let alone a brand-created show. In testaments to its consumer appeal, "Inside Trader Joe's" regularly catches the attention of food bloggers and earns segments on NBC's "Today Show".

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### **WHAT'S IN IT FOR THE LISTENER?**

In another widely-cited example, GE's fictional sci-fi podcast, "The Message," is regarded by many as one of most successful branded podcasts ever. The show has nothing to do with the medical devices or aircraft parts the company manufactures. Rather, it is a fictional sci-fi series about messages received from space. But GE is synonymous with invention and innovation, and that's the halo that shines on its brand.

Whether your branded content is audio, video, print or social, done properly, it will create positive associations with your brand. That halo effect produces action and increases engagement. Branded content is so popular now that an estimated 88% of brands now deploy content marketing campaigns. Unfortunately, while media industry boasts some standout examples of branded content, there are countless projects that fall short of delivering value for consumers.

To avoid the pitfalls of over-commercialization, you want to create value for the audience and approach content with the "WIIFL" filter, or "What's in It for the Listener?" Don't focus on how the content will benefit your brand. (We know it is hard, but forget about sales for a minute) Rather, consider how a consumer will connect your company with the content and build a relationship. The best branded content leaves a lasting shine on your brand. And that creates value for your brand and your customers.



### **THE EXPERT: STEVEN GOLDSTEIN - AMPLIFI MEDIA**

Steven Goldstein is CEO of audio innovation firm Amplifi Media. Amplifi works with top media companies, corporate brands, podcasters and individual talent to define and create effective digital strategy and content for on-demand audio including podcasts and smart speakers. Amplifi also produces content for brands via its Amplifi Originals initiative. Goldstein has long been recognized as a thought leader in audio programming, marketing, and management. He has created and developed scores of successful radio brands around the country, as well as nurtured and advanced local and national broadcast talent.