



Onclusive

FIVE

WINNING OWNED
MEDIA STRATEGIES



Growth PR is many things. Here at Onclusive, we define it as the way to think about modern PR. It all starts with crafting a narrative using data. It's a way to discover what your audience cares about and what drives behavior that delivers tangible results for your company. Essentially, growth PR helps your story get told on the right channels.

Owned media is a critical component to every growth PR strategy.



Five Winning Owned Media Strategies

If you've followed our blog or attended any of our webinars, some of these terms will be familiar to you. We'll start by reviewing each strategy, with an added, real-life insight derived from one of Onclusive's customers.



Provide Something of Value

To do this effectively, marketers must put themselves in the mind of customers or consumers. What questions are they asking, and how can you answer that question for them? You need to earn trust before you earn customers.

Example Application:

Yext is a digital company specializing in search. Their innovative product called Yext Answers helps a website to do the heavy lifting in search, better directing searchers and limiting unsavory search results. Josh Grau, Chief Brand Officer, says that Yext provides content as a way to "warm up" potential users. Yext leverages their series, "Answer me this" to tap into a network of influencers and start a conversation. Their goal is to provide education and entertainment from the very first interaction. From there, they offer a gated master class and move on to other paid opportunities, including the creation of groundbreaking apps that many individuals and companies use to track COVID trends. Promoting these helpful apps has attracted new traffic to their site and increased their brand awareness.



Optimize for Discovery

Search always matters. First, you need to have data on what people are looking for so that you can get in front of their content needs. Then, design your content with keywords that enable discovery. Finally, ensure that content is placed properly across channels and on your website.

Example Application:

Cunningham Collective is a Silicon Valley based digital and branding firm. Their CEO, Andy Cunningham, believes that everything should be created with search in mind. No matter the medium you're using, proper search tactics will help your content to be found. That goes for everything from web content to podcasts to social. As Andy says, "*You need to get discovered and you need to be sticky.*" Today's world exists on the internet, and having a presence there is crucial. Without investing in SEO strategy, there is no presence.



Enlist Internal Experts

We call this “insourcing”. These experts can be people on your own team, subject matter experts, or client service professionals. Their expertise is the best way to understand both customer needs and the value that your company provides.

Example Application:

Sisense is a company that sells business analytics. As such, quality thought leadership is paramount to their marketing strategy. The leader of Sisense’s marketing function, Michelle Herman, is an expert at deriving content from subject matter experts within the organization. She shares that companies can generally use three tactics for generating content from internal experts:

- 1 Begin with content program needs. Consider which topics need more content, and who is the best individual to create those pieces. At an individual level, look at what might motivate that particular person, and have a conversation about the content and possible reward for them. Michelle shares that some people enjoy “seeing their name in lights” and are eager for the byline on content.
- 2 Cultivate a strong relationship between copywriters and subject matter experts. As engagement increases, collaborations will happen more organically over time.
- 3 Consider an incentive model with rewards for staff who proactively contribute to content and marketing efforts. Focus on internal recognition and employee advocacy, highlighting the benefits of creating valuable content, and the trade-offs for doing so.



Amplify Your Message

“If you build it, they will come” is not a successful philosophy for content strategy. Promote your content through social, personal networks, or paid promotion to maximize the potential impact of your content.

Example Application:

Many companies have found success by making informed decisions about what content to boost, and then leveraging paid options to support those efforts. One such company is Yext. Josh shares that they have taken a “best of” moment from a conference that was highly enlightening and engaging, and then created follow on content to exploit those moments.



Measure and Optimize

This step is what makes any of the owned media strategies possible. Onclusive has plenty of tools that can help companies monitor, measure, and improve their media efforts. Every organization needs a program that helps them understand which content is producing the biggest impact on the business and why.

To truly optimize your media efforts, you need to understand where you are currently - which is all about measurement. There are certain metrics that we follow closely when it comes to our own media:

- Owned media readership (blog readership by week)
- What drives social media engagement?
- What drives traffic?
- What drives conversions (or goals)?

Savvy marketers want to understand what is driving social media engagement – which channels and which stories. Using Onclusive’s Sort and Analyze tool they can study social amplification trends to understand social behavior and which topics are resonating.

Taking things a step further, use data to correlate traffic with blog readership. That means understanding which topics drive people to spend more time on your website. Good content creates an impetus to learn more about your company and products.

Finally, you need to understand which content drives conversions. Not all companies have online conversions - in a B2B space, a goal might be requesting a quote or watching a webinar. Whatever a conversion means to you - you need to understand how your content maps with those activities. Which articles are leading to the desired results? Keep in mind, some of the articles that drive conversions might not be your most amplified or most read. That’s why it’s important to understand all of the metrics listed above, and how they all relate to each other within your owned media strategy.

Owned Media Case Studies



Don't Stray from Your Core Brand Archetype



MICHELLE HERMAN

VP of Corporate Marketing & Brand
SISENSE

Sisense is a late state private company that sells business analytics solutions. Their clients are companies who want to crunch complex data in order to deliver insights that help them manage their business.

