

# Customer first thinking.



## The Content Experience

An Interview with Randy Frisch, President and Co-Founder of Uberflip

Randy Frisch is the President and co-founder of the content marketing platform Uberflip and the author of "F#CK Content Marketing".



The practice of content marketing began to evolve into a grown-up discipline about a decade ago. That was around the time social media platforms had reached the size where they could serve as a practical delivery channel. Companies no longer had to rely on paid ads to drive visitors to their own branded web properties – they could attract inbound traffic organically through social media. And then with the democratization of publishing the content floodgates burst open.

Today the world is awash in blogs, streaming video, e-books, white papers, infographics, webinars, podcasts, newsletters and so much more, in a dizzying dogfight for attention. We've reached a saturation point, where no matter how good the content may be, the chances of it being noticed are remote.

Despite this explosive growth, content marketing remains a leap of faith for most companies. They may have become better at generating content – but whether it works or not remains to be

seen, especially when you consider that 70% of content reportedly goes unnoticed. Which is probably why 86% of companies say that their content marketing efforts aren't generating business value, according to Forrester. Pretty distressing when you consider how much money is spent on content marketing – oftentimes, as much as one third of a company's marketing budget.

Despite the questionable contribution to business results, marketers are undeterred – budgets are expected to keep growing. But that means the content glut will only get worse. Even more money will have to be spent making that content visible – relying, just as before, on paid ads.

The solution, according to Randy Frisch, is to say "F#CK to Content Marketing", which just happens to be the provocative title of his recently published book. Despite the attention-grabbing title, he's been an ardent proponent of content marketing ever since he and his partner founded their company Uberflip in 2012. Uberflip competes in the hotly contested arena of content marketing platforms. But unlike a lot of its CMP competitors, which function as publishing workflow engines, Uberflip prefers to optimize what it likes to call the "content experience": allowing marketers to offer a more personalized and interactive way to engage with content. Every year the Toronto-based company hosts a highly regarded event for marketers called CONEX - short for "content experience" - which just last month drew a crowd of over 700 attendees from across North America.

The main thesis of Randy's book is that marketers have spent too much time worrying about content scalability and not enough about content discoverability. Even the best content can get buried in a

chronological scroll. And often the content is too elementary or generic to be of much value to prospective buyers deep into self-education. Marketers should be thinking about how to map the content journey to the purchase journey, Randy argues, and design a dynamic experience that aligns with the knowledge level and decision stages of individual buyers.

But before getting Randy's take on the state of content marketing I wanted to know: what's up with that book title?

RF

**Randy Frisch (RF):** I don't think it was the way it was intended and when we say intended, I'm talking about the definition. If you look...you know, my favorite definition is always...the guys at Content Marketing Institute, Joe and Robert over there and they define content marketing. Of course, it starts off, create valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract an audience. But that's kind of the only part of the definition we ended up focusing on because when we think content marketing, we think of content creation, we think of people whose job title is content marketers and content marketers are thought of as the people who write, who maybe were journalists at one point in their life. But what we don't give thought to is the latter half of the definition that talks about driving profitable customer action and that's...

SS

**Stephen Shaw (SS):** In other words, why do content marketing?

RF

Right. Why do it? Or, you know, why bother creating all that content if it's not gonna go to use? Which would've been a really longwinded title of a book. And that's really what I meant.

SS

It's shorthand for, "you guys aren't getting this quite right yet." Is that what you're saying?

RF

Exactly. It's funny. My team wanted me to use the term "stop" at one point, right. They're like, "It's still harsh but it's not..." And I said, "No, but that's not what I want. I don't want people to stop creating content." I just...I don't think there's a point in creating it if...and the number that I reference a lot is a data point from Sirius Decisions, which is almost 70% of the content we create goes unused.

SS

Yeah. I've seen Forester's benchmarks on that too. They say 64%.

RF

Yeah. So it's pretty scary to look at that. I've had people challenge me on, "Well, what does it mean not to use content?" To me it just means that you post it to your site. Like I'm not talking about the content we create, and it never gets used. I'm talking about the content we create, and it sits there on our website without ever being leveraged by anyone other than the person who published it or the person who finds it through SEO.

SS

Right. It's interesting. Today I had to reach out...because of a blog I've created from a product manager someplace saying, "Oh, we've just written this blog. Would you mind posting this on your site? We know it would be a valuable resource." Which was a naked attempt at back linking and I'm just thinking...I'm thinking, "No. that's kinda not how we wanna play the game here on our side." But I just wanna go back to that question though because it's certainly a relevant one. Content marketing admittedly has become a buzzword. It's somewhat like CRM used to be back in the '90s, tarnished by mispractice and malpractice. The core thesis of your book...just help me understand. You're saying I think that this is...content is only useful if it's relevant to where somebody is in their life cycle. Is that the essential thesis of your book?

RF

I think that's a part of it. I think delivering the right content to the right person at the right time is a big part of being more strategic about the content that we did create. But I think it's thinking about the content on, you know, beyond just is this good content or bad content. There's been over the last five years already this rise of quality versus quantity debate. That's not what this book is about, right. You know, other people can debate that and probably argue it better than me.

SS

Is it frequency versus quality? Because that's really the debate I see. "Oh, we've gotta produce some blog five or six times a week. Oh, by the way, it's gotta be 1,500 words. Oh, well, that better be your full time job if you're gonna do that." (7.40)

RF

Yeah, it's an interesting...you know, that's important too but I would say it goes even a level deeper than that which is not just the frequency but when we create content, what are we creating it for. Like for what purpose in the buyer journey, for what stage and as a result, what format etc. I think a lot of us go through this notion, "Well, we have to do that one ebook that we are due to do this quarter, month, week, whatever. Same thing with blog posts, same thing with podcast etc. But actually, taking a step back and saying, "What is the journey that someone's gonna go through? And what assets are we gonna need at different stages? And that starts to get you to challenge everything from format to frequency to writing style.

