



Transform Aid

INTERNATIONAL

For a world without poverty

Episode 5: Content Marketing

Impact Leaders

Leigh Hatcher: Hello and welcome to impact leaders for a world without poverty, supporting and equipping business leaders to grow their business, give purpose to their people and make a transformational impact on global poverty. I'm Leigh Hatcher. In a world of media and messaging overload how can one message stand out from all the rest? Is it possible to be more strategic in communication and come up with something that'll be of true value to our audience, our customers, rather than just another load of white noise? These questions actually go right to the heart of our whole approach in the impact leaders podcast series, one significant answer is content marketing. While the concept is well known in the world of marketing, there's often a disconnect with the targeted audience because they can't see the value in it. Greg Wood has had a great deal of experience in the world of content marketing as a marketing and communications strategist. He's grown global brands and created brand and communication strategies for dozens of clients. For the last three years he's been marketing manager for Transform Aid International. Greg, thanks so much for joining us.

Greg Wood: Thank you. It's great to meet you.

Leigh Hatcher: While the term content marketing is a familiar term, how do you define it?

Greg Wood: Content Marketing is about saying something valuable to the people you're trying to connect with it saying something valuable so that you can be relevant in their lives and have a reason to have a voice, a voice for them.

Leigh Hatcher: So it's got to have value.

Greg Wood: Yeah, it's got to have value first for the audience. That's the main thing is to say how can we speak something that matters to these people, but also saying something that you have some expertise in as well. Because if you find something valuable that you really know nothing about that will be seen through pretty quickly. So it's about finding something that is true for you, a truth and something ideally that's unique for you as a leader, as a business, as an organisation, but then really importantly finding that thing, you know, finding an intersection with something that's relevant.

Leigh Hatcher: So it's important to say it's not an ad.

Greg Wood: It's not an ad. Yeah. So it's, it's not selling. It is really storytelling in a way. It is more about information or it can be more about entertainment. That doesn't really matter. It's about starting with that audience in mind.

Leigh Hatcher: Here's the trick and I think the art in content marketing, it's not about us. It's actually about the audience.

Greg Wood: Yeah, exactly. That is the thing. To make it less about what we want to say and more about what our customers want to hear. You have to have some intent behind it. You have to have a strategy. You have to think about it first because what you want to do is become known for this thing that you're talking about. You want to be so consistent in the topic that you're talking about, that people come to know you as the place to go for that kind of information or entertainment and it's building an identity for yourself. But then we that identity, you can build a relationship.

Leigh Hatcher: So no matter who's doing the content marketing they are often in a bubble. The demand is to truly understand the audience, get yourself out of your own bubble.

Greg Wood: Yeah, that's true. I think the habit is pushing your wares, pushing your message. It's really easy to do and really easy to, to slip in to. This is about doing something profitable for you as a business, as an organisation. You've got your own objectives, you want to meet that, but what we say with this way of thinking is that that comes naturally from a relationship that's built. It comes naturally

when someone trusts you, when they hear from you and want to read what you've got to say or watch what you've got to share, they then remember you more and then when it comes to that rare moment of them wanting that thing that you sell, they'll have you in mind. Yeah, but it's rare that you're going to shout at someone at the very moment they're ready to hear. Usually you've got to start with where they're at, what's relevant for them.

Leigh Hatcher: Yes, don't shout at me. Tell us how you've arrived at where you are today, Greg. There have been some important lessons in content marketing along the way for you.

Greg Wood: Yeah, so I've been in marketing for 15 years. I liked the idea of it because it combines creativity and producing results somehow that that kind of idea. I think marketing is part art, part science. So I was really keen to learn the skill, you know, after my marketing degree had a shortlist of the experts in marketing and a global scale and found Unilever. I worked there for 10 years and then worked in advertising as well. And I really liked that time in Unilever, which even 10, 15 years ago they were doing content marketing and it's been around for more than a hundred years really in different terms. So I've learned a lot through them and I really enjoyed that work because it's kind of a game you kind of get to, you know, you're selling your blue shampoo and the other guy down the road selling his green shampoo and you've got to try to be clever and smarter, luckier. And if you win, you win. And you know, that's the game of it, which is kind of fun. But also knew that's not enough in life. I want to find something that I can contribute to well that brings some social good, you know, that drove me to some further study and some specific roles to learn skills and ultimately coming here.

