Use What You Got
Leveraging Content For Profitability While Furthering The Mission
USE WHAT YOU GOT
Here’s how three associations are leveraging their content for profitability while furthering their missions.
BY CARLA KALOGERIDIS

NOT READY FOR RETIREMENT
Amid the drumbeat of digital, these old favorites are still going strong.
SIGNATURE STAFF REPORT

EMBRACE THE POP MENTALITY
Keep your conference conversations going year-round with a Pre-event, Onsite, and Post-event content marketing strategy.
BY THOMAS MARCETTI

2018 AM&P ANNUAL MEETING SNEAK PEAK
With nearly double the conference content and a sold-out exhibit hall, this year’s Annual Meeting is the most robust event in the association’s history.
All Signs Point Toward Dollars

While raking in revenue is important to an association’s vitality, Signature explores how the secret to success can lie within existing content.

BY DANIELLE MOORE

You Can’t Boil the Ocean

Making your content marketing more effective doesn’t require massive shifts. Take small steps to spotlight content you are already creating.

BY THOMAS MARCETTI

A Tale of Two Reports

From visual style to timeframe, these two annual reports demonstrate a wide range of possibilities.

BY THOMAS MARCETTI
EMBRACE THE
Keep your conference conversations going year-round with a Pre-event, Onsite, and Post-event content marketing strategy.

MENTALITY

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“Events are content generators — and it is natural to put that content to use all year long,” says Corbin Ball, CMP, CSP. “Members and potential members want relevant, current information targeted to them. They want it in short, digestible segments. Content marketing must be relevant, current, targeted, catchy, and usually short.”

Ball, a speaker and independent third-party consultant focusing on meeting technology, notes that in general, associations and organizations could plan ahead more effectively and thereby achieve better use of their event content. “It is a matter of better managing the marketing campaign,” he says.

Ellen Kim, founder and creative director at GRAPHEK, says the main importance of content marketing for events is building an all-year strategy based on quality content that is engaging, authentic, relevant, and valuable to the audience — and to remember that the audience includes prospective attendees, returning attendees, exhibitors, and sponsors.

“Associations have a better understanding of the importance of content marketing, but there’s still much to be learned,” Kim says. “I can’t tell you how many associations still primarily use location to market to their audience. The materials end up looking like they are promoting a destination for a travel agency. Or they use the same content and market the same way year to year. No changes. Nothing new.”

Content marketing is not just about making maximum use of content’s potential to increase attendance at your event. Stephanie Stahl, general manager at the Content Marketing Institute, says event strategies should not exist as a separate effort. It should be a fully fleshed-out part of a comprehensive, ongoing content strategy.

“Content marketing for events is critical to build interest, generate excitement, educate your potential audience before the event, and keep the conversation going after the event,” Stahl says.

**BUILD BUZZ ALL YEAR LONG**

So when is the right time to start marketing your event? The short answer: Always. “Ideally, with association members, it should not be about marketing a single event. It is about having an ongoing dialogue year-round,” Ball says. “Marketing next year’s meeting begins with a wrap-up video of this year’s meeting. Short, relevant, content-rich videos of the past meeting throughout the year can be relevant reminders to register for an upcoming meeting.”

To keep the audience interested, Ball says it is crucial to use only relevant content to drive the conversation. If the content isn’t relevant, it will get lost or ignored. This not only means a wasted effort, but it can also start to erode the
Create a never-ending supply of POP content

Tap into the expertise of your speakers before, during, and after your event.

1 **PRE EVENT.**
Showcase your speaker with an interview or pre-event Twitter chat. Publish or share content they’ve created about an event topic. Consider a pre-event podcast.

2 **ONSITE.**
Video is a great way to highlight speakers. Record presentations and offer short snippets or full-session video to members who can’t attend.

3 **POST EVENT.**
Follow up with additional content. Use post-event Twitter chats, podcasts, interviews, and video to help attendees synthesize what they learned.
The always on, never off, year-round plan for POP content marketing »

Start with a strong content strategy — immediately. Roll out the campaign at least a year in advance.

An early start will:
1. Build interest
2. Generate excitement
3. Educate your audience
4. Keep the conversation going

Analyze market research and attendee feedback to pinpoint your audience’s interests.

Create content that is
1. Relevant
2. Current
3. Targeted
4. Catchy
5. Short

Mix up your media.
1. Motion graphics
2. Animations
3. Infographics
4. Live streaming
5. Video

Kim says a strong content strategy should be in place so the campaign can be rolled out at least one year before the event. Having next year’s branding completed coming into the current event provides an opportunity she says an association shouldn’t pass up.

“What better place to unveil the new brand than in front of your target audience to build excitement for next year’s event?” she points out. “The more time you have to build a brand, the more time you have to incorporate trust, awareness, and visibility, which makes your event more successful.”

USE EVENT CONTENT BEYOND THE EVENT
One of the most common missteps, according to Ball, is simple failure to

audience’s trust in you. To ensure relevancy, you need to plan ahead.