SS

So you make a really good point and I just...it's because I get confused about this. Where does the line get drawn between traditional marcom, sales enablement, sales collateral material, material that's used to assist somebody at a point in time and thought leadership content because they all obviously deserve attention. Does content marketing, you know, the concept encompasses all of those objectives and formats or is it more narrow in focus?

RF

That's a great question. I would say the real question there is what is content. All right? And it's funny. This was years ago. We're very good friends and partners with the team in Marketo and they're part of Adobe and I remember early days being on a call with one of their product marketers and we were...and they said, you know, "There's a lot of confusion here. We think we're competitors with you." And I was like, "I don't see that. We use Marketo. You know, you guys, you know, talk about us in partnership." And the issue is this individual was thinking of content as the body of content inside of the emails that we send. And I laughed to myself but then I took this...the position of what if I'm a customer, what if I'm a marketer. How do they see content? And it's...there's all these competing forms of content in so many mediums at so many different stages. I like the idea of going back again to a definition. Content marketing is content that is, you know, relevant, valuable and consistent to attract an audience. Right? We need that at the top of funnel which is usually more that thought leadership. We also need it at the middle and bottom of funnel more than

ever these days to move people along. So, you know, I always like to ground myself in, "Well, what am I trying to achieve?" I'm trying to achieve that ability to connect with that audience to drive profitable customer action. I'm gonna do that in various different forms. What we need to be aware of though is what piece of content comes after the other. Because sometimes what a lot of us do...and it's kind of funny when we think about it is we post content on our website or wherever we store it and we post it by either format or chronological data. Those are the most logical ways that we just know how to do it. So all of us and, you know, anyone listening to this would kind of, you know, shake their head when they realize this. All of our blog posts live under the blog and then our ebooks have a page called ebooks.

SS

Whitepapers, podcasts, infographics.

RF

Videos etc. Infographics, exactly. And it's humorous because when was the last time you went to someone's website and said, "All right, I'm gonna figure out what these guys do by looking at ebooks."

SS

Totally.

RF

We say...

SS

Or resources. They have a full deck of resources. (11.10)

RF

Yeah, and then you get to those breakdowns. But what if we actually broke down content by the challenges that people have. Same thing with the chronological issue that we do. Because we post it and we post it in these archaic CMSs that weren't really built for content, we may have, you know, this concept of evergreen content and content that doesn't go bad. We may have an amazing post from nine months ago. So we link someone to that post or they find it organically and then they enjoy that post so much that they're ready for the next post. Well, what's the next post that they're gonna see? In all likelihood if this post was from May 15th, 2017, they're going to see the one from May 14th, 2017. But that may no longer be accurate, evergreen or even on topic to the challenge that this person's dealing with. So I think it's trying to rethink content under how we deliver it.

**SS** How we organize it.

**RF** How we organize it, yeah. There's three buckets that I often talk about with content experience that help us understand it from a definition. At a high level, content experience is about encountering content. What does that look like? So when we look at it it's the environment that it's in, the structure as you just said or the organization and the third one is how it compels us to engage.

**SS** Right. It's interesting because, you know, you go to Medium and it's always an interesting experience but it's like an infinite scroll and it could keep you there forever if you...that was the only thing you had to look at in a day and I always think, "There's gotta be a better way for these guys to organize this content in a way that gets categorized more effectively." So even the content masters if I may put it that way I think are still struggling with this basic concept is how to make this assessable and relevant to the individual at that point in time as they're experiencing your content.

**RF** Well, it's interesting you bring up the infinite scroll because I actually think some of those channels are doing what they wanna do. They wanna just keep you there. The longer I scroll through Instagram, the more ads I see. The longer I scroll on LinkedIn, the more ads I see.

**SS** Yeah. They don't want you to go offsite. Absolutely.

**RF** So what they're doing...and I think we're gonna learn a lot from them actually. This term of infinite scroll locks me in. So I'll sit down in my bed before I go to sleep and I'll say, "You know what? I'm gonna catch up on LinkedIn. I'm gonna see what people have posted in their feeds, see what's going on." And I say to myself, "I'll give it five minutes." Twenty minutes later I'm still there. That's what we want as brands.

**SS** If it's the only site you're going to. I get frustrated because I'm dealing across a dozen probably sites every day and, you know, Flipboard's another good example. Exactly the problem. I can scroll forever and, you know, I'll randomly choose stuff I think may be relevant but it doesn't help the experience. It doesn't help me actually figure out what it is I typically...like look. Medium doesn't do a bad job because

it basically looks at the last few clicks and then figures out, "Oh, you will like this content." But I still say it's an industry challenge and to your point is it's...and this is why I think your book is unique is that it does focus on the experience as opposed to the process of developing content which is really all you read about today is the process, right. Not the experience.

**RF** It's about thinking about where we wanna direct people to find content and how we tee up that next asset as you just said in a more systematic way that's gonna get someone to stick around. Because there's stats out there. There's one by IDG that talks about the number of pieces of content we need to consume before we're ready to buy. So the number thrown out is seven. (14.37)

**SS** Yeah, I've seen that.

**RF** Whether the number's seven, nine, two, doesn't matter. The question is how do you get people to consume those seven assets in one seating or two if need be rather than seven. And most of us think of it as we were trained to do with email. Well, in my email I'm gonna send out seven emails. Gonna be the best headlines ever. You know, clickbait again to your earlier point. Get people to open them up and even if we're right and we can do that which isn't easy because there's so much else distracting us, why would we wait seven emails in to get them to consume all seven pieces, right? When we all know that we'll jump on to Netflix and we'll watch a whole season in an afternoon. And it's not... you know, most marketers will say, "Well, that's Netflix. They have like really compelling content." That's not true. We have content that interests our buyers and again this book is not about how to create the right content. It's about how to queue up the right content when you have it.

