

MARKETING

Deliver value to consumers through entertaining, informative content: Marriott exec

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Video still from Marriott's "Two Bellmen"

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK Taking branded content beyond traditional advertising or promotional videos provides an opportunity to engage and connect with consumers on a deeper level.

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As brands require more video content to reach consumers, a number of companies have made an investment, creating in-house studios. During the "Brands Building Studios: The How, the Why, the ROI" panel discussion at ad:tech New York 2016 Nov. 2, speakers shared their own experiences of using video to inspire consumers.

"There's an explosion of video that brands need to reach the same audience on digital, and with that, a lot of that content is disposable or temporary," said Gabe Gordon, founder/managing partner at [Reach Agency](#). "So the investment brands make when they're going from 10 TV spots to now making 300 pieces of content to reach consumers on different channels, there had to be a change in the model."

Content over commercial

[Marriott International](#) developed its own content studio a few years ago, taking the creative strategy in-house. The hospitality group's vice president, creative and content marketing David Beebe explained how once an idea is born, the studio will find the right production partner to bring the piece of content to fruition.

Taking this route allows Marriott's hotels, which now include the brands under Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, to be the star of the narrative, rather than an afterthought. This studio has produced everything from scripted films to unscripted series.

These have included J.W. Marriott's action comedy "Two Bellmen" and unscripted content in partnership with Bill Rancic.

Along the Canals / Open Invitation Venice

While this content is first and foremost a marketing initiative, these films have actually become a revenue driver for Marriott, as it licenses its videos to other parties such as partner airlines.

Charles Schwab similarly shifted its content strategy from financial-centric content to stories that would resonate more with consumers.

For companies that have traditionally been focused on straight advertising, making the move toward more inspirational content can be a challenge, as it requires a change in mindset and strategy.

Once content is created, marketers need to get it in front of the right eyes.

For brokerage and banking company Charles Schwab, whose content efforts are aimed at gathering a new audience for its services, its strategy centers on going beyond its own channels. Using social media, it is able to engage and spur consumers to take actions with the content, such as sharing it to their network.



Charles Schwab's content aims to inspire its clients

Marriott leverages what it knows about its guests to feed them relevant content in-room and in-app. Along with playing content on its own network in hotel rooms, the hospitality group's films also play on platforms such as YouTube.

The most important thing is that content be connected to other calls-to-action, leading consumers to engage with another brand touchpoint.

Trending video

Luxury marketers have gotten into the content game.

Toyota Corp.'s Lexus shows its sense of humor through its Web series "Hudson Valley Ballers" produced by Above Average.

The series, the brainchild of two "Saturday Night Live" writers, airs exclusively on Lexus' branded content channel L/Studio. Television sponsorship enables brands to highlight their personality and raise their profile in a way that is not overtly branded ([see story](#)).

Precision-cut crystal maker Swarovski similarly looked to drive ticket sales with social media promotions to its first feature film production, "Romeo & Juliet," developed by its entertainment division.

Released in 2013, Romeo & Juliet was Swarovski's first time working with Hollywood partners to develop, finance and produce a film shown in international theaters. While many brands participate behind-the-scenes in costume and set design, Swarovski is likely to build more brand awareness by using a dual approach that includes jewelry featured in Romeo & Juliet as well as its behind-the-scenes participation ([see story](#)).

"I personally think that any brand has the opportunity [to create this type of content]," said Kirstin Falk, managing director brand innovation at [Charles Schwab](#). "I think what holds brands back is just legacy issues, perceptions about

the brand and the way in which we produce content.

"I think we're in a space now where we actually don't totally know where this is going to end up, and so there has to be a sense of experimentation built into the model now, where you have to take some of the risks, some of these things might not work and that's ok because you're learning from it," she said. "So to me, it's much more of an evolution constantly evolving, and this is where it's going to go."

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