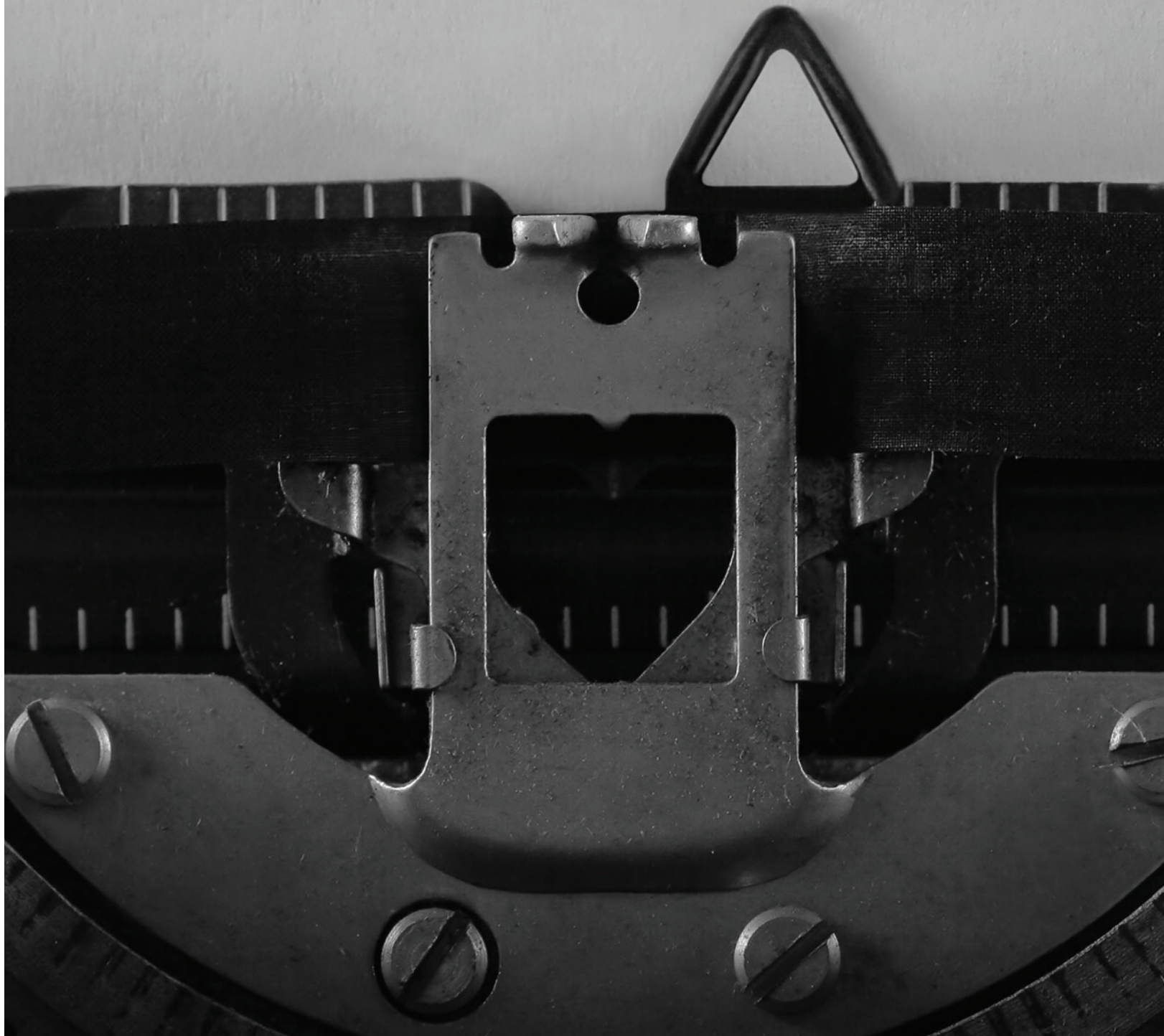


Tell your story



WHY CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WILL BE THE NEW FOCUS

BY KAISHA JANTSCH

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ell, it turns out

Michael Scott, the often off-base character from the TV hit show, “The Office,” had it right all along. In terms of content creation, marketing experts agree: Business is always personal.

But it has not always been this way.

Joe Jackman says that content used to be more about function. Translation: It centered on product details like makeup, design, purpose and quality. Then, as consumers evolved, smart companies moved from functional content to experiential content. “Experiential content is anything surrounding the functional product,” says Jackman, founder and CEO of Jackman Reinvents and author of “The Reinventionist Mindset.”

This kind of content goes beyond basics

and ties brand values to products. In today’s market, it’s essential. Jackman says we are witnessing the birth of the values economy and that brands need to stand for things today. “Customers are saying, ‘I really want to be part of something that’s deeper than a transaction.’ They need to have the brands they buy have meaning for them.”

Personal care products brand, Dove, understands this. The brand has long established its functional value, along the way building a highly successful product. But its website does not talk up its products. Instead, it discusses women and men, beauty and gender, and confidence.

“The site is about engaging women,” Jackman says. “It’s setting a platform in place and letting its customers participate in dialogue [about values] and they buy more soap.”

Indeed, Dove’s homepage reads, “Welcome to Dove, the home of real beauty.” The welcome is followed by a blurb about how the brand strives to remove the anxiety surrounding beauty, as well as an article on its recent commitment to reduce plastic waste. Furthermore, the tabs at the top of the site provide links to the Dove “Self-Esteem Project,” which works to take on body dysmorphia, and “Dove Stories.”