**SS** So...and so it's an interesting conversation because there is the...and you bring this out in the book quite effectively. It's mapping content to specific lifecycle stages pre and post. Got it. But there's this other opportunity that...and we'll come to this in a second but where brands decide they're going to be a singular trusted source of information on a specific subject. So as an example, I think of HubSpot, which has really set the standard in terms of inbound

marketing. Their phrase. They invented it but really that is their entire marketing efforts are devoted to getting people to come to that site and they've succeeded tremendously in the markets that they want to serve. So that's the other option is really get people to come to you and being seen as a trusted source as opposed to trying to figure out in advance how to map to the decision stages and I mean, not to say one or the other is better but it's interesting that some brands take certainly different approach than others.

RF

Yeah. Listen, HubSpot is amazing and they're a close partner of ours so I will never say anything bad of them. Not just because they're a partner, because I'm amazed at what they've accomplished.

SS

They should be using your platform.

RF

But the reality is not all of us are gonna be HubSpot. And I think sometimes the gold standard of what HubSpot does... we can take a lot of lessons but not all of us should be sitting here saying how do I have everyone come by for me, right? There's a marketer that we work with. His name's Daniel. He works at a company called Snowflake. And he was presenting at a conference recently and he made this point that amazed me. So they've invested heavily in account based marketing which is this, you know, concept if people aren't familiar. Targeting accounts. These are the deals that I wanna land. More enterprise minded perhaps than even HubSpot. HubSpot sells to same enterprises but they've got, you know...

SS

Medium sized to smaller sized companies.

RF

SMBs, yeah, exactly.

SS

That's their sweet spot.

RF

So they're going after a much larger audience. So the inbound mentality and pull people in and everyone come to our site and let us be the thought leader definitely works well for them. But when you start to say, "You know what? I don't need the whole world to read what I've got." How do I start to put the right content just in front of the right people? And what they've started to see is over half of the content that people are engaging with now...so if they have a post and for simple math, 100 people view it, over 50 of those

views come from specific accounts that they said, "I wanna put this piece of content in front of that account." And you start to look at that and you say, "Well, that means there's so little traffic on their website. You know, if they're targeting these people and getting that their website's barely doing anything for them." But maybe that's the goal. Maybe it's not about, you know, catching with a big fishnet versus a spear if you've heard that analogy inside of ABM. And I think that's where we have to be careful to, you know, overly try and be a HubSpot sometimes versus understanding what is the purpose of the content I'm creating. (18.38)

SS

Correct, yeah. Well, it's where in the case of B2B certainly as you're describing, you know, it's where marketing actually starts to do more of the heavy lifting around those early sales interactions where sales people today are being shut out of the conversation because they're not providing value add.

RF

Absolutely.

SS

It seemed to be...have a long way to go there before they trust marketing enough to give them that responsibility.

RF

Yeah, there's a Gartner stat on that. You know, we used to always read those stats that just talked about how much content or how far in the buyer journey they were before they spoke to sales.

SS

Like 60%, 70%.

RF

Yeah, but there's a more interesting one I found that 82% of their time now across the entire buyer journey is being spent doing research versus speaking to sales.

SS

Sure. I believe that.

RF

So of the 18% being...you know, where they're speaking to sales I always think to myself, "It is very likely that whoever owns the 82% of research time will own the time spent with that specific vendor." So if I can win 60% of 82% of research then I'm probably gonna get the same proportion of the vendor time that they spend talking to a salesman.

SS

Well, and your own space, the one you compete in...and I'm gonna...I wanna get to this question momentarily but there's NewsCred, Contently, yourselves and a few others

doing masterful job as you would expect of bringing people back to their site on the strength of the content experience. Like, you know, I just...and those names are in my head anyway. You know, I'm very aware of them. I'm aware of those brands which when you think about the job of marketing in part to raise brand awareness it's a terrific way to do it but also a tremendous amount of resources have to be put against it. I wanna go to that question in a second. I do wanna take a bit of a side trip here though. You're pretty young. You started out in sales I think, and got a marketing job with Rubbermaid and there was a company called...am I pronouncing this correctly, REM? That you went to?

RF

Yeah.

SS

In a sales marketing capacity. Then you and your partner, cofounder, started this company called Mygazines and that presumably was the inspiration ultimately to Uberflip. Prior to that obviously Flipbook. Just can you explain that arc for me just a little bit. How did you make that leap? It's always one that takes a huge amount of courage obviously to go out on your own like that. But what got you to...what epiphany did you have to get you to start Mygazines as an example?

RF

Yeah, so for clarity, I didn't start Mygazines. I actually joined my now cofounder of Uberflip. He started...

SS

He started Mygazines. Okay.

RF

He started Mygazines. So I spent...you know, I guess the two longer stints of employment before being in tech, you know, were definitely marketing related but they weren't in technology. And I was passionate about technology. And I got to a point where I've actually gone out of a business venture that was not extremely successful. I wasn't overly happy going through that process. And my wife very much encouraged me to, you know, take some time to do something I was passionate about, right. And I think that that's one of the most important things, you know, regardless of starting a company or being part of a company is doing something that you're passionate about. It's so much easier. (22.06)

SS

To change the world and feel that you're changing the world.

RF

Yeah, or just enjoy going into work and enjoy pushing forward.

SS

Sure.

