



Content Marketing: Ideas for programming to meet industry demand

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Abstract:

In addition to employment opportunities for students and graduates, content marketing—the practice of a brand providing engaging, useful content that its audience wants and needs on brand-owned platforms—offers opportunities for small university programs as well. With burgeoning growth in the field of content marketing, how can journalism and mass communication programs, particularly small programs, meet the growing demand for content marketers and prepare students for career opportunities in this field?

According to Haeusennann (2013), who studied contracted companies producing branded content, content marketing utilizes “the writing standards of conventional journalistic products” but the “content is designed on behalf of an organization with an aim to engage their customers and/or members, deepen the relationship, which shall ultimately lead to loyalty, and—in the case of profit-oriented organizations—increased sales” (p. 104). As such, content marketers wear the hats of journalists, marketers, PR professionals, and advertisers. Thus the well-prepared content marketing professional necessarily will possess competencies from multiple journalism, mass communication, and business disciplines. These core competencies may include reporting and writing fundamentals; digital communication strategies; direct and indirect marketing skills; media planning abilities; PR principles; consumer awareness concepts; advertising messaging fundamentals; magazine storytelling abilities; microeconomic principles; and more.

The name “content marketing” alone can be somewhat of a flashpoint in journalism and mass communication academic circles. “If it’s content marketing, does it belong in a school of business rather than a

school of journalism and mass communication?” the discussion goes. However, “content marketing” is the most commonly used terminology in the industry. Those in the academy may feel more comfortable with “brand journalism” or “branded content.” Regardless, historically there has been a divide between the purposes and goals of advertisers, marketers, and public relations professionals and those of journalists. The field of content marketing, however, blurs the lines between these groups.

Journalism and mass communication programs continue to evolve to address the ever-changing platforms, tools, and practices of journalists and mass communication professionals and to prepare students for this rapidly evolving industry. The field of content marketing, though technically not a new discipline, has recently experienced tremendous growth with increased opportunities for content marketing professionals. A recent LinkedIn jobs search netted 3,551 results for available content marketing positions. And a general LinkedIn search for “content marketing” on the same day produced 72,600 “company” results and more than 3.3 million “people” results. In addition to employment opportunities for students and

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graduates, content marketing—the practice of a brand providing engaging, useful content that its audience wants and needs on brand-owned platforms—offers opportunities for small university programs as well. With burgeoning growth in the field of content marketing, how can journalism and mass communication programs, particularly small programs, meet the growing demand for content marketers and prepare students for career opportunities in this field?

In an attempt to address this question, as well as to weigh potential new offerings within its journalism and mass communication programs, the researchers, with assistance from an honors program magazine media student research assistant at Drake University, conducted an audit of program offerings from 107 U.S. colleges and universities accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) and 518 U.S. colleges and universities accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (MCSB). Both ACEJMC and MCSB schools were included in this research because of the nature of content marketing.

Of the 107 schools in the U.S. currently holding ACEJMC accreditation, a review of majors, minors, concentrations, specializations, and course offerings showed that none offered a major in content marketing, none offered a minor in content marketing, and only one—Northwestern University—offered a specialization in content marketing. Furthermore, only eight courses in content marketing are offered, with four courses offered at the University of South Carolina alone. Other universities that offered a content marketing course were University of Iowa, University of Oregon, Brigham Young University and West Virginia University. After an examination of course offerings at each of the 107 ACEJMC-accredited programs, researchers found an additional nine courses that mentioned content marketing as a component within a broader course description. San Jose State University and Colorado State University each offered two courses that addressed content marketing. Bowling Green State University; University of South Dakota; California State, Chico; California State University, Fullerton; and Ball State University each offered one course that mentioned content marketing in its description.

Content marketing-related offerings were even more limited within the 518 business schools in the U.S. holding MCSB accreditation, a specialized global accreditation for business and accounting programs. A review of majors, minors, concentrations, specializa-

tions, and course offerings for these programs showed that none offered a major in content marketing, none offered a minor in content marketing, and none offered a concentration or specialization in content marketing. Furthermore, only four universities offered a single course in content marketing (Arizona State University; University of Alaska, Anchorage; University of Florida; and Utah Valley University), while 14 courses at 14 different universities mentioned content marketing as a component within a broader course description. Those universities were Rutgers University, Adelphi University, American University, Canisius College, Fordham University, Harvard University, Loyola University, Miami University, University of Southern Maine, Stetson University, University of Central Arkansas, University of Montana, University of New Mexico and University of Rochester.

