

The Art of Editorial

What's the secret to good editorial?
We ask leading journalists.



Charles Arthur is a former technology editor at *The Guardian* and *The Independent* and author of *Digital Wars: Apple, Google, Microsoft and the battle for the internet*.

A good story is one that does more than inform. It adds value to the topic at hand – whether through critique, analysis or treatment. It can't be sensational, and everything in it must be verified. It must be balanced, independent, and nuanced. It's got to be relevant to the audience at hand in a way that's new or that helps to refine their thinking. And it's got to have integrity. These are the core principles of how we at Raconteur approach editorial for brands.



Dominic Mills is former editor of *Campaign* and writes the 'Mills on Monday' column for *MediaTel's Newsline*. He is an Honorary Professor of Journalism at Roehampton University and has written for *Euromoney*, *Reuters*, and the *Daily Telegraph*.

Creating quality editorial is quite the art. It's particularly hard for brands who are often under suspicion for the intent behind the content they produce. But the gains are significant – brands who master the art of editorial stand to gain the respect, mindshare, reliance, and ultimately trust of their target audience and their peers.



Lucy Fisher has more than 15 years' experience working as a journalist, specialising in B2B communications. Lucy has written for *The Guardian*, the *BBC*, *Marketing Week* and *Newsweek*.

In order to present a set of valuable guidelines, we've interviewed three top journalists who have written for *The BBC*, *The Guardian*, *Newsweek*, *MediaTel*, *Reuters*, and *Raconteur*. Below is a gathering of our tips, tricks and ideas, substantiated by their experiences as primary content creators.



tap into your reader's mindset

1



There is a unique art to crafting an angle for an editorial piece that is essential to its success. In a business context, this amounts to understanding accurately where their knowledge gaps are – as Charles Arthur puts it, “discovering an ‘angle’ is discovering where that gap in knowledge, and hence interest, lies”. He goes on to explain, “good storytelling is about tension: there has to be a distance between what the reader expects or knows and what you present to them, and you have to exploit that by making them want to find out more.” But educating top-level professionals on their own industry is no small task.

Arthur gives good advice by suggesting brands take a nuanced approach: “confront their prejudices with facts that both contain their expectations but also expand them. That means they realise that the world runs as they think but that it’s also more complex – and now they can see how to navigate through it.” Understanding that psychology, and building an editorial project around it is the linchpin of first-class business content from brands.

By adapting your content marketing strategy, you will position your business as a thought leader and ‘knowledge owner’ in the digital era.

Put people at the heart of your content

2



It’s clear that a human-centric approach to editorial has the most success. When it comes to creating content that builds a story, the advice is to find the experts: involve those who are passionate about the topic, and relay the information through their eyes and words. Dominic Mills points out that “by combining the topical with the human interest” a brand can convene ideas in such a way that they feel accessible and approachable. Arthur highlights that “with editorial, the key element is getting people to speak to explain the topic”. If you can realise this, your analysis won’t feel dry because you’re using quotes and interviews to illuminate important ideas and concepts. As Mills reiterates, “telling the story through people is invariably the best way – find the narrative, and then everything hangs together from beginning to end. The reader is hooked.” We would recommend brands to find the hidden voices in their supply chain or the right independent experts whose analysis will be highly regarded by the industry.



Use research to create your framework

3



Research – meaning either original, proprietary quantitative and qualitative analysis or existing fact-based material – is critical to building credibility and trust with your audience. It stands out, it speaks for itself, and it also lends itself to creating the kinds of angles and nuances that an audience will respond to. Arthur highlighted good research as the single biggest factor in creating high quality editorial and the best means by which to engender trust in journalism. Because research is specific, it also allows for the creation of very specific briefs for the analysis, which means the editorial can be crafted without the vagueness and limpness that so often characterises branded content. It's not easy to pull a story out of thin air, or create a piece of newsworthy content, so including research offers brands the opportunity to build out the infrastructure of a content project artfully and with much scope for success.

Have a counter-intuitive approach

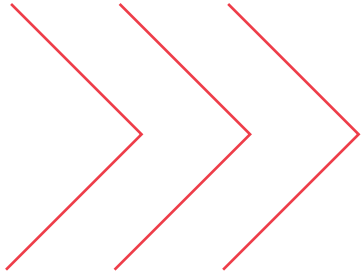
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This principle goes to the very heart of journalism and its purpose. Why create content in the first place? Yes, it's done by the Marketing Department, and yes, the Marketing Department is responsible for helping to further the business agenda. But the principle of journalism is to “educate, stimulate, and cause debate” or “to provide context” according to Mills, and to “inform and entertain” according to Lucy Fisher. If brands are going to commission content projects, they have to put these principles first. Only in this way will they be able to generate the engagement and loyalty that in turn will serve them in a business context down the line. It is counterintuitive perhaps, but well-crafted editorial absolutely cannot be about the sale. It has to be honest and transparent, and it has to serve its readers.

Mills points out that trust in journalism is engendered by being honest and not wasting the reader's time, and a large part of that is achieved by taking this content-first approach. Where good content prioritises educating and challenging readers, badly produced editorial tends to be “a sales pitch masquerading as an unbiased article” Fisher points out. “Very often, boring content is self-serving content,” she says, warning brands that those who endeavour to create content that's about the sell will find themselves trapped in a cycle of uninteresting, dry and badly-received projects that will not improve their business bottom line.





In summary:

In a business context, “readers want to learn [what] makes their jobs easier. It may be that simply learning about what their competitors are doing can help them tremendously, or they may want to be inspired by the latest success story, or learn about the greatest mistakes that have been made in their industries, or seek some help in looking ahead or ‘future gazing’”, according to Fisher. All of these aspirations, when linked to the provision of research, become tangible for readers and therefore assets that help them do business better.

Being the brand that enables that to happen is the ideal position, but crafting high-quality editorial requires skill. It’s a process that takes time, a team, excellent commissioning, and dedicated resources. For B2B brands, it’s not worth embarking upon the journey without these assets at hand alongside a firm commitment to important editorial values. But there is much to be learned in the craft, and it’s one that marketers should be constantly looking to refine as they increase their spend on content marketing activities. As Arthur puts it: “Editorial is content that people want to read. Knowing what that is from moment to moment, day to day, requires empathy for who the reader is going to be. That’s a human need, and it can’t be distilled into a formula [or a science]”. For brands, understanding that editorial creation is an art is the first step to success.

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the art of editorial,
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