RF

So that to me was really what...you know, I owe a lot of that to my wife. I owe a lot of that to like, you know, being in this role is having a passion for marketing. You know, when I grew up I always kid that, you know, to me what was sexy was Super Bowl commercials. You know, along the way I realized B2B marketing's pretty sexy too which, you know, some people may not see but I see it. And what bothered me and a lot of the reasons that we started Uberflip were tied to things that frustrated me as a marketer. Like I was the creative guy. I was able to come up with these awesome ideas for campaigns, but I couldn't get them onto the web. I mean, I didn't go to school for that. I even struggled trying to figure out Flash back in the day. Like Flash wasn't easy but PowerPoint was easy. You know, I wanted something for getting content on the web that was as easy as PowerPoint versus having to figure out Flash. You know, Macromedia is an amazing company, but it wasn't an easy solution to pick up and just start using. We needed web teams or design teams back then for those tools. Same thing is what I...what Yoav and I saw together was that there was gonna be a need for the marketer to leverage content in a more meaningful way and it kind of...you made reference to some of the people that we compete with. We actually don't compete with NewsCred or Contently.

SS

No. because they're more content production platforms.

RF

Right. But they were around already when we started Uberflip and they were some of our motivation because we looked at them and we said, "They're solving for creation."

SS

Yeah.

RF

And once someone solves for creation, once someone solves for anything it creates yet another problem.

SS

Right.

RF

Right. I mean, the biggest thing that we always looked at from electric cars and said, "It's never gonna take off," was the infrastructure. Even if someone were to figure out

how to build an electric car that was great there wouldn't be infrastructure. The reason Tesla's been so successful is the infrastructure that they put out...put around us. And we kinda said that with content. We said, "Well, if they figure out how to create all that content, what happens when people have content?" So I think, you know, the jump into this role, into Uberflip was very much driven on passion, driven on, you know, being a marketer, knowing the problems that marketers had and wanting to solve them for myself. I'll throw in the fact that I actually couldn't find a job at the time so it was kind of out of necessity to go start something. That's a true story. (24.48)

SS

It's hard to believe.

RF

True story. I could...I was frictionally unemployed. I had run a company, I wanted to get into tech, no one wanted to hire the guy who ran more, you know, traditional brick and mortar businesses and I had my MBA so I was, you know...I had silly mindset of what I should be paid. So I said, "If no one's gonna pay me that, I guess I should go earn it."

SS

Yeah. Well, that succeeded in an amazing way. So but explain to me the epiphany because you got into this Mygazines, which I think I get, came up with the Flipbook concept which was great. We used it actually at our shop for a big presentation we were making. And then migrated since to...which...none of this was a pivot. It was a progression if you...it seemed to me a progression of thought or evolution of thought that got you to this point. At what point was the epiphany that, I know what the marketing problem is here that I need to solve.

RF

Sure. So at the time when we...when I joined Yoav with Mygazines he was selling it to media publishers. So traditional magazine publishers, things like that. And we realized that as much as what we were solving for them being like a Flipbook magazine experience was strategic. It was the wrong type of strategic. It was too strategic.

SS

Well, not to mention there was probably glimmerings at that point of a sunset on an entire industry.

RF

Agreed, agreed. So it was the wrong type of strategic. A lot of funny stories I can tell you of things that set us to

eventually realize that. So we started to look at the fact we had some customers who were marketers who were using the technology for their ebooks. Taking their whitepapers, serving in that same way. And we went to them one day and we said, "What more could we do for you?" We had an interest in marketing, we had looked at other possibilities around, you know, document management for public markets, lawyers, finance, whole bunch of things but we were passionate about the marketing ones. We went deep there. And they said to us...they said, you know, it'd be really nice if I had a page where I could organize all these ebooks. All right, like rather than individual assets, if I had one page where I could manage them. So we said, "Okay. Well, that's easy. That's like a, you know, a week project for us to build something like that out. What else would you want on this page?" And that's when people started to talk about all these other formats of content that they'd love to just show the top three pieces from their blog, the latest four videos from YouTube and on and on and on. And we just answered back. We said, "Well, just grab little widgets and throw them on the page that we give you." And then marketers that we said that to with confidence on our side said, "Well, I don't know how to invent those widgets." And as soon as they said that we realized that it wasn't so much about a page for their ebooks. It was about a page for the content that they wanted to surface from their huge repository of content. You know, down...you know, from there we continued to, you know, dig in and using some of the experiences we had managing content around the importance of conversion, you know, the idea became more fledged out but it was very much that survey that we did with customers asking them what more could we do that led us to realize that there was a huge problem down the road. (28.15)

SS

When I look at the content technology space it's horribly confusing. Like, you know, I mean, it started out as, you know, WordPress for bloggers and it's exploded into splintered, fragmented into all these different types of solutions and applications and tools. It's totally bewildering. And I get your positioning your company around the concept of content hub and content organization because when I initially ran across you guys I thought, "Oh. Well,

that's an interesting approach and I like it." How would you describe the state of the industry today and are you seeing or will see a consolidation from both directions in terms of content companies swallowing up other content tech companies or the martechs of the world or Marketos of the world I should say and other martech companies swallowing up content companies because obviously there is some interest in integrating those components other than through API. So how would you describe the state and where do you think this is gonna net out in a few years?

RF

Yeah. So first off, I think it's very confusing to marketers. I mean, I go to a lot of...

SS

Hugely confusing.

RF

A lot of these conferences I even go to where there's big exhibit halls and I just think to myself like, "How in the world is a marketer supposed to make sense of this?" I mean, half of them are not the same messaging and their product doesn't do anything the same. And you look at the combination of what's out there from an analyst perspective, what's out there from a peer review perspective. It's also confusing. I mean, take Forester or Gartner as an example who have their content marketing magic quadrant wave, you know, whatever.

SS

Different criteria. Yeah, totally.

RF

Yeah, so we're actually fortunate. This is gonna be the first year we're part of Forester's wave. We don't know where we're gonna sit in the wave yet but to be honest I'm going in prepared to not sit where we think we belong. And that's because the definition of content marketing software is very much around creation and workflow. Very important aspects. But that is very different than a content experience platform or something that helps with content distribution or content analytics. I mean, these are all very different problems but as we said at the beginning, they all get lumped under content marketing with a heavy sway to creation on content marketing. So it's interesting. The...you know, I give a lot of credit to G2 crowd. Last year, late 2018, they went in and they said that their term for how they look at the landscape was a grid. So they said, "Instead of having a content marketing grid anymore we're gonna break it down."

