

Preprint or book section. *A potted history of Content in modern electronic media* by Izabela Derda.

In: Dzamic, L. & Kirby, J. (2018). *Definitve Guide to Strategic Content Marketing. Perspectives, Issues, Challenges and Solutions*. London, New York, New Delhi: Kogan Page.

## **A potted history of Content in modern electronic media**

Media has since its beginning sought ways of attracting external funding for content, as well as means for filling its schedules. Already in 1929 more than 55 per cent of radio programmes in the United States were financed or produced by brands (Lehu, 2007). One of the first and more famous was *Little Orphan Annie*, on the NBC Blue Network. It was sponsored by Ovaltine, the manufacturer of dairy dietary supplement. This radio play, based on a comic book of the same name, enjoyed great popularity, managing to attract 6 million fans to their radio sets (Harmon, 2001)! This model was considered attractive by both advertisers, for whom it was an interesting form of advertising, and stations, which found it easier to fill an all-day programming schedule.

In the 1940s, advertisers started to show an interest in the growing medium of television. Drawing on experiences from the radio — its programme-funding models and the widespread presence of sponsored content—the advertising industry in the 1940s and 1950s exerted strong pressure on commercial broadcasters in the United States (Godzic, 2010). This pressure, combined with the broadcaster's desire to develop and acquire new programmes, led to the repetition of formats and approaches from the elder medium — hence the old radio favourites such as *The Colgate Comedy Hour* (Lehu, 2007) or *Kraft Television Theatre* (AdAge, 2003). These programmes were mostly produced by advertising agencies and pursued the sponsors' commercial interests.

The dominance of commercial funding was so strong that even the first American news programme was, actually, advertising content. Broadcast by state-owned NBC, it was entitled *Camel News Caravan* and effectively served as an advertisement for a popular brand of tobacco (Godzic, 2010). The presenter reading the news smoked cigarettes on air, with the packaging always visible in the frame, while the news programme ended with a cigarette in the ashtray. The brand's influence on NBC was so great at the time that a 'no smoking' sign, or information on the fatal consequences of smoking, could not appear anywhere. Interestingly, neither would people smoking cigars, which were competition for cigarettes. Exceptions were made only for the contemporary British Prime Minister Winston Chums – for whom the cigar was his trademark (Utley, 2000).

It became apparent relatively soon that the radio model based on one sponsor financing

the creation of a programme does not work for television in the long term because of high show-production costs. Advertisers increasingly turned to cheaper genres such as gameshows, which on one hand significantly affected the quality of the content, while on the other resulted in a series of scandals caused by quiz results being manipulated (Lotz, 2007; Carter, 2003). At the end of the 1950s sponsors made questions available to selected participants in cooperation with directors and producers. They won large sums in spectacular style and ratings grew rapidly. These scandals cast a bad light on sponsorship of television content and resulted in a significant effort aimed at curbing the practice of putting programmes financed by one sponsor on air.

Simultaneously, a 'placement black market' was developing. Increasingly, brands paid writers to place their products in scripts. Branded products were to appear on the screen in a seemingly natural way, while actors and presenters were paid by corporations to play in individual scenes (Newell, Salmon and Chang, 2006). In 1948, NBC began combating such practices via a standards and practices department, which served the role of, in essence, a censor. Soon, reports, which previously evaluated programming content for sexuality, alcohol products, racial stereotypes, violence, juvenile delinquency, religion or blasphemy, also started to report pseudo-advertising activities (Pondillo, 2003). The first mention of a product being removed by the censoring department comes from 1949. The following year brands were removed from scripts once a week, on average. However, had any illegal advertising activity escaped the attention of the censors, it was often reported to the network by manufacturers of competitive products. This resulted in NBC deciding to temporarily use bottles and packaging without labels or, in the case when the scene required a brand to be indicated, obliging the creators to check whether the brand was currently an advertiser on NBC.

Sponsoring of programmes by a number of advertisers was not the dominant form of financing until the beginning of the 1960s. In the period between 1962 and 1963, as many as 52 of the 94 programmes on air were financed using this model. Television began searching for other means and models of cooperation with brands, only to return - recently, after a number of years - to the original solutions, but in a modern guise.

It is assumed that the beginnings of what is considered today as branded content date back to 2001, when the mini-series *The Hire* had its online premiere. It was created and financed by the German car manufacturer BMW and is considered to be the first modern branded content campaign.

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