

Does anyone know what content is any more?

By [Justine Drake](#), issued by [Dentsu](#)

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What is content anyway? Well, other than being the most overtraded word in marketing history, it also appears to mean different things to different people most of the time.

I come from a traditional content marketing background where, waaaay back when, we produced magazines, and added value print supplements and seeded articles for clients who wanted to communicate in a 'more relatable, less press release-centric' manner.

While this was hotting up, so was the digital age of marketing.

Our print offering morphed into blogs and vlogs. Truth be told, the days of the blogger were dark – what a lot of shite most of these overnight upstarts sprouted. And where are they now? Most are, thankfully, doing whatever it is they actually trained to do instead of being purported experts in their hobby fields. But back then, 'I can cook' or 'I like eating at restaurants' would lead to a much-touted blog and a gargantuan smack of arrogance. It's always the ones who really know next to nothing about a host of subjects who are the most arrogant. An unfathomable truism.



Justine Drake

Of course we now have influencers, aka creators... But let's not jump the chronology of content's development.

Blogs were long and often tedious, and frequently steeped in questionable facts and inflated opinions. Okay, some were lovely and inviting and inclusive, but, really, they did bang on. Those that thankfully still exist (now called blog content) are mercifully the product of humans who can actually pen a sentence, have a well-constructed opinion, are genuinely amusing or actually know their stuff. Survival of the fittest and all that.

And then a big part of content became mailers, underpinned by well-researched pieces of content – from finance and food to gardening and sex – populating websites with something more useful than a product and a price. Suddenly, it seemed only right that a website should offer more than an online shop. Sheer genius!

Not to miss the making of a buck, traditional above-the-line agencies jumped on the burgeoning content wagon, and everyone opened content studios. Oddly enough, not everyone actually got it right – you see, you need real journalists (not copywriters) and research humans, SEO and product specialists, and a host of others. Content is actually big business and rather useful when done right, at least if you're going to be doing your clients and their customers any decent service.

But was this content getting enough eyeballs? Well... no. So, confusingly, we needed to create a different kind of content to shine a spotlight on, well, content. And so social media content became a thing. Now it's all called content – short form, long form, ATL, BTL, TTL, social, video, music... endless streams of content on every morphing platform, all called the same thing! And in a business that prides itself on creativity, we have ONE word for things that are simply not the same. No wonder clients are confused. I suspect a large number of agency staff are too.

Finally – well, for now anyway – we have content creators (note the title case), who really are bloggers on steroids and who, very bizarrely, are not the creators of the content mentioned above, but creators of their own content. Until a year ago, they were simply called Influencers. But you can't influence if you don't create 'authentic content'.

So, again, what is content? Well just about anything written for anybody, about anything.

Unless, of course, it's good content. Then it's something different!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Justine Drake is executive content director of Dentsu Creative. She doesn't take herself too seriously, but after 30 or so years in all things media and marketing, she has an opinion or two about content.

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