And they ended up with three buckets. They have a content creation map or grid rather, a content experience grid and a content analytics grid. So very different approach where they actually went in and they said, "Listen, the Kaposts of the world, the NewsCredits, the Contentlies, they are creation tools. The Uberflips of the world, the Follows, the Path Factories, other companies like that, they're focused on experience." And then you've got other solutions like Outbrain and Tabula and others who help with distribution of content. They'll be under the content distribution map. So in a way it's...you know, some marketers may look at that and say, "Well, now I need more technology." Well, that's... sometimes that's the reality. (31.28)

SS

Some sort of super suite that covers the basics but that doesn't exist at this point.

RF

Right, and that's, you know, that's your question on where we're going in a few years. I think that there will be a lot of convergence. I think though that it's important to realize that a lot of the content creation tools are made for the people who become content marketers where their job title is creating content. A lot of the tools perhaps for content experience or content distribution. In some cases, they're more meant for the demand gen marketer or the digital marketer. And I think that's where content is very confusing term where we assume that because we created a job title of content marketer that we should expect that person to be able to do everything.

SS

Right.

RF

And that's not fair to that individual. It also...you know, it's part of my book is the point that I'm not telling content marketers to fuck off. I'm not telling them that they shouldn't exist. In fact, many of them are probably sitting there saying, "Well, fuck my job if the content I create isn't gonna be used by the other people in my organization." And we end up with this challenge where people, you know, may look down on content marketers when I think they're actually highly valuable. We just have to figure out how to leverage everything that's coming from them.

SS

Well, and so let's get on that subject because it's one that fascinates me personally. I just...you know, I look at



marketing more broadly and the way it's organized today and it's still not optimal clearly and mainly because the old marketing formulas are on their way out the door and no one's quite figured out what's gonna replace them. So there is this whole lack of a general marketing theory and I think this is where content marketing struggles is because you're now bringing potentially into an organization brand journalists who have no background in marketing. And flip the equation, you have marketers who are trained from school on to be messengers, not storytellers.

RF

Yeah.

SS

Yet you hear this term storytelling and it's really bunk for the most part because there is no story, there's no narrative arc and there's no consistency between what the brand is saying about itself and in fact the content that you're producing. So it's a bit of a mess. Now how do companies successfully make that leap? So if you were talking to a company today that does no content marketing what would be your plan if you will to get there sooner rather than later? Would you contract out the work? Would you start small? Would you scale largely quickly? Like what would your recommendation or advice be? I realize that's gonna be so dependent on the type of company but just generally speaking. You must get that question a lot.

RF

Yeah, I do. So first off, let's zero in on a stage of company because very different for the mom and pop, I wanna create content. You know what? Then the founder should be creating content. They're gonna know their business. They should start, they should set by example, prove that it's gonna make a difference. But let's talk about more SMBs, mid-market enterprise organizations, you know, that are investing in a large marketing team, you know, at least 10 marketers on the team or more. I think one of the things that we expect is that if we want content marketing to be this very strategic thing in our organization then we need a content creator to lead that team. And I don't know that that's always the best recipe. Not to say that they can't do it but then you end up with like an editorial team. You end up with a brand journalism team if you will. And that can be very effective in large organizations where it's truly thought leadership. That can work. But if you're trying to map that

thought leadership to revenue and to a buyer journey then I would argue that you're starting to look at more of a digital marketer or demand generation marketer. At least someone who's lived on both sides. Maybe they started their career in content. They moved into demand and now it's on them to really take on that role of bridging the two sides. Now as people are listening to this, they're probably getting really scared. Do I have to go to my CMO? And do I have to say, you know, that we need this new headcount? At some point you probably do. You know, we've seen a lot of people start to use the term content experience manager. Out there we have a couple of people with that title on our team of 20 of which...our marketing team of 20. I've seen a lot of job descriptions out there lately for the content experience manager and very often they're referencing someone who has created content but more importantly understands demand generation, understands the buyer path that people are going in different channels. (36.13)

SS

Understands performance marketing.

RF

Right. When you think about it, it's also...it's...understands where is content gonna be used. And not just on our website but like are we gonna do retargeted ads and then those ads are gonna link to content? Are we gonna send emails from our marketing automation platform and link to content? Are we going to send direct mail where they open it up and they go to a URL and that's content? Like the reality is you can't execute any of these marketing strategies that we're talking about whether it's inbound, ABM, even our sales reps. They're sending out content all day long. So it's someone who understands the complexity of the different touch points.

SS

So you touch on a huge issue which is the mere complexity of it, obviously. And when you look at how much content can be produced by an organization and to your point earlier, how much gets unused because there's no visibility on it. I think more importantly that it's acts of random content that is, "Great, you can have a content strategy but if that doesn't line up to some kind of customer experience strategy, I don't see how content strategy does the heavy lifting to solve the problem." Do you know what I mean? That is there needs to be...and this goes back to the concept of customer first thinking. There needs to be

from the top down an understanding of what you want the customer experience to be. Because maybe it's light on content. Right? Content isn't gonna be the answer to everyone's, talking about how much you...point that you were just making. So my point is is content marketing only gonna succeed if a company, or brand I should say, has the right vision around what that differentiated or signature experience could be?

RF

That's a loaded question. I'll say I think there's a big problem...

SS

I specialize in that, by the way.

