

The buzz around brand journalism

 By [Samantha Wright](#)

23 Nov 2012

Brand journalism has become the buzzword in the marketing and PR profession. As the digital space takes over and marketing and PR campaigns gear themselves towards "engaging" with their customers, brand journalism is two words on everyone's lips. But what is it?

For starters, it's nothing new. Smart entrepreneurs have, for many years before the rise of social media, realised the importance of sharing knowledge, weighing in on industry ideas and giving themselves a voice that potential customers are interested in hearing. It's not about selling or promoting your product, but rather about sharing your industry and its human face.

It is also not [content marketing](#). While they're two very similar concepts there is a difference. Content marketing is centred on creating and developing content relating to your brand that is interesting to your target market. It catches their attention, draws them in and they then become focused on the brand. Content marketing employs marketing principles and concepts when determining the content and direction the brand wishes to go in. Brand journalism is a bit different in that it's about applying journalistic principles to traditional marketing ideas.

So instead of asking, how does the brand benefit? A brand journalist is asking how a general audience benefits from the content being produced by the brand. Content is produced in a more general way for a much broader audience.

So it's just good PR?

Tom Foremski published a blog post during the Holmes Report's Global PR Summit - in it he argued that the term "brand journalism" was simply a rebrand of PR. I tend to disagree with Foremski. Granted, many good PR firms have always head hunted potential employees from print media and have at least one "former" journalist on staff. Those same PR firms have been employing the brand journalism concept long before social media took over.

The lines between content marketing, brand journalism and PR do blur but there are distinct differences and many big corporates are jumping on the brand journalism band wagon (try saying that three times fast).

Coca-Cola recently launched a website specifically aimed at its corporate offering. It can be found at [Coca-ColaCompany.com](#). This clever offering pulled at elements of the company's internal employee magazine and brought it into the digital space. Pay the site a visit and you'll see it offers far more than investor statistics, board member biographies or company reports. Actually, the "traditional" corporate mambo jumbo makes up a very small percentage of the website. The rest is filled with stories, videos and interesting opinion pieces. The articles are varied and submitted by a variety of people

- not just the Coca-Cola marketing team. It's mirrored on a typical news and entertainment website and it works.

Stuart Elliot wrote a piece for the *New York Times* on Coca-Cola's flirtation and final implementation of brand journalism. An executive at the soft drink giant told Elliot that Coca-Cola had reformed its digital and social media teams and it now resembled an editorial team. Things like production schedules and an editorial calendar were littering the offices. More big corporates are moving away from traditional marketing and are working towards becoming "media companies". Coca-Cola joins the ranks of Red Bull and Apple along with a host of other big names who've realised that pushing product and the occasional funny status update is not what potential clients are after.

How does this benefit you?

Brand journalism is a fantastic tool for niche market or B2B SMEs. It can be used for a variety of marketing platforms including direct marketing campaigns, all social media platforms and traditional print journalism.

So many companies get social media so wrong. The likes of Facebook and Twitter are not about simply telling potential clients about discount specials or new products, it can be used to inform your audience about changes to a particular product standard which affects your industry. Moving from that, you can write a blog post or print worthy article on how the changes to the particular standard came about, why they were instated and how it impacts the industry.

Business professionals can be quick to fob off traditional B2B print publications and argue that "no one reads them". People do flick through them though and they'd likely be far more interested in reading an article about why a particular industry standard is now in place and the mitigating circumstances of the implementation, over an advertorial about your latest wonder product, all the new complicated features and how it conforms to said new industry standard.

See where I'm going with this?

Brand journalism doesn't focus on telling your client how "cool" your product is or why they should buy it. It informs a large audience about content that affects them and that they have an interest in. Your brand becomes the industry authority.

Potential clients feel a kinship with your brand because you supply them with information to make their own informed decision rather than simply shove the "buy our product/service" message down their throat.

ABOUT SAMANTHA WRIGHT

Sam Wright is a full-time content creator at techgirl.co.za - she is a gaming and technology blogger and YouTuber, as well as an Esports MC and broadcaster who went on to host some of South Africa's first million-rand competitions before heading overseas, where she has hosted at Gamescom (Europe's biggest gaming expo) and in China (for a \$850,000 tournament). She currently consults to brands on how to reach a switched-on generation...

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