So, where does this leave small journalism and mass communication programs? With lots of opportunities. After completing a thorough examination of content marketing-related offerings nationally, the researchers identified four key themes that can help programs of any size to develop innovative content marketing pedagogy. Think of these options on a continuum, ranging from a content marketing unit within an existing course to a multi-disciplinary collaboration resulting in a content marketing major. These themes can guide faculty discussion in curriculum development and help determine the course of action for any university.

1. Weave content marketing principles into existing courses. Several universities mention content marketing and closely related topics within the course descriptions and syllabi of existing classes. For small journalism and mass communication programs, a variety of opportunities exist to introduce students to content marketing principles in this fashion. The chance to incorporate core principles from content marketing logically and naturally can occur in journalism writing courses, magazine publishing classes, advertising principles classes, advertising copywriting classes, marketing principles classes, and digital and social media strategies courses, to name a few. While simply introducing the topic in one or more courses won't fully prepare students for content marketing jobs upon graduation, it will expose students to an entire field of career opportunities. And, particularly important for small programs, it can be accomplished with a minimum of additional faculty resources. Faculty collaboration among courses throughout the

small program is critical to success of this approach, allowing students to develop a seamless understanding of content marketing principles by experiencing more consistent pedagogy among faculty.

2. Add one-credit special topic content marketing courses on a rotating basis to judge interest while building interest. An increased commitment in terms of resource allocation, offering a one-credit (or a fraction of the unit's standard course credit offered) content marketing course on a rotating basis as a special topic provides the small program an opportunity to attract new students to the school or major, while gauging the potential interest from students in a future concentration, minor, or major. Particularly if special topics are currently part of a program's schedule, this is a low-risk way to test the market for a potential new course or program. While developing content marketing as a special topics course in any format would be valuable, offering a one-credit course may help lessen faculty overload payments or entice adjuncts or professionals to teach in shorter sessions when they may be unable to commit to a teaching assignment spanning a traditional term. These options help programs elevate the importance of content marketing as a distinct area of study while also reflecting current industry practice—an important measure for a journalism and mass communication program of any size.

3. Enhance options with content marketing concentrations or specializations. With such limited offerings currently available in the U.S. in terms of content marketing majors and minors, small programs could build a competitive advantage by developing a content marketing concentration or specialization. Faculty buy-in across multiple courses and enhanced curriculum review could help small programs maximize existing resources and increase enrollment. This concentration could appeal to students in a variety of majors including journalism, advertising, marketing, business, public relations, English, and politics. But, with such broad appeal and application, this would also require increased collaboration with faculty colleagues across campus and colleagues throughout the industry.

4. Build capacity with cross-disciplinary concentrations, specializations, minors or majors. While required classes are often administered within a single unit, and more narrowly, from within a single major or discipline, the very nature of content marketing requires faculty to think more broadly about curriculum. Content marketers promote brands like a marketer,

plan and research like an advertiser, and write and tell engaging stories like a journalist. It's a natural extension then, to apply this same melding of strengths to the core requirements of a new content marketing major, minor, concentration or specialization. Broadening the scope of disciplines from which faculty draw core requirements for content marketing curricula provides a distinct advantage for small programs. By harnessing the strengths of related disciplines around campus and capitalizing on collaboration among a smaller faculty campus-wide, it is possible for small programs to create a dynamic content marketing program with only a handful of new courses.

With no accredited schools currently offering majors or minors in content marketing, innovative small programs have an opportunity to be one of the first to market with this unique offering. If programs build upon an existing foundation of core journalism and mass communication courses, a brand new major could be developed by offering as little as one new content marketing course each year for several years. While this is no small feat, particularly with thinly stretched resources, it is within the realm of possibility for an ambitious small program that seeks to differentiate itself and to prepare students for a field ripe with opportunities. In fact, small programs are uniquely positioned to lead the way in this effort, because they are notably innovative out of necessity, given budget, faculty and time constraints. Small programs are nimble, leading the way in transforming traditional curricula to create dynamic, multi-disciplinary programs that answer industry needs. The industry is calling ... small programs are perfectly positioned to respond.

References

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