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# BUILD A CONCEPT & CONTENT ECOSYSTEM

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## OR SPEND MORE

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anthony **Barnum**  
PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Founded in 2007 in Austin, Texas, anthonyBarnum is a national public relations and social media firm specializing in complex industries including technology, real estate, professional services firms and health care. Our approach is distinguished by the ability to create systematic campaigns with quantifiable and measurable results that impact companies' most critical marketing objectives through advanced strategies.

# **BUILD A CONCEPT & CONTENT ECOSYSTEM OR SPEND MORE**

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*Shape and repurpose marketing assets and graphics to realize savings,  
amplify reach and strengthen communication uniformity*

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Disruptive and leading-edge companies require deeper, more nuanced marketing. Their target audiences are sophisticated and advanced. Their strategies for establishing meaningful, forecastable revenue are increasingly dependent on newer forms of marketing. The ideas, insights and content distilling who and what makes a company different have got to be meaningful or they will not produce results.

Whether it's earned, social or owned, disruptors and innovators have many elements to intertwine. To maximize return, what is created to position the company's leadership must not only reflect a consistent vision and narrative, it also needs to be put together with maximum efficiency. To do so, old notions of public relations and social media must be retooled. Instead of marketing and PR teams operating in silos creating social media, news articles, demand gen, lead gen and owned content separately, the ecosystem of concepts and content need to radiate from the brand's center to create cohesion and efficiency.

This is not conceptual; it's practical. What it means is that the strategy and all the tactical components of the marketing plan need to work hand-in-glove to deliver results. Each critical target area for marketing with anticipated metrics needs an interrelated, integrated plan to maximize the use of assets.

By setting a total, programmatic vision for various purposes—blogs, social media, earned media, demand/lead gen, and partner collateral, presentations and more—brands realize at least three advantages: cost efficiencies, message cohesion and reiteration.

This ePaper introduces how the process generally works, offers tips on leveraging collateral that companies already have at hand, and discusses options for getting the most out of limited resources.

# DEFINE DIRECTION: UPFRONT STRATEGY

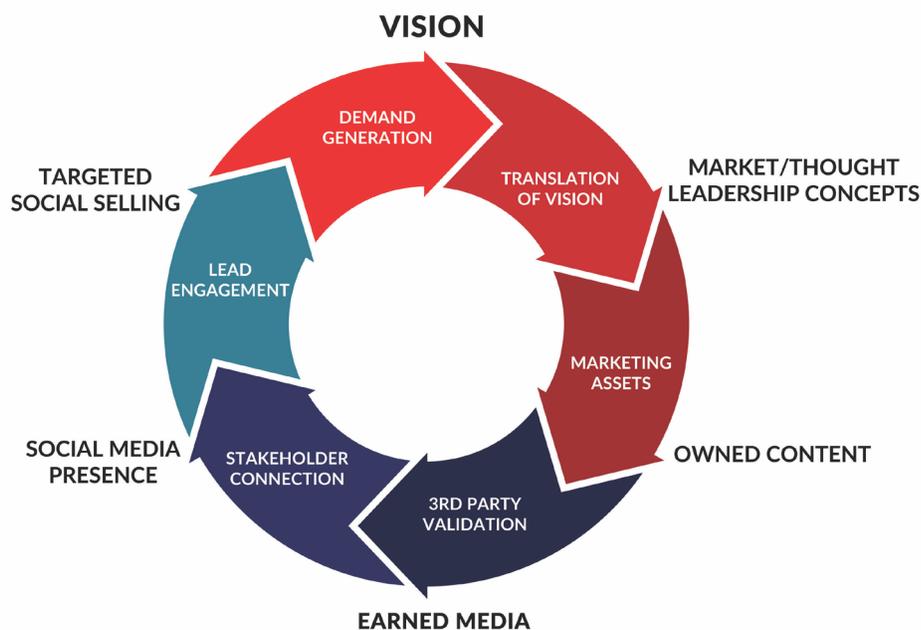
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Before deciding how best to shape, tweak and focus content for different platforms, it's critical to specifically define who the brand's various audiences are, how marketing will reach targets and measure the impact, and what sort of technology systems are or can be put into place to track interactions.

The first part of this task involves careful thought and analysis—and that's why the beginning of almost all anthonyBarnum engagements include a significant upfront strategy component. It's essential for any brand to not only analyze the competitive landscape and develop a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) matrix, but to also analyze and take stock of the current media landscape (i.e., which potential thought leadership issues are being covered where and at what rate). Doing so helps ensure core brand values are accurately articulated and developed into a precise tactical plan with metrics and goals via an Objectives Map in context of the current environment.