Leigh Hatcher: Hence where we are today. Is it possible for any and every business to be engaged in content marketing or is it open to just a few, the chosen few?

Greg Wood: No, it's not a open to only a few. I think that anybody that has something to offer to a customer can pursue content marketing with value. So the first example of it that we know of is John Deere, the tractors in the states and I'm probably selling them short, but the tractors as I know the green one, they created The Furrow magazine in 1895. This was the start of it. And they said, well, we can write a magazine for farmers because we sell to farmers. What are farmers want to know about? We've got some expertise. Where else can we find some expertise? Let's add it in and create a magazine that still is running today. Um, so it is storytelling in any of us can do that. It's finding that thing that we have some knowledge about. Something to say that matches with

what an audience is going to care about. You do need to do that work to find that thing that's at your centre as well as being relevant for the customer, and that takes some work.

Leigh Hatcher: And again, understand the audience.

Greg Wood: Yeah, exactly. And I think that it is easy to skate by knowing the thing that you sell, looking at yourself, being oriented around what you do, what's your profit margin, you're looking at the detail. And then sometimes it's, it's those companies that find things slip away from them and they don't know why. It's because they haven't been talking to their customers. So I think for our business, we need to talk to our customers. We need to know our customers. But you can't do content marketing without knowing your customer.

Leigh Hatcher: Yes, get yourself out of that bubble. You have a saying that at the heart of your approach to all this 'change at every level'. So how does that guide you in your work and how can that guide our business leaders as they seek to market and communicate more effectively?

Greg Wood: This is not so much about the theory of content marketing. This is our phrase as an organisation that we've come to. So this is really our centrepiece. I talk about needing to find your centre. This is it for us and it took us a bit of work to get there. I interviewed our other senior leaders in our organisation and other people who know our supporters really well with a bit of reflection to this little phrase change at every level. For us, it reflects our belief and our action as an organisation that if we're going to end poverty, we need to address it at every level. We mean individuals, households, communities, governments, corporates, and it means the same thing for our supporters. You know, change at the heart level in my actions, in the way I speak out to government, to companies, it's physical and mental, emotional, spiritual. So this is what we mean by change at every level. This is what we believe as an organisation it's going to take to end poverty. And so we then write what we write and make videos, you know, with this in mind. So everything we do is meant to sort of ladder up to this belief, this idea. So what it leads us to is finding little unique detailed expressions of, oh this is an interesting dynamic about poverty you might not have known. So you have to actually address that. So we've got interesting content there about the narrow detailed stuff, but we also keep trying to ladder up and say, and this is why we need to see change at every level. This is why we have to work at systems and in communities. So for us this is has been a reflection piece to say actually who are we as an organisation? How do we operate, what do we think it takes to

change the world? And then our content is, anchored in that it's about understanding your truth and your uniqueness. And then understanding, well, what are our supporters want to hear about in that space? And how do we produce something that they're going to want to engage with.

Leigh Hatcher: It strikes me as I hear you, it would help enormously for you to be a believer in whatever your content marketing about, whether it's tractors, but I mean, especially in this kind of thing. End world poverty. What an inspiring and what a towering thing to do. But you've got to be a believer in it.

Greg Wood: Yeah. You do. You know, working for a consumer goods company, I became a believer in ice tea and I became a believer and Cuppa soup and, you know, you immerse yourself. It doesn't need to be, you know, something that's, that's going to change the world at its centre. You do hope that as we grow as leaders, that we choose to gravitate, you know, to let ourselves be gravitating to those things that we have passionate about. If for me, it could be other things myself, it could be coffee or music or whatever, and that'd be fun to work in and I'd have passionate and I could connect with people who share a passion. So yes, it's a lot easier if you have some passion for what you do.

Leigh Hatcher: There's another well known and somewhat related term today that many aspire to, but I think only relatively few might actually achieve it. And that's to become a thought leader. And that has resonance in this kind of conversation. What's that look and sound like and how do I get there?

