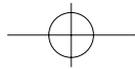


And Why It's The Million Dollar Question

WORDS: HANNAH EDENSOR



**A**S ANY MEDIA OUTLET WILL TELL YOU, GOOD CREATIVE IDEAS CAN BE A COSTLY CAKE TO BAKE. THAT'S WHERE CURATION — BLOGS, WIRES, READER FEEDBACK, EVEN OUT-AND-OUT THEFT — IS PROVING THE MORE TASTY OPTION...

So the story reads that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Starting with stars in the sky, trees, rivers, animals and eventually, us (or at least a hairier version).

Despite your views on faith (or the lack of) one thing is certain: in the beginning, there was creation.

Creativity is the root of everything we do in the realm of publishing, advertising and marketing. But in an age where creativity is often condemned and lamented as dead alongside the ad exec who's dry of ideas, the practice of curating has risen to become cheaper, faster and easier. So how do these 'creators' of content walk the tightrope between originality and clever repackaging?

In a world of the 24/7 news cycle, where the internet is our informational nirvana, the idea of producing carefully crafted original content is becoming a quaint notion alongside the Encyclopedia Britannica you've managed to cling to longer than your virginity. But it's time to face it — the way consumers view content and the approaches that work best for brands and publishers alike are shifting, and it's time to change the way you view creativity because, in case you didn't notice, that definition has changed too.

"I think that the great advantage of curation is it gives you scalability," says Lauren Quaintance, head of content for

content strategy and creation agency, Storyation. "Original content creation is highly resource-intensive, whether you're a publisher or a brand, but if you want to scale your content creation, you want to really grow it and have volume, then curation offers you a much easier way to do that, whether you're licensing content or linking content created by other people."

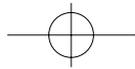
But for curation to work for a publisher or brand, it needs to be done right, and that means reshaping it and giving it new life. "I think with news, the thing is you already know what's happened, you know that David Bowie has died, it's now about... that insight that [an online publication] can provide you about that news you already know," adds Quaintance.

"They want you to tell them why it happened, they want your analysis, your take, your twist on things. And that might be an in-depth analysis on *The Sydney Morning Herald* of the budget or it could be just a take on a celebrity death through *Pedestrian*."

Curation is not a modern phenomenon, just a more visible one thanks largely to the internet. "The largest global news brands have utilised wire syndication services and third-party reporting since before the internet so the concept of curation is nothing new," says Chris Wirasinha, PEDESTRIAN.TV co-founder. "Costs play a factor in this but it's also down to the fact that the media has always needed other media to survive and thrive."

"It would be close to impossible to provide a substantial and definitive news service without reflecting the breaking stories being created by other media," adds Vanessa Lawrence, P.TV's head of editorial. "For our readers, at least, [our tone] is what they seem to value above originality; they might opt out of reading a story on news.com.au, but ▶





YES, YOU MIGHT BE THE PERSON WHO SHARES A CAT VIDEO, BUT YOU CAN ALSO BE THE PERSON WHO WILL SHARE A 10,000 PIECE ON THE WAR IN SUDAN.

really enjoy reading it on P.T.V, which comes down to the way we present information.”

But while curation is steamrolling ahead as the method of choice for producing content, it seems original content is morphing into a kind of rare collector’s item, requiring time and patience to appreciate.

“With so much information going out at once, I find curated content a useful way at looking at a topic as a whole, or in a different way, especially when my time is limited,” says Brighette Ryan, social media editor at *The Australian*. “But there are occasions when I have time to sit and read through an article, and want to delve into a subject a little further, which is when I would opt for created content written by a reputable journalist.

“While the way we absorb news may have changed over the years, people still want to be well-informed and read quality journalism. While curated content might save you some time, there will always be a market for original content.”

“Actually, long pieces are shared more than shorter pieces,” says Quaintance. “When you think about social behaviour, it’s because you want to share something. Yes, you might... be the person who shares a cat video, but you can also be the person who will share a 10,000 piece on the war in Sudan.

“I think that there is a role for [long-form journalism] in digital that people perhaps didn’t anticipate a couple of years ago, they thought that was all dead, and now it’s just about quick snappy content and getting people’s attention, but I think there is an appetite.”

Created content is also more likely to be shared

online, namely pieces that tap into or express a side of our personalities. A Reuters Institute study on shared content conducted by Satu Vasantola shows: “By sharing a basic news item, you seldom have a chance to express your personality and your aspirations and it is because of that we share in the first place”.

She also notes the “rise of an individual angle” is paramount, with blogs, columns and opinion pieces the big tickets to popularity.

“Traditionally, news journalism has concentrated on politics, economics and international relationships, all of which has been covered from a national, system perspective. The angle of an individual has been overlooked and even despised,” Vasantola notes.

“It seems that the audience wants both information about the social, national or international context and personal stories, views, feelings and experiences. While the importance of news seems to be diminishing, this observation may provide an answer to news organisations that are currently trying to find new ways to engage their audience.”

Creation can be subject to interpretation too, and as Ryan points out, it’s sometimes about getting creative with what’s already out there.

“At *The Australian* we often use curated content to add value to our original content, including galleries and interactives. We also curate content directly from social media. For example, during news events such as elections, we add a curated Twitter feed into our stories. We find this works well as we can fish out the most interesting commentary, doing all the hard work for our readers, many of whom might not actually be on Twitter.

“[When Bowie died], we asked our social media followers to let us know their favourite memory of David Bowie. We then produced an article curating the best of their answers.”

In that vein, finding a balance between the two is a fundamental element of modern creation. While the beginning might have been all about the real McCoy with fresh ideas and imagination, creativity now takes a different shape.

“I think we’re in an age of experimentation right now where people are trying to find a model because there’s a content overload going on,” says Quaintance.

“Even sites like BuzzFeed that you might perceive as repackaging a lot of stuff are actually creating quite a lot of original content, and they’re also experimenting with newsier content than you would normally associate them with.”

“The future of online content will combine both curated and long-form content. News stories will always travel beyond the original source who created them,” says Wirasinha.

“People want to see how trending stories impact them, and consume them in a tone of voice with which they can connect. While I’m a fan of long-form content, I think the reality is that the audience is largely looking for originality but not 5000 words. The future will combine multi-faceted reporting from video to data visualisation, illustrations and more to deliver original content in the most impactful way.”

“Ultimately it’s a dance between our editors and our audience,” he concedes. “The internet is an excellent democratic tool, which allows the audience to select which media brands and websites are creating the right balance.” ✽