RF

I think there's a big problem. I mean, and I have an opinion. It's not a popular one. It would probably get many, many CMOs typically fired. Luckily I'm a founder so, you know, I feel like as a CMO I'm somewhat safe here. You never know. But, you know, there's this term attribution right now, or multi touch attribution which is the idea that, you know, we can't simply look at the first touch to conversion. You know, you came in as a lead so we're gonna attribute everything to the event you were at or the ebook that you read or whatever it is. (38.31)

SS

It's a bit simplistic.

RF

Or last touch as in, you know, what was the last thing you did? It's this idea that there's so many touches but the problem that comes with that is...and it's right, first off. Before I say it is a problem, it's right. There is multiple touch points across that buyer journey but in some ways it's letting marketing leaders almost say, "Well, I've gotta do everything because I don't know what's gonna have an impact." Or they'll be able to show that the prospect touched 20 different, you know, touch points along the way so naturally they're all important. And I think it's a bit of this bloated attribution that we're getting to.

SS

But isn't the challenge here is if we look at everything as a buyer journey, of course that content is going to be skewed in a certain way to support that decision process. But half the battle, more than half because you referenced it in your book is really post purchase, is what's the experience like once somebody's bought for the first time. That's why I'm

suggesting the gap occurs and we have the same issues with our clients. Convincing them that as much attention if not more investment should be put after the sale is made than prior to the sale was made. Do you know what I'm saying?

RF

I do. I do. Yes. So I agree with that. You know, Laura Ramos at Forester. She writes a lot about this in terms of...

SS

Lifecycle marketing, yeah.

RF

Yeah, and, you know, the ideas of activation. And we've actually...with Uberflip we've started to see some of our customers using our platform to better engage marketers with the right content at the right time. Our team internally here has started to take on a lot more responsibility in defining what our role is within customer marketing. So putting together content that is just as rich and well thought out and strategically created by our content team, you know, that's gonna serve post purchase. So you start to...you know, it's less thought leadership to a degree but it's...there's still no element of thought leadership in there. Well, sorry. You're right. I should say it's less about removing our brand, which we try and do a little bit sometimes at the top of the funnel. We try and say, "Listen, we can't talk about our company. We gotta be truly thought leaders and we gotta show best practices." Once they're a customer you can start to interject your brand a little bit more, your solution because now they're committed. They're trying to justify the ROI in that platform.

SS

Well, and so...and there's two conversations here, B2B and B2C. Recognizing that. But I mean, you look at the pantheon of what we would regard today as leading content producers and I wanna invite you to think about this and offer your own companies, but certainly Red Bull sets a standard, Dollar Shave Club has proven it works. Kraft Foods, one of the early companies to embrace the concept of recipes as a way to connect with people. We talked about HubSpot. Nike certainly in terms of the value it provides every day to people. You know, people use it religiously on their app to help them with their...or even the Cleveland Clinic, a company you brought to Conex.

RF

Amanda. She's great.

SS

Amazing work. Who would you add to that list of greats where you can look at them as reference point not only just in terms of the quality of the work that they're doing but the success that they've had with that? Who would you add to that list?

RF

Yeah, let's look at a couple in different ways. I mean, I think you said HubSpot on there but one of the things I'm impressed with HubSpot...I actually on my podcast recently, I interviewed Kieran who's their VP of Growth and one of the things that interested...that I found interesting is...so HubSpot now has users of their platform but as he describes it they have two other types of users. They have freemium users because they have this free product. So that's their second type. So we all, you know, understand tech companies, SaaS. Those are their...your two typical types. His third type of user though...he described it as a content user. And they define that as someone who registers and gets a full account type of some sort inside of HubSpot and he's there really just to consume content, more premium, gated content that's designed to make you into a customer before you're even a customer. (42.50)

SS

Or train. I will add, brilliance of them and I see it with our staff, the junior staff who look for advice on the latest...and they're not gonna get it in their textbook. So where do they get advice and training from? HubSpot actually delivers it to them in a whole bunch of different ways as far as digital marketing goes. That's its brilliance as far as I'm concerned.

RF

Absolutely. Absolutely. So and then another option that, you know, I...and I think this is the opportunity for people to be motivated because we look at some of these brands that you've given examples of and we sit there, just as I said with HubSpot and we say, "Well, how am I gonna become a Red Bull or how am I gonna become a HubSpot?" That's overwhelming. But I gave you this example earlier of Snowflake and Daniel Day and Daniel's approach is...and he talked to me. He's like, "We can't create that much content. We create the content that we know our customers or prospects are gonna want and then we package it in a way that's for them." They are personalizing content delivery but they're doing so through the selection of content that they have at their disposal. Not saying, "Okay,

we're gonna go land this customer. What content do we have to create for them?" They do that at a point within, you know, going back and circling back to what content should we create but they're trying to create content for as many accounts as possible. They're just handpicking the right ones which is no different than the experiences that we're all used to on sites like Netflix, on sites like Spotify. I always kid that, you know, when I go to Spotify and I get that "made for you" or that, you know, playlist of the day that they have, they're not composing new music for me. Like AC/DC doesn't go and, you know, pump out a new song for me. I simply get the best songs that are in their library that are geared toward my interests in my life.