Greg Wood: I think that it doesn't very often happen without some intent and some significant effort, but I think if as a leader and as an organisation you have something unique and valuable, you can become a thought leader. So if you know your ethos, do you know what drove you and your organisation to the place that it's in, you have then something that others don't have. There's a journey that is unique. If you're selling paper, you're selling paper, the guy down the road selling paper. But what has got you to where you are, what, what's your story there? What is there in that story that could be unlocked and maybe even you actually have a value in ethos. You're not living out in your business and maybe that means you, you know, you might have, if we stick with paper, you might have a deep passion for the environment and you're doing some stuff behind the scenes, but we're not telling anybody or, you've got this project you haven't ever got off the ground because there's no real market for it. Go and do it. And then you've got some things to say. You know the supply chain better than any other sort of average person out there.

You've got some things that you know, you add that to a cause around environment or ethical shopping and then you've got a whole lot of environmentalists out there who would love to hear your take on x, y, and z. If you're a cafe and you care about your community, you're in that community, you're everyday, you're speaking to people. What is it that you're hearing that you could speak back to that wider group and then find the way to say it. Find a new communication channel.

Leigh Hatcher: What am I going to be doing practically if I'm the paper guy or the woman in the cafe? Wanting to be a thought leader. And speaking to people's lives in terms of content, what are the practical things I'm going to be doing?

Greg Wood: I think she can just have a go at writing something down to start off with. If you could work out all right, this is my hunch. Even just go with a hunch of this is the thing that I think is something I could be known for and be, you know, really increase my relevance to my clients or my customers by talking to them about grab a pen and paper, write a couple of pages, read it over. Maybe you've got a couple ideas there. Split it out into some shorter pieces. If you're running cafe literally, you know the couple of people that are, you know by name and you know well and you just pull them aside when they're not looking too busy say this is what I'm doing. Can I give you these couple of pieces of paper? Can you read it? Tell me what you think about it. Is it interesting which ones the best? Refine it a bit, find out what you think is going to resonate with people.

Leigh Hatcher: You never know who your customers might be.

Greg Wood: Yeah. They might be a content marketer and they want to do it for you! Just starting somewhere and mix a little bit of the reflection and the thinking with a bit of action and just let it be an iterative process and you don't need to be a talented writer. I think you can just start somewhere because it might end up being a post on a Facebook page or photos on Instagram. It doesn't need to be academic papers.

Leigh Hatcher: In fact less is more and there's no end of media channels today for us in a social media world.

Greg Wood: That's right. Social media presents a free opportunity to reach people who already think that we're somewhat relevant to them. But you know, if you're in a cafe, I don't know, I've never been given a cup of coffee and a newsletter about my community. That'd be pretty interesting. Why not do that? There'd be lots of opportunities. If you're creative.

Leigh Hatcher: You say that there's a high level of this rhythm in the work that Transform Aid International does. What's that look like, Greg? Maybe give us an example of it.

Greg Wood: I'll get quite practical in this. So if someone is sort of on the edge of really wanting to give this a go, I'll share how we do this. Yeah, we're lucky to have a team of people that do this, amongst some other things in our organisation. And I know that's not everyone's situation, but for us our rhythm is about technology and it's about routine. In our technology space, we use Trello, which is a free web tool to basically organize yourself. We use a calendar plugin called planyway and we work those together. And really what I did there was I googled Trello and content marketing or content publishing and you find a whole lot of articles, content marketing articles to explain how you can use it, how you can set up Trello to be sort of a virtual production house for you to move something from an idea to a drafted piece to something that's being published. It's how we keep every single thing that we say to our supporters and churches. Is there one place that we keep it all so we know we can go to that one place, we can add something in as an idea, we can develop it, we can cut it, we can, you know, keep it going through to completion. So that's the tool and it's not complex and it's completely free.

Leigh Hatcher: So it's managed, but also people have got the freedom to be creative.

Greg Wood: Yeah, absolutely. And that comes to our routine part. So that was our technology and our routine we plan six weeks out, we start by actually emailing our entire office and say, you know that we're about change at every level. Have you got anything you think supporters would like to hear about? Because Ant from programs would say something different to Scott, our resident theologian and ethicist. And so they'll come with different angles and we've got experts all throughout organisations. Yes. And this will be true for all of us. You might have, if you're a cafe owner, you might have a customer that's an expert, they'd like to write something for you about their local community. You can be coordinating people, getting ideas from everywhere. Then we meet to plan the month. Then we just schedule it all and then we meet again to make sure people know what they have got to deliver when and we organize it that way. So it really is, once you have the tool and what you know is your idea of what you want to be talking about consistently that's relevant, you can set up a routine that actually means is not all on your shoulders. And there's a real, healthy, fantastic byproduct here. Everyone in this organisation knows what we're about. Because we keep asking every month what do

you want to share? And they actually know that we respect their expertise because we asked them to share.