Michelle began her career in PR and evolved in corporate marketing, essentially moving from an agency to in-house media roles, where she developed a passion for branding. When she joined Sisense, she noticed that the experience of interviewing didn't match the company's public persona and marketing. She had a perception based on what was happening internally and felt a disconnect with their externally facing content. This led to a program of internal surveys, resulting in adjusting the brand to better reflect their position as a creator and innovator. Taking things a step further, they applied these learnings and created a new, high performing, content program.



With such a well-performing content program running, COVID-19 created quite the disruption. Like many organizations, COVID-19 set Sisense on a different journey altogether. Immediately the company created a two-part task force to manage the pandemic. A customer success team set out to “bear hug” customers with support, free software, etc, while on the marketing side they tried to think more about what people were consuming now. Naturally, most content was COVID-related. The company fully pivoted to COVID content, and then noticed their content performance dropped significantly. Michelle shared that her team had lost sight of why people came to their site in the first place - for helpful content that solves problems. She knew they had over-pivoted and lost sight of their original content goals.



How to fix such a problem? Upon discovering the issue, Michelle guided their content strategy back to the brand's core values. These efforts evolved into a new program with content covering topics such as "Healthy Data", "Tools of the Trade", and "Navigating Change in Crisis". The content offered more of a balanced approach, while still intersecting with the pandemic.

"It's never the wrong approach to dig into data."

MICHELLE HERMAN

One lesson that any company in any industry can apply is to avoid over-marketing or shifting strategy too much, even during unprecedented times. Remember that your core goals and business plans are in place for a reason, and even if strategies must shift slightly, it's essential to remain focused on the big picture. Michelle's advice to forward-thinking marketers is to remain true to your brand archetype and remember that data-driven content will always ring true.

An Oclusive Takeaway

Humility is crucial. No matter your endeavor, it's not easy to get it right the first time. Taking time to comprehend data and switch courses can ensure you don't exacerbate a problem. Keep in mind that owned media with reporting (that is a substantive value to your audience) tends to be a good long-term marketing play.



Deliver Value Before the Value



JOSH GRAU

Chief Brand Officer
YEXT

Yext is a publicly traded software company known as the “next big thing” in search. They help manage all business and information across the internet starting with individual websites. Their innovative product called Yext Answers helps websites do the heavy lifting in search, better directing searchers and limiting unsavory search results.

Josh believes that the real value any brand offers is their product or service. It can be hard to get people to buy what you’re selling, so he looks for ways to provide value before people sign on the dotted line.

COVID provided Yext with an opportunity to think deeper about this value concept, starting at the product level. What can Yext offer when everyone is in austerity mode? People are making tougher decisions than ever before about where to spend their resources. Yext’s solution? Offering their Answers platform for free.

In an ongoing program, Yext wanted to provide value by supplying a free 90-day trial to assist with continuity during this challenging time. Josh notes that even offering a differentiated product for free, it can still take some convincing to get people to understand why you matter and why they should enter into a relationship with you. This is where content becomes a bigger driver of behavior. In general, Yext looks for ways to fill the funnel with great moments of value derived from content. Items like thought leadership, insights from friends of the company, and plenty of rich data are incredibly valuable.

Meanwhile, Yext - who hadn’t worked with any government agencies previously, was using Answers to help the state of NJ deal with increased website traffic and overwhelming numbers of questions related to COVID-19. Too much misinformation was circulating and NJ wanted to ensure they were the single source of truth for their residents. Yext created a COVID-19 Hub powered by Answers. A search bar where users can type in questions powered by a knowledge graph results in deep and accurate information from official sources. This effort was lauded as a success by the government agency and by people who used the website function.



The COVID-19 Hub provided a great content opportunity as well. Josh says that his team considered how best to relay the key messages using visual context, through blogging, and to business users on LinkedIn. Their announcements about the project created a strong impact that led to further engagement, including an exclusive piece by TechCrunch. Ultimately, these media efforts opened the door to more opportunities with other government agencies and even attracted the attention of the World Health Organization.

“Cut out the noise and own the narrative, which can really get away from you on search engines because of how they’ve changed over time.”

JOSH GRAU

Josh is excited that doing their due diligence on their own channels and obtaining owned media presented significant opportunities across the country for Yext. They were able to leverage the COVID response to create a substantial amount of new owned media and content, including a case study being shopped to the Harvard Business Review and a podcast.

His advice for companies is to reflect on the greatest assets you have and how you can be helpful to a broader audience. No one saw the pandemic coming but Yext was quick to seize the opportunity that presented itself and create content around that - adding value before people had to decide about adopting products or services. In this way they enabled their own business continuity while helping other organizations stay afloat in a trying time.

An Onclusive Takeaway

This is a great story of using lemons to make lemonade. Yext was able to create a significant amount of content around this single opportunity. As the situation unfolded, Yext created owned content, which led to earned content, which led to a case study, which led to a podcast, and more. This company did a great job of making the most out of a story that’s working for them.