SS

And I think you've touched on something really important. You've mentioned it a couple of times but it's this idea of the long tail and finding the niche audience that you wanna serve. But that niche audience you wanna serve needs to be clearly be aligned with the market segments that you actually are interested in pursuing as well. There needs to be, you know, synchronicity there if you will, between your decision as to your go-to-market strategy and clearly your audience building strategy to build commitment, belief and repeat visits etc. etc. I guess that's...that would be common sense. I do wanna ask you this question though because, you know, we referenced Red Bull and Kraft and a few other companies. P&G is another company that's embracing content as a component of lifestyle marketing and that is to say for their brand to be integral to the lives of the people that they're serving they need to connect with those...you used the term passions earlier, values etc. You look at the Thank You Mom campaign they ran in the Olympics. Brilliant. You know, didn't talk about their brands at all. Just positioned themselves as they should, as connecting to their audience's values. So there's that side of the fence which is what Forester calls media led content marketing because it's supported by paid advertising. A lot of what we've been talking about today in this meeting is they...Forester calls customer led-content marketing, which I'm not sure I love but it's the idea of building audiences more organically to...in the way that you were just describing. And then you get a whole constituency saying, "Well, heck. All marketing today is content marketing. There is no difference." Do you

make distinctions in the different types of marketing out there, media-led, customer-led, whatever your equivalency terms are? Do you make distinctions in...and what do you say to the marketers who scoff and say, “Oh, I’ll...you know, an ad message is content today.” (46.23)

RF

You know, one of the things I knew you...I’m not gonna answer this one. I can almost jump ahead to an area I know you wanted to discuss today with my answer which is I think that there’s a difference between creating content to tell stories and creating content to drive revenue. And they’re both very effective strategies and I’m not one to crap on storytelling because I consider myself a storyteller. I love analogies, metaphors, ways to get people to pay attention and buy in. But at some point within we also have to figure out how we show the value that we can drive, right. And I think some of the examples that you talk about with Red Bull and P&G, you know, sometimes it’s more about the stories within there and as a result we’re able to fall in love with that brand. I’m not gonna say that can’t be done for more niche products because there are those opportunities but we have to look at how much time we’re gonna spend with that brand, how much impression we’re gonna get with that brand, what’s our goal and what’s...how much consideration will we give and as a result start to shift our thinking in terms of what type of content we may be looking for. Am I looking for very practical, help me understand...

SS

Conversion content.

RF

Yeah.

SS

Or brand awareness content or even brand attitudinal content which is kind of what you were describing where... well, P&G specifically. Where their investment at one level is to build up P&G as...its corporate purpose or the same might be true with Unilever versus say the Dove brand.

RF

Right.

SS

You’re operating at two different levels.

RF

And what we have to remember is in some of these organizations there are people doing both. Just each of us or people listening to this may only see part of it, because until we enter into that buy in cycle we don’t see all that

other content that’s being created. We just see the stuff that’s designed to get us to pay attention and it’s designed to pull us in. and when we’re ready to be pulled in the best ones will continue with that...you know, as you called it, conversion content or retention content depending on the states that they’re in. I think that’s the key is we can’t just go all in on the storytelling at the top. There should be an element of storytelling with all of our content. (48.39)

SS

Well, there needs to be a consistent voice and tone. Don’t you think?

RF

Agreed. Agreed.

SS

Like it’s a...it’d be like, you know, you have a certain personality in a conversation. Brands similarly, it needs a certain...and if that doesn’t play out across all forms of content there is dissonance of it...that’s great with the end consumer.

RF

We actually recently...I mean, being very transparent at Uberflip, we realized we have a problem with our own content strategy. Forget about like what we do from a product perspective. We realized that we had...

SS

Shoemaker’s, you know, that...

RF

Yeah. But we had a good problem. We had way too many leads. Way too many leads. Even after she was...

SS

That’s a good problem to have.

RF

Absolutely. Because everyone is intrigued about the way we’re approaching the market, the way we challenge content. Even the things that we help them with for their content strategies. But where we were weak in terms of the content that we had was how do we get them from, you know...we’re B2B so how do we get them from MQL down to being an opportunity. How do we move things? So we had to actually shift our thinking to say, “Okay. Well, how do we think more about that buyer journey a little bit more?” And I think that’s what I would say, you know, back to your question on...I think it was media led versus...

SS

Customer led.

RF

Versus customer led is that we need to play on both sides. You know, large organizations start to have corporate

marketing teams versus more demand gen team. That corporate marketing team may be your storytellers. Right? There's...this is what our brand stands for, this is our rally cry. But then the revenue team or the demand gen team, they've gotta create the content that's actually gonna pull those people in to a buyer journey, to a buying cycle to talk to sales, to arm sales, to, you know, to show the value and ROI that someone's gonna...

SS

Well, I liked the distinction you made earlier which is to say there is a demand generation element to this where you need to think about what problems am I solving there but the relationship management component, it's divided between probably between an onboarding stage and, you know, basically an orientation stage and then obviously as a relationship settles into a certain cadence you're trying to move customers up the value equation and that's where it gets interesting because what content will help to move customers from, you know, a so-so relationship to one where they're advocates for you, become...and those are all strategic objectives and as I go back to what I was saying earlier. Unless you have an experience strategy that sits above it your content strategy...becomes chaotic unless you...seemingly to me anyway can figure some of that out. I wanna go...I wanna...just wanna touch...don't wanna leave the measurement question quite there because I don't think we've addressed it as head on as perhaps we could. So there is what I'd call low level metrics which it seems to me most of the digital world has lived in for so long now without any ability to ladder up to higher levels of marketing success and measurement. And then when you put content marketing equation, the distance between outcome and those initial metrics is even greater which puts pressure on marketing to say it's worth that investment. How do you make the business case for content marketing given those traditional formulaic approaches to funding of marketing initiatives?

RF

First off, I think we've evolved from the bad state we were with content at one point. Like, you know, we were almost going down that same road as social where we just tried to validate that engagement was enough to justify investment and we know where that's landed social. You know, not that social's not important, not that social media marketers are not important but, you know, some of the metrics from

the early days just weren't gonna cut it for justifying, you know, the spend there. You know, we've moved away...a good friend of mine, Matt Hines did this awesome report on content and what people are tracking and they're moving away from tracking likes.

SS

Or social shares.