Most companies have several easily defined audiences for marketing material: Existing customers, new prospects, partners, media, internal employees and investors. The more discretely a brand can manage the data about its customers and prospects, the better—and that's why most companies have defined three or five classes of prospects, depending on where they are in the sales funnel.

For instance, a prospect who is reading a company's blog for the first time is quite different than a prospect who's deeply familiar with that brand, has been talking to its salespeople for years, and may have a defined budget and planned purchase timeline.



Marketing assets can be shaped and repurposed in multiple ways, including owned content, pitches, catalyze earned media, social media, prospect offers, internal communications and more.



To leverage all these discrete points along a customer's journey, marketers must embrace a lot of the capabilities within their customer relationship management (CRM) systems and customize it to record and save everything important to the conversion of revenue. CRMs, or software programs used for improving the relationship with existing customers, finding new prospective customers and winning back former customers, are used by almost all the mid-market companies anthonyBarnum works with. However, a striking number of these companies seem to not be fully exploiting the multitude of its potential dimensions.

To that end, for marketers who have spent time customizing CRM, it is a detailed, precision-driven and mistake-prone tool that requires vast upfront time of customizing to produce hard data. Organizations who are only using it as a repository, and not constantly evolving it to deliver more precise, forecastable value and insights on the sales process, are leaving value on the table. And, the consequences of CRM not serving up high-value insights as a standalone tool spills over into the demand and lead generation side of sales vis-à-vis the marketing automation tool bolted to it.

If the bones of the CRM aren't set straight, the marketing automation machinery is a mere shadow of what it could be. In a broken system, the data simply produced will not deliver the unending value it could – the kind of value it could deliver that truly allows marketers to identify opportunities, assess what's working, and pivot quickly to optimize pipelines that lead to sales.

For complex sector organizations, it's either invest and convert to it or face being rapidly outpaced in marketing by those who have and are optimizing their brand concept and content ecosystem.

In a recent blog, anthonyBarnum encourages [Marketers to Make Mistakes](#). Making those mistakes, then learning and pivoting, is infinitely easier when CRM and marketing automation are in lockstep producing data that can be extrapolated for actionable steps.

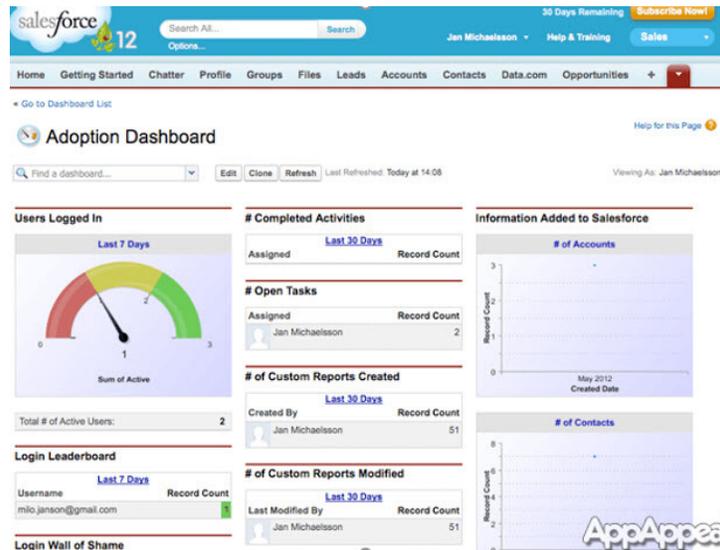
At anthonyBarnum, for instance, we reach out to prospects via direct demand generation content campaigns, newsletters and other mailings, and we track all kinds of metrics, such as:

- Whether the prospect has even opened an email offer or downloaded an ePaper (or has done so several times)
- Whether the prospect clicked through to our website, where the prospect visited on our website (e.g., blog, case studies, services profile, etc.)
- Which domain the prospect clicked from
- How that cross-references with other data stored about the company (e.g., revenue, industry, geographical location, whether other prospects from that company have clicked through) and far, far more

# AMPLIFY INFLUENCE

With that groundwork set, a rich collective of data in CRM and the marketing automation humming—careful time spent building messaging and planning how to organize results—the marketing team can get to work extending the brand and creating content.

Any single company might not implement the many kinds of marketing collateral that are possible to create, but the same general principles of adaptation apply.



Today's CRM systems can help track every imaginable metric on customers and prospects. Take advantage of every available capability to refine messaging, build messaging frequency and analyze response rates.