Be Master of Your Destiny



ANDY CUNNINGHAM
CEO
CUNNINGHAM COLLECTIVE

Andy runs a boutique marketing and branding firm in Silicon Valley. A seasoned PR professional, her practice expanded when the internet opened a whole new world within the industry. The key trait of this new world was that companies could be the master of their own destiny. Andy explains: in the old days, firms had only their own advertising and some press (which they had no control over). Now, things are totally different - as evidenced by her work with Blackberry.

The once giant smartphone company was facing annihilation at the hands of innovators like Android and Apple. As mobile applications became more popular, Blackberry purposefully chose not to go that route, believing apps could threaten the security that the company had made their hallmark. Leadership was faced with a conundrum: How do you transform from a mobile hardware manufacturer to a leading enterprise software company and make it relevant to a new audience?



Blackberry had a social media following of 43 million. All of these followers were engaged with a brand that no longer represented what the company was hoping to become. The perception of Blackberry was molded by several things, among them declining hardware sales and a business-as-usual communications strategy. Upon investigating, Andy found that 48% of Tweets and 70% of the brands blogs were about hardware....all while trying to make a shift to being a software company. Even messaging from the CEO as late as 2014 carried mixed messages.

Andy knew they needed to create white space in the already noisy Internet of Things space. Blackberry would need to create a compelling story arc that described Blackberry's journey from a hardware to a software leader - and the message needed to be one that the whole company could coalesce around. Essentially, this story arc needed to encompass their new corporate vision.

Andy used owned media to begin the turnaround, which was rapid. It all started with building a new message architecture. Every portion of the story is encompassed by the message architecture document, which is embedded into every form of content that Blackberry produced. Social media, blogs, email - everything shifted to a new narrative around software. Within just 3 months, Blackberry's entire brand perception changed. Andy kept momentum by creating content on "Enterprise of Things," which was the new narrative.

After 3 months, the new messaging took hold and the stock price began to rise. A significant upward trajectory began, leading to stockholder confidence which propelled the company's new image. From there, it was easier to point the press to Blackberry because the footprint was so well developed.

"We no longer had to pitch the press on Blackberry, we were pointing the press to Blackberry because the footprint was so well established."

ANDY CUNNINGHAM

Andy shared with our team: *You do have control over your own destiny - and it's through owned media. We have unprecedented levels of control over the story arc surrounding our company. Take the time to craft your own messaging and then point media to it.*

An Onclusive Takeaway

Earlier we learned about two companies who did a fantastic job reacting to current events. But sometimes, the real benefit comes from being proactive and directing your own strategy, even if that means shifting from what might feel comfortable. Usually corporate visions change and then the media follows suit, but here, those two elements worked in tandem - proactive media efforts helped to actually adjust the company's overall strategy.

Information Rather Than Commercialism

We just shared some examples that demonstrate what we've seen before: during periods of economic uncertainty, businesses and consumers react, and those reactions have ripple effects. Marketing strategies are being altered and advertising budgets are being slashed. While it can be argued that this is a short-sighted strategy during an economic downturn, when coupled with a global pandemic, this response is a bit more understandable.

Consumers have reacted by shifting their focus more toward information than commercialism. They are engrossed in the latest news and updates, which may actually affect their well-being. The volume of news content being published, as well as the consumption of news media, has spiked. This is where the eyeballs are - this is where the attention is.

Consumers are growing tired of paid media.

In fact, research shows that paid media channels have been declining in trustworthiness and credibility for years. Additionally, traditional media outlets are getting more complicated and cumbersome to navigate. Classic earned media – while powerful – can be difficult to manage. Your brand's story might get told, but you won't have control over how. With either of these options, organizations are not thoroughly in control of who sees their message or even how that message is relayed.

These are just a few of the reasons that owned media has become a cornerstone of the modern marketing mix. According to Nielsen, owned media channels are among the most trusted marketing formats. Their statistics show that branded websites and other forms of owned media are the second-most trusted form of marketing, with **70%** of global respondents saying they completely or somewhat trust these sources. In addition, more than half of respondents (**56%**) trust the emails that they signed up for.

For those reasons and many more, controlling your story and crafting your own narrative are more critical than ever before. Ultimately, the right mix of earned, owned and paid tactics will depend on your specific company, so we encourage you to put content at the center of your marketing and communications strategy and let the data tell the story.

For a deep dive on these case studies with input from the business leaders themselves, watch our webinar [“Owned Media & The Growth PR Playbook,”](#) or reach out to Onclusive experts to discover tools and technology that can power a data-driven approach to earned and owned media.

CLARISSA HOROWITZ

VP of Marketing

Honest and credible numbers, as opposed to vanity metrics, have allowed me and my team to have transparent and productive conversations with our executives about what works and what doesn't, how we are going to shift our strategy, and what resources we need from the company to build successful programs.

Onclusive

Onclusive is the data science company for communications. We connect content to business outcomes for the first time, and leverage artificial intelligence to reveal which communications strategies drive actual brand engagement. The result is thousands of high-performance campaigns around the world. Onclusive developed the Power of Voice™ metric as a way to measure the quality of a brand's media coverage in relation to its competitors, and invented PR Attribution™ to measure the real impact that content is having on a company's bottom line. Onclusive was founded in 2011 and is headquartered in the San Francisco Bay Area.

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