Leigh Hatcher: Yeah, it's a two way thing, so what strikes me is that there are clear open channels but also a will for people to be heard and people to offer stuff and that's about empowerment as well.

Greg Wood: Yeah, absolutely. And we know that we have the power to say thanks for the idea and we might not use it fully, but very often our best stuff that's been coming out has been coming from, you know, the corners of the organisation that you wouldn't know. And we have partners overseas who will share with us their their need in their community and we pass that straight on.

Leigh Hatcher: More broadly in the midst of such a rush of communication change, where should we be directing our content or being a thought leader?

Greg Wood: I think there's sort of two ways of answering this I think, where I think every leader should be directing their attention is to something to do with social good. Because I think that we've got an opportunity as leaders to be a positive contributor to the communities that we're connected with. We should find some intersection, think, with a deeper value, what we do as an organisation and what's relevant for our customers. In terms of practice. I think we need intentionality and those rhythms, and then I think it's about speaking to people who might have some other expertise in this to say, I'm embarking on this and I've got a Facebook page with four followers, but I don't know what to do, and there'll be people around you there will be articles. There'll be tutorials to learn about how you can use some of these tools that are out there, these channels out there to be relevant to your audiences.

Leigh Hatcher: And you can be your own broadcaster.

Greg Wood: Yeah, absolutely. There's very little limit for the average organisation and not a lot of costs. It takes some time and some effort.

Leigh Hatcher: Never been as cheap, actually. Yeah. Greg, finally, tell me of one particular idea or business or strategy where you've seen all this come together for everyone's benefit, actually, business and client and audience, and what are the lessons our business leaders could take away from that?

Greg Wood: I think back to probably not the most famous example, but I think back to Unilever days, and this would be now 10 years ago,

Rexona deodorant, you know, there are about being ready for the pressure moment, you know, there are about deodorant, you've got to be about something deeper. You know, they've got to connect with, with uh, important work. They thought up this idea of Australia's greatest athlete. So they created a television show that ran for three seasons, they Billy Slater against Quade Cooper, against Mark Webber and rowers and shot putters and racing car drivers against league and AFL players they had Ricky Ponting hosting it. And so it was this TV show that ran, I think had eight episodes each year, an hour worth of content. It was its own business. Really. It wasn't something that cost, it was something that worked for the network and for them, this is an idea saying what about audiences want to hear, they don't want to hear about deodorant, technology or even really want to sit and watch ads. You know, back then they were fast forwarding through ads and now we're not really even watching free to air TV. So what do they want to hear? They love sport they asked that question, well what if Quade Cooper was playing this code instead of that code and who would, who would be the better one? Well now they've got a chance, they've got all these kind of obstacle courses and all of these tests for athletes and they find out who's the greatest athlete and they get these moments of course for branding in the background and they get their moment to have their product up in lights. But audiences are choosing to watch an hour worth of content and it's got to do with Rexona and they get to say, yeah, we're about pressure in the moment. We know about sport and we're kind of experts in that. And you know, they got a whole lot of free media for the back of it.

Leigh Hatcher: So it wasn't about deodorant necessarily.

Greg Wood: No, but there's still, there's a connection. That's one example for me that I remember, you know, being sort of alongside the teams that did that next, you know, in the booth alongside seeing these, this idea come up. And really it just, again, it just starts with what would our audience love to hear about and do we have some sort of right to say it. They've got some rights. There's enough of a connection there for them to go ahead and produce it.

Leigh Hatcher: And that's the lesson. Know your audience and it gets back to the value thing that we started off with.

Greg Wood: Absolutely.

Leigh Hatcher: Greg, thanks so much. It's a fascinating area. Thanks so much indeed for sharing with us.

Greg Wood: Great. Thank you.

Leigh Hatcher: If you'd like more information on content marketing, you can subscribe to receive useful articles and news from Transform Aid International. It's offered to any business leader who wants to grow their business, give purpose to their people, and make a transformational impact on global poverty. Head to our website, transformaid.org/subscribe.