The last part is critical. Why? Because stories matter today. John Livesay, the award-winning Conde Nast salesman and author of “Better Selling Through Storytelling,” says that nobody wants to be sold to anymore and get information pushed at them.

“Stories create an emotional connection,” Livesay says. “When people love a story, they share it with their friends and become your brand ambassadors.”

Once again, the Dove site solidifies that truth. Most of the stories under the story tab are user-generated, meaning customers engage with Dove’s branding, largely through hashtags on Twitter, and essentially promote Dove products just by sharing their everyday experiences, struggles and strengths with beauty.

Content like that stands out. “There is more noise and distractions than ever before,” Livesay says. “Experiential content with stories helps you break through the clutter and pull people in.”

LEAN ON ME

So, what are the stories people gravitate to? More than any other, people love original stories. Tell the story of your brand’s origins and you cannot go wrong. “Just as children ask their parents to tell them the story of how they met over and over again, consumers love to know how a brand started,” Livesay says.

The stories a brand tells also depend on the market it serves. Brand leaders should ask themselves what their target customers really care about emotionally, what’s important to them in their lives.

That’s what Jackman’s company did when it helped to reinvent US Foods. The brand was considered largely functional. But in paying closer attention to its market, Jackman discovered that all of the company’s customers shared a love for food.

“We realized that yes, US Foods is a distribution business,” Jackman says, “but fundamentally it is in service of people who love and live their lives to create great food.”

Thus, the term “food phenetics”—a user-driven content center—was born. “It was simply a place that [US Foods customers] could come and get inspired by one another, learn from one another, find out what was new and on trend,” says Jackman, who also has worked with brands like Duane Reed, Old Navy, Gap, Athleta, Dave and Busters, JCPenney and Walgreens. “It became this incredible community that still exists today.”

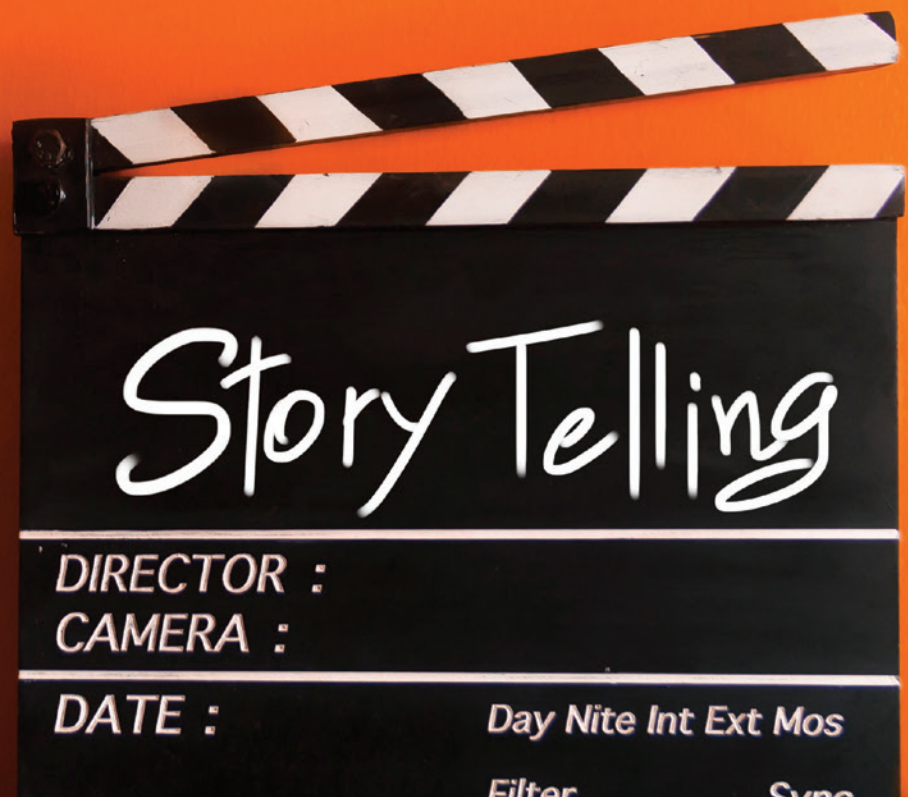
While “food phenetics” was produced for online and print, the channel companies use to share their experiential content can vary, depending on the market and need. One of the best approaches a brand can take to create experiential content is to ask its clients for stories and share them on social media. “When consumers see themselves in the stories your current clients tell, they want to go on that journey too,” Livesay says.

To solidify those efforts, social media can help with areas like data tracking. Take Domino’s Pizza, which uses data to track if customers order the same pizza every day at the same time so it can start the order before the customer finishes, which helps save time on delivery.



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— JOHN LIVESAY,
AUTHOR OF “BETTER SELLING
THROUGH STORYTELLING”



And while social media has its merits, Jackman says it is not a universal solution to sharing experiential content and triggering consumer conversations. He recommends options like digital content and custom print publications to complement social media campaigns.

Who are your customers? What do they care about? And how do they wish to consume the added value content that you as a brand are going to serve up? "Let the customers determine channels of communication," Jackman says.

The content can be managed by an internal, external, or hybrid team. "There's no right way to manage content," Jackman says, stressing again that companies should

do what works best for them.

No matter what approach a brand takes to managing content, it must ensure the content it produces is focused, aligned, consistent and experiential. "It's so easy to just generate stuff and content," Jackman says. "Even when you're outsourcing, you don't want to outsource the soul of the brand."

And in the end, having a soul sells.

"Storytelling is in our DNA," Livesay says. "The format and platform might evolve, but the strategy will always work when your content is authentic and has an emotional connection."

It will always work as long as business is personal.

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