

The future isn't digital - it's people

 By [Travis Bussiahn](#)

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There's an interesting thing I'm watching in the content strategy & marketing space: A separation of paths, a divergence in the wood. I might be tired and on the wrong side of too many coffees as this epiphany comes, so grab a pinch of salt and humour me.

[Dion Chang](#) speaks about "[soft power](#)" being the thing that will win brands in this new space. It's effectively the ability to attract and co-op rather than to coerce. Now before you go telling me, "duh Travis, all us strategists and content people know that's the way of the future, it's like native bru," let me suggest this: knowledge of the *theory* of authenticity does not an authentic campaign make.

Chang's comments on soft power sparked a conversation between my brain and my heart and I made up my own stuff (which is generally more fun) and came up with this notion: If there is a "soft", then there is a "hard". (At this point the coffee is being fed intravenously.)

I'm involved in a lot of forums and see a lot of us "content strategists" (as we like to be called) strutting our stuff and I am amazed at just how much some of us all sound the same. It's possibly because a lot of the stuff we read makes sense and we adopt it, but it's also because we do the *hard* stuff. The theory. We promise brands 'numbers'. A certain amount of posts or tweets, a spreadsheet of audited results, a curation plan for amplifying existing content, [wordy-linky articles](#), [SEO](#) and [syndicated](#) and or original content feeds. It's all very scientific and much needed. But this is where most of us play. We offer, to a degree, the same service. We peddle artificial intelligence and the difference in performance for a client is made by the diligence and often weight of hours ploughed into their project. This is "hard" and a "*what*" rather than a "*why*" drives it.

What is "soft"?

So what is "soft"? Soft is the game-breaker. Soft is the stuff that can't be copied, or automated or fed. Why? *Soft plays in the realm of the heart and not the mind.*

Soft makes a connection that robots cannot. Soft is the story and the telling therein. It is where flashes of unbottleable (I made that word up) lightning create moments that touch an audience and engage them with magic and human relevance.

Soft is where we have fun, where we draw on the walls. It is where a person experiences our content and then leaves having either shared it online or around the dinner table. It is the conversation starter. Soft is reserved for human beings and robots are *not* allowed to enjoy it.

Until marketers are measured on more than filling the funnel the emphasis will be on output and not quality. It leads to creating content that had to have its authenticity discussed and plotted before it went out there. That's a ruse. A fake lure. Synthetic skin on a lifeless form.

Everyday, thousands of community managers go into work and pull their hair out because they *must* produce content for their communities so that the brands they work for can gain market traction, build audience and up their [edge rank](#). I see them stressed and entirely reactive in all they do. But this is not to say there aren't pearls out there, which brings me to my next point: Radio... Huh?

Radio

I come from radio. I produced a hell of a lot of content for radio in my 20's. I was a content machine (my mom says I *still* am). Ask my content-machine-producing [program manager](#). Ask Daryl Ilbury. From the time I arrived at 4.30am every morning of my breakfast show to the time I left at around 1.30pm each day there was one mission - to tell as many stories in as many ways as I could.

I made pictorial content, written content, radio content, pink content, yellow content, blog content, video content and I stuck it everywhere I could and it was good.

Did I do this because I had a mandate from [East Coast Radio](#) to do so? No. Did I do it to attempt authenticity in the name of increasing brand awareness? No. Was my sheer attention to detail contractually sanctioned or a requirement for me to generate as much multi medium ammo as I could sitting in some scope of work strategy? No. I was a radio producer back then, not a multimedia specialist. So what drove me?

A sheer desire to tell stories

I'll fill you in: a sheer desire to tell stories. To see how far stories could go, to test all the flavours and make new recipes with them. To touch the human soul at the other end of the narrative I was sending out; to inspire laughter; to inspire tears; to inspire. It was a core and a raw drive from deep within to express and to entertain - to connect. The fact that the radio show and its brand prospered was simply because of the cause and effect of it all.

What's my point here? It's this: Community managers and content strategists are the radio producers of the new world. A type of person designed to use topicality and real-time content injections to connect with human beings.

When you get a good one, they're good because they were born to do it and your brand will just happen to benefit from their passion and desire to get behind the controls everyday and create.

Your brand will generate edge rank, your content will be authentic and your business will grow - not because you planned it but because of the heartbeat of the storyteller you've got sitting there. Find the good ones, the ones that *want* to be there and not because they need a stepping-stone. In radio there were ones who were 'radio' to the core and then there were tons who wanted TV more.

Ultimate bad-ass content agency

Sure, quantitative metrics (hard) work and the fake lure will always catch a fish but there's more than just that. There's qualitative (soft) and I want to work with companies that share in the vision of inspiration and life change through their reach and their fables. Yes, let's brainstorm, let's design, let's plan - but let's be the radiant architects of vivid narrative and emotional connection rather than the detached draughtsmen of Edge Rank, ROI and plotted authenticity.

Am I saying that "soft" is more important than "hard"? No I'm not. Together, they make up the ultimate bad-ass content agency, capable of delivering on both sides of the content coin: metrics and science for client, experience for audience.

But I must say that I see an oversupply of hard theory and not enough soft authenticity in my circles. A deluge of content created for brands and a rarity of content created for human beings. That observation probably says more about my circles and less about the state of the industry - but then this is my opinion piece and if you're reading it then you're in my circles and you'll no doubt have a comment which I want you to make right now. The future isn't digital - it's people.

ABOUT TRAVIS BUSSIAHN

Travis Bussiahn is the Executive Creative Director of the Happy Media Video Agency. He solves creative and business problems for both Happy Media and its clients. He understands the importance of emotional connection in content, branded or otherwise and believes in traditional media's ability to be blended with new media to profound and holistic effect. He loves and excels at concept and the art of story. Contact details: website www.happymedia.co.za | Twitter [@TravisBussiahn](https://twitter.com/TravisBussiahn)

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