Here's an example of building out the conceptual and content ecosystem:

A company may be planning the release of a new product or service featuring a key capability and differentiator. The marketing team associates with the brand generally, highlighting it as important for future company direction and for enhanced inclusion in coming products or services months down the road. This is the thought leadership concept. Build that concept into the specific news announcement and draw on it as a theme for other marketing assets.

In tandem with the press release, create a complimentary media pitch on the topic to entice reporters and editors to learn more and interview a company executive, walk through a demo or hold a meeting at an upcoming tradeshow. It may also lead to media results that drive an interview with a company executive, watch a demo, schedule a meeting at an upcoming trade show, read about how the product was highly ranked in a Top Tier review, etc. Internal messaging to employees about a company initiative can also be created from the same core messaging as a media pitch, with a slightly different tone and set of highlights.

The schedule of activities around this launch include the development of a blog and social media on the topic. The key messages are the same, but presented in a different manner. This not only simplifies the creation task and saves money, but it keeps a brand's verbiage consistent—plus, it leverages the public relations campaign to strengthen and reinforce the ongoing, existing campaign that's hitting on other platforms.

From here, a campaign is only limited by the time, resources and priority it demands. With basic messaging in place from the very beginning, which is now instantiated in a press release, pitch and blog, it's simple to extend the campaign using limited but focused resources. Most brands have partners, as well as customers and prospects, so it makes sense to develop eContent (e.g., newsletters, renewal offers, show announcements and highlights) specific to all three sorts of audiences with the same messaging and thought leadership themes.

If time and demand allow, take it further with: executive presentations, podcasts, customer service scripts, partner offers and more that all hit on the same themes, reinforce the same thought leadership concepts and build brand awareness.

To accomplish this, marketing needs to develop multifaceted teams that work in careful coordination under a masterplan. Facets of the masterplan often need to be outsourced to a public relations/social media/owned content agency with the expertise to complement the internal team.



# CRAFT CAREFULLY

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When thought leadership concepts and a plan to track results are in place, begin building collateral. One of the most critical challenges in creating great content is finding the right people who can craft the messages that really capture a brand's message and engage its intended audience. Nuanced, compelling content is never going to be an easy find for marketing, and no single person can cover all the disciplines. Success lies in either managing teams leveraging fractional skill-sets or looking to an outsourced partner who brings the disciplines together.

1. **Stay focused on the audience.** Great messaging has multiple angles, access points and points of attraction. It's important to choose the right messages to highlight and the appropriate tone. An existing customer targeted for upselling probably cares about different things than a brand-new prospect who's never heard of the company, and internal employees will still require a slightly altered focus. The tone a brand chooses to use in social media will generally be quite different than that used in an academic or professional conference presentation. Always keep the audience at top of mind.
2. **Use graphics, video and infographics.** Graphics catch people's attention and imagination sometimes more readily than even the best-written words. Therefore, be sure to include lots of visuals and consider building content entirely around them, such as infographics. All sorts of variations are available: custom-created graphics, amazing photos, screenshots, charts and graphs, memes, and more. This social media tidbit may not fully apply to content built for other contexts, but it's worth remembering that Facebook posts with images receive 2.3 times the engagement of posts without images, and users spend three times as much time watching live event videos than traditional videos.<sup>1</sup>
3. **Stay on-message.** In many cases, this simply means repeating the exact carefully crafted corporate messaging from the beginning of the process. Introductory content, tone, length and other surrounding rhetoric can and should vary widely in content per intended audience. Never forget that the key goal of any campaign content, be it a social media graphic or a CEO speech, is to repeat and reinforce key thought leadership messages, value

propositions and differentiators. That will simplify and build retention and impact among multiple audiences on multiple platforms.

4. **Use calls to action.** A reader should be intrigued, even excited, by great content—so strike while the iron is hot and take advantage of that with a call-to-action. Tell where they can click through to see a demo, sign up for a download, read a blog with more information or call sales people who can answer more questions.
5. **Build velocity and cadence.** Thought leadership campaigns fail when they don't have persistence and regular cadence. Thought leadership campaigns, after all, are about big and important messages. It's important for audiences not just to read these messages one time in a single article or hear about them one time at a major industry event. Thought leadership messages need to be repeated, developed and reinforced over time via multiple channels and in multiple iterations. Examples of reinforcement include placing an article in one media outlet followed by another published in a complementary and competitive outlet elsewhere just days or weeks later. A concurrent blog on the topic can be further reinforced with a podcast, social media posts, explanatory infographics or a live video event.

Don't ever let announcements or campaigns be one-offs without groundwork laid out before and no follow up after. A brand wants its messages to be written about week after week and month after month. Build momentum. It requires committed resources, but it pays off big.



