



Thinking psychologically

Giuseppe Caltabiano, head of content strategy – EMEA & APAC at Contently, takes an academic look at marketing strategy

It's a common misconception that content is only a useful tool for marketers. In reality, quality branded content can, and should, affect all the departments in a company, acting as the nucleus for all communications.

Of course, telling professionals in every department to start creating their own content isn't likely to go over well. A company's marketing team should shoulder the burden of integrating each department's needs into a single, overarching strategy. Most companies create content, but only a select few marketers adhere to a strategy. The best way to strategically use the entire company's resources in content production is to interview key stakeholders in each department to define their goals and KPIs.

What content does your events team need for each convention? Do you have blog posts, infographics, interactive experiences, giveaways, and email blasts to be distributed before, during and after an event?

Let's say your events team needs help getting people engaged with their booth on a crowded convention floor, and they need content with clear calls to action (CTAs) to hand out and refer leads to. From there, craft a content marketing strategy that's aligned with the overall company and its many needs. Each department will eventually have its own model for assessing the content you create to support them.

I find it helpful to note Cialdini's *Principles of Persuasion*, a psychological theory published in 1984. Dr. Robert B. Cialdini defined what he believed to be the building blocks of persuading a person to think or act a certain way, and his findings can be helpful to marketers. In his keynote speech on using his principles in marketing, he says: "There is an important distinction between persuasion and manipulation. The approaches advocated in this program can be used in entirely non-manipulative ways that never deceive or coerce others into assent."

Since we live in an age of information overload, we

rarely have the time to process all of the information we see and make informed decisions. This incapacity, like on a crowded convention floor, makes us look for signals that help us decide if we want to do something.

"When we fear that something is scarce, we feel compelled to act"

Cialdini calls these signals his principles, or neurological "shortcuts," which a marketer can harness. These triggers are most effective when actionable, personalised and timely. If a user is presented with a CTA when they're able and somewhat motivated to perform a behavior, it's likely that they will. The three most helpful to event marketers are reciprocity, social proof and acceptance, and scarcity—the latter is most commonly known as the Fear of Missing Out, or "FOMO."

Reciprocity

Psychologically, a bond forms between two individuals if one does the other a favor without asking for anything in return. That means, the more you give to your customers early on, the more they'll be willing to give back to you as your relationship deepens. Whether it's offering convention attendees an unexpected discount or inviting them to a collaborative networking dinner on a topic relevant to your field, the idea is to go above and beyond their expectations of convention freebies. Every booth has candy and cheap junk with brand names on it; your brand should start conversations and leave an amicable impression through strategic content that provides a surprise service.

Social proof and acceptance

We generally value opinions and ideas from people we believe are kindred spirits or of the same mind. According to Cialdini, we feel a greater compulsion to act when we see others like us taking action, so gathering an audience in a public space like an event will always result in stragglers coming to see what the fuss is about.

Social proof in marketing comes in a lot of forms: published customer case studies, short testimonials and proof of social engagement, to name a few. In events marketing, it might mean holding mini-events on the floor, like flash giveaways or trivia contests.

Scarcity and FOMO

When we fear that something is scarce, we feel compelled to act – to buy, stockpile, or experience that thing before it's gone. This is an incredibly powerful psychological principle that marketers have used for years to drive action.

As with the other shortcuts on the list, the intention isn't to trick your audience, so don't create false discounts in order to drive up interest. Instead, consider releasing your most popular e-book as a print publication for the duration of an event, or offer a steep discount on your services for convention attendees who sign up before leaving.

Those especially susceptible to FOMO probably engage with social media, so they'll jump at the chance to create their own social content with your brand if you allow the possibility. Photo ops, Snapchat filters, personalized quizzes and shout-outs all work like magic (or, rather, science), especially if your audience at an event skews younger.

While outlining his principles of influence, Dr. Cialdini admitted that most people will never even attempt to use them. "Since 95 percent of the people are imitators and only five percent initiators," he wrote, "people are persuaded more by the actions of others than by any proof we can offer."

If you suspect that you and your brand are still imitators, the fastest and most effective way to nudge your trajectory into initiation is to alter your content strategy, and event marketing is one of the clearest platforms on which to debut your new content.