RF

Or social shares. Those type of things are no longer enough. Now there is still people who look at them and maybe more in B2C than perhaps B2B because, you know, some of the content we're creating is of such volume in the consumer world with so many channels. But, you know, I think what we really need to do with our content is understand is it actually driving to the outcomes that we're looking for, and that's...that comes back to this point that we talked about earlier in terms of multi touch attribution, understanding how...what role content's actually having in that process so that we can map back that value. You know, the tricky part is who's responsible for this. Again, is this the responsibility of the content creator? Is it the responsibility of the demand gen marketer? I would argue in that case it's actually the marketing team as a whole. You know, this isn't a one person thing and that's the part that I don't like when content marketers say, "Well, it's just on me to create the content. It's not on me to tell you if that content's driving value or not." Those people need to be knee deep in those solutions, whether you're using, you know, a marketing automation platform like a HubSpot or a Marketo or an Eloqua product. Any of those will help you as the marketer jump in there and understand who at what stage is actually engaging in these content assets you're creating. (53.50)

SS

What's the answer to a CMO who says, "Well, how much of my budget should go to content marketing?"

RF

Well, again, what are we defining as content marketing is the problem here I think. I would say that what we've seen so far is that when we define our budget we define the content creation piece, and then we just expect that because we have it, they will come. I mean, you know, Kevin Costner in "Field of Dreams", "If I build it, they will come." It's not that simple. We have to actually take the approach to say how are we gonna use this content and evaluate it on a channel by channel basis. We may have a great piece of

content that we put no dollars behind and works really well from an SEO perspective for us because it's indexed, people are searching for that. But we may have another piece of content that we put a lot of effort, a lot of time, a lot of, you know, dollars even if we outsource it. It may have no organic attribution, but it may be key to getting someone to buy from you in the very end. And that's where we have to start to evaluate what content is actually driving those outcomes that we look for. And it's...that's not the type of thing that a social sharer as we said is gonna tell you or just a view. Go back to the example we talked about earlier with Snowflake where they said, "50% of our views are coming from accounts that we've actually targeted after they were in MQL."

SS

Is this the age of peak content? Are we about to enter dystrophic disillusionment? Where companies start to backpedal because they can't make the business case that you were just describing or is AI going to come to the rescue here and help people find the content they need more easily, or even more science fiction-wise, will AI actually create content at some point for people?

RF

That's a great question. So first off...a loaded one too, yet again.

SS

I'm specialized in that.

RF

You're good at these. I think all those play together. I think AI is only gonna make it harder for us as marketers to create great content. It's gonna create a higher standard. Just think of what's happening already. There used to be this funny joke which was where do you hide something and the answer was page two of Google results because no one looks there.

SS

it's in your book too, I noticed.

RF

Mildly humorous. Now though the scary question is does anyone go to result two? Like, you know, that button on Google that says, "I'm feeling lucky." When I speak to a Google Home, you know, or an Alexa or whatever, you know, home device I have I'm basically saying, "I'm feeling lucky" every time. And that I believe is what we're gonna start to expect more and more. When we get to someone's website, we're gonna expect to be lucky,

because when I open Spotify or I open Netflix, they know what I'm looking for. So this idea of having too much content...we...a lot of that content will not be surfaced through search. It's getting simpler and simpler and simpler to find what we want. The question is how do we tee up what's next? Because that's what leaves us there. We talked earlier about infinite scroll.

SS

You're stranded, in other words.

RF

Right. How do we create an infinite scroll? How do we emulate what these, you know, mass medium channels like LinkedIn and Instagram and Facebook are doing? But how do we do that through the brand lens? So someone comes and they say, "You know what? I'm here because it was a great piece of content but now I'm sticking around because what you got up for me next is just as relevant." You've gotta start to know people and if we don't, they're just gonna opt out.

SS

Sure.

RF

Opt out could be anything from unsubscribe. Basically, "I'm not coming back, right."

SS

Yeah, or not coming back. Absolutely, absolutely. Well, there's a lot of loose ends to this picture. Final question.

RF

Sure.

SS

Marc Pritchard as you know is the CMO at P&G has said, "We are going to look realistically now at a possibility of an ad free world." If that happens it changes everything. And it may be a progression or it may be fairly quick. We're starting to see some significant changes going on now. Does that mean content rules at that point? Pick your time frame. Five, 10 years from now. (58.12)

RF

I...listen, I...Yoav and I...Yoav's my cofounder here. We have said for a long time that there will be a point where our home page is content. I mean, right now it's messaging and product messaging but what people come for is content. Check out websites of companies like IBM. They're already doing that. That's what you're greeted with. And part of that is because their offerings are so complex that they're just jumping there but I think more and more of us are gonna start to realize that that's what we need to

lead with. We need to lead with our position, which is no different than what Mad Men did back in the day. I mean, you know, Don Draper is sitting there and saying, “What do we stand for.” It’s the same thing that we’re seeing with content. We just need to make sure, as we’ve said just the question before, that we lead someone down the journey off of there, because at some point we’ve gotta get them to buy our products, but we need to be a little bit more suave about it if you will. We gotta lead them down there without them feeling like they’re being led.

SS

Right. Well, that’s what a good salesperson does too.

That concludes our interview with Randy Frisch.

The answer to the content glut, it seems, is to improve usability and relevancy: making it easier for people to navigate the choices - or at least guiding them directly to the right choices. By putting as much thought into experience design as content development, marketers have a much better chance of engaging customers at every stage of the purchase journey. The goal is not simply to convert potential

buyers, but to help and inform them – whether that’s thinking differently about a problem, diving deeper into a topic of interest or searching for new ideas and inspiration. Up until now the practice of content marketing has always put the emphasis on content ahead of marketing as brands tried to master the publishing craft. Now the reverse needs to happen if marketers want their content to perform as intended – and for their growing investment to pay off.



Stephen Shaw is the chief strategy officer of Kenna, a marketing solutions provider specializing in customer experience management. He is also the host of a regular podcast called Customer First Thinking. Stephen can be reached via e-mail at [sshaw@kenna.ca](mailto:sshaw@kenna.ca).