## MEASURING RESULTS

Once marketing assets are ready to go, then published and distributed, the final, critical piece is measuring results. This is where marketing needs to lean heavily on available CRM classification and tracking features to act on new knowledge gained from every campaign response.

Fully exploit the company's CRM by categorizing and refining the sales funnel with a focus on growing an understanding of the people, companies and response trends.

Questions to ask may include:

- Is the highest response coming from companies in industry X with revenue Y growing at a rate of Z percent?
- Does industry A have the highest response rate, but the shortest close cycle? How do we increase engagement with that audience?
- What level of the company is most engaged?
- How many non-targets are filtering in? Classify in tiered systems for clarity and reporting.

# THE SOLID ROI OF A BUILT ECOSYSTEM

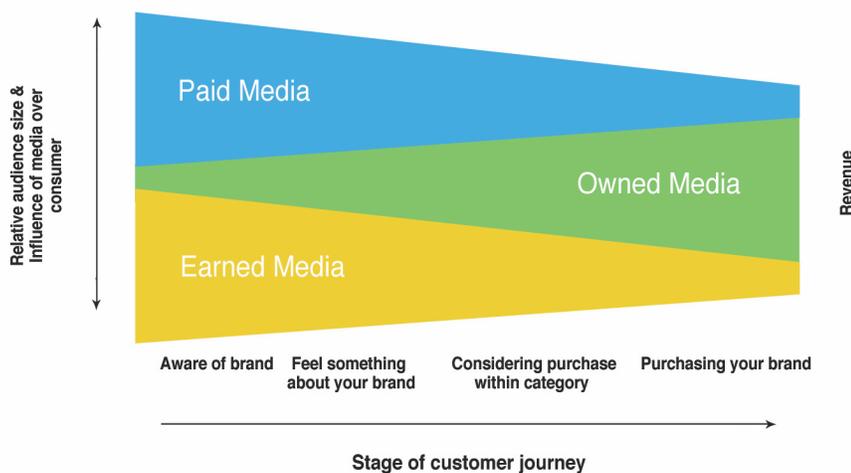
Most of what we've discussed developing in this ePaper—blog content, presentations delivered by executives and later put on SlideShare, eContent, white papers, etc.—is the development of owned media, i.e. marketing assets that are created, controlled and distributed by the company itself. [anthonyBarnum](#) has put together an entire ePaper on the topic: [Read it!](#) Owned media requires a significant allocation of time and resource investments upfront, but pays off. Once in place, it is a valuable asset with more or less unlimited useful life.

Owned media has unique advantages:

- 1) **It offers brands total control.** A brand gets to craft the story it wants to showcase, including the expertise, services and/or products themselves in exactly the way it prefers.
- 2) **It offers longevity.** Content never disappears on the web and enables brands to “own a category” in alignment with its customer’s greatest pain-points.
- 3) **It offers tremendous reach.** Search engines offer tremendous organic exposure to media built with relevant keywords and strong content.
- 4) **It offers versatility.** Owned content can be recreated and repurposed in multiple media forms on a variety of relevant brand pages.
- 5) **It is uniquely cost-effective.** Once a brand creates it, it can repurpose without new fees or licenses.



“Owned media creates brand portability,” says Melissa Anthony Sinn, CEO and founder of [anthonyBarnum](#), who adds, “It’s a way for brands to create a solar system of interrelated content that articulates company vision, engages partners and prospects, and even drives industry direction.”



Paid and earned media are most effective and influential at the start of a customer journey, but as that journey progresses, the importance of the owned channels increases dramatically. (Source: [Zenith Optimedia](#))

In the ePaper on owned media by Anthony Barnum referenced above, there's lots more detail about the ROI of owned media, as well as some striking data on marketing budgets. The Content Marketing Institute found in 2016, for instance, that B2B marketers allocate 28 percent of their total marketing budget, on average, to content marketing. The most effective allocate 42 percent and the most sophisticated/mature allocate a full 46 percent.<sup>2</sup>

And strikingly, in a day of great distrust of media, owned media of the sort discussed here is trusted only a few points less than "media as an institution."<sup>3</sup>

In sum, strong content variously repurposed and built into a mutually reinforced ecosystem can drive sales lead quantity and quality, build higher conversion rates, increase website traffic, result in brand lift, improve SEO ranking, grow customer renewal rates, strengthen subscriber growth and increase purchase intent.

It's an investment well worth making.



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Contact us for more information on how your organization can benefit from high-impact public relations and social media.

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