“The minute you decide to create a new event, you should start planning your content strategy,” Stahl says. “While the event team is planning the agenda and recruiting speakers, there should also be a focus on creating content for your prospective audience that goes beyond promotions for the event.”

“Event brands should leverage what I like to call a POP mentality — engage your audience pre event, onsite, and post event,” Stahl says. “Keep the engagement going all year — not just for the few days of the actual event. Content marketing really should be an ongoing effort by a brand to build an audience and gain trust from that audience.”

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use event content outside of the event. Associations are sought after as sources of information. If associations are not using examples of their industry expertise to promote their event, they will miss out on potential attendees. Ball says if associations are not using information from the conference to keep the conversation going afterward, they are inviting someone else to set the agenda and potentially promote their own event.

One of the best and easiest resources to tap into is the expertise of speakers. “Love your speakers! Showcase them, invite them to a pre- or post-event Twitter chat, publish or share content that they’ve created about the event,” Stahl says. “Video is a great way to highlight speakers or to introduce topics that will be discussed in depth at the event. Pre- and post-event podcasts are also a great tool. When you can bring personalities alive, it makes it easier for attendees to connect with your speakers and content.”

**KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE**

As in any other kind of publishing, the right medium for the content will depend on the message and the audience you’re trying to reach. Kim says a common mistake is not identifying your audience’s interests and behaviors.

“Truly understanding your audience should be the first step so all content created is engaging and relevant,” she says. “Many times, it’s the same staff within an association that identifies and targets the audience. Having the same staff always looking from inside out can get stale. Try asking folks to look from outside in. Invest in market research for your events. Explore new ways to market your content to your audience. Try video marketing, motion graphics or animations, infographics, or live video streaming.”

Kim also recommends using attendee feedback from every event to improve. “Strategize with your team on what can be done better. What worked and what didn’t? And don’t forget to include your design agency or in-house design staff on these discussions,” she adds. “Good designers value the insight and will help create visual concepts that effectively communicate ideas that resonate with the end audience.”

Constant assessment and strategy adjustment helps keep your message from getting lost in the daily flood of information and other event promotions your audience is exposed to, especially when so many organizations rely almost solely on form emails and social media posts for their event marketing.

“Promotions that tout speakers, pricing, networking events, etc., are important, don’t get me wrong. But a content marketing strategy must go beyond that,” Stahl says. “Provide additional education on topics that will be addressed at the event, interview speakers so that prospects get to know their personalities and expertise ahead of time, showcase local attractions where the event will be held to appeal to personal interests, follow up after the event with additional content to help attendees synthesize what they learned.”

Stahl says recording presentations and offering short snippets or full-session video is a great way to reach out to members who could not attend. “Some event brands charge a fee for these, while others make it available as part of a membership,” Stahl says. “Either way, giving your audience access to some of your event sessions can be a great way to educate and generate interest for future events.”

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**Why video?**

1. It’s engaging
2. It’s shareable
3. It’s trackable
4. It’s cost-effective

Use this year’s event to build trust, awareness, and visibility for next year’s event.

Do it all over. Again.
Ball finds the increasing use of short videos to be an exciting trend in building engagement with attendees and prospects. He says live events like conferences are replete with content opportunities to use video to extend the footprint of the meeting and for promotion of the next event.

“Videos engage viewers, increase retention of content, are accessible via many devices, and can be easily shared via social media channels. The use of videos can improve your search engine rankings, and video email marketing is fully trackable and has higher click-through rates compared to traditional marketing methods,” Ball says. “The costs to produce and distribute video from point of inception to delivery have reduced dramatically. The bottom line is that video can be a very cost-effective way to promote and build event attendance.”

Of course, for every good strategy, there are plenty of failed ones. “We have a saying in our studio: ‘Don’t believe the hype. It’s a sequel.’ Just because it’s trendy doesn’t mean it will work for your association,” Kim says. “For instance, don’t get rid of your printed onsite program because you hear everyone’s going digital. You would be surprised over the years how many associations got rid of their printed guides and then regretted it.”

Dipping a toe into new content marketing approaches is preferable to jumping in head first, Kim says. Especially when it comes to big changes to staples like an onsite program, it’s important to move judiciously and to maintain constant dialogue with members to see how they react.

For example, while Kim agrees that there is popular buzz around pushing digital and video for events, she is also seeing some trends refocusing on quality mainstays. “Infographics have been popular for some time, but I’ve only found a handful of truly effective infographics,” she says. “Associations now understand that infographics are only as good as the data. Also, custom illustrations and photos are coming back, and use of stock images is dying — thank goodness.”

This resurgent focus on quality mainstays is arguably far more important than any technological marvels, she believes. “Motion graphics and animation are very exciting to me, but for it to be effective, it must support the concept and should not compete with the overall brand,” Kim says. “A design, graphic, or video is just pretty artwork if it’s not backed up by good quality content. They have to go hand-in-hand.”

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