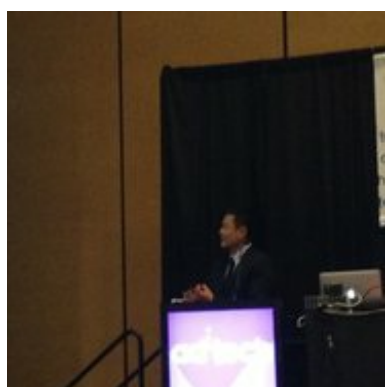


RESEARCH

Expert content lifts purchase intent more than branded user-generated media

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By JOE MCCARTHY

SAN FRANCISCO - As content continues to proliferate online, consumers are increasingly hard-pressed to distinguish between credible sources and sources masquerading as credible, according to a panel March 27 at ad:tech San Francisco.

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The "Trusted versus Branded in a Content Saturated World" session discussed the importance of locating credible sources and avoiding an overtly self-promotional style. While user reviews are often touted as a beacon for consumers, the panel concluded that independent expert content still holds the most sway.

"Nobody wants to be sold to," said Peyman Nilforoush, cofounder/CEO of [inPowered](#), San Francisco.

"What's really foundational to us as consumers is access to credible information," he said. "Without it we're kind of crippled when making decisions."

Karaoke effect

The advent of social media unleashed a torrent of so-called experts. Millions of people gained a platform to voice their opinion and the ensuing noise made it difficult to find the

experts from the imposters.

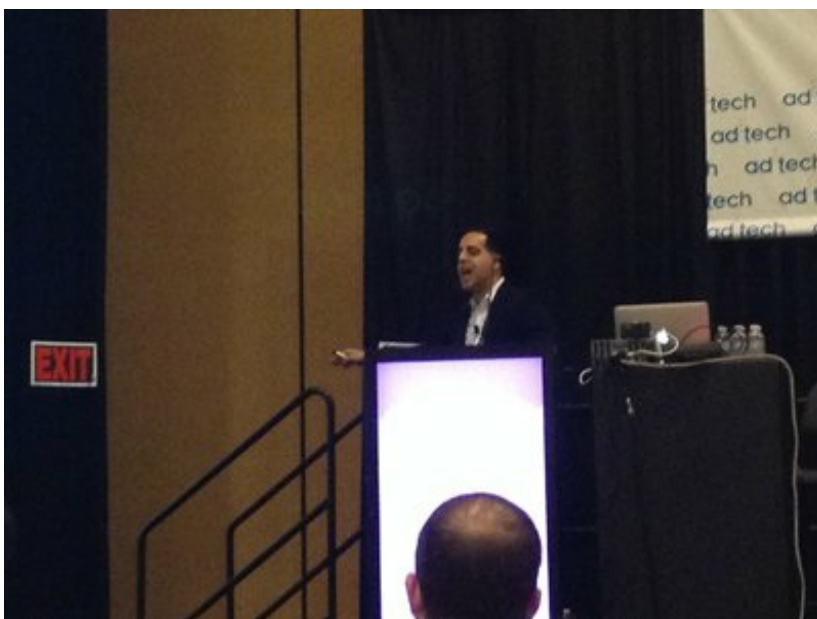
However, consumers have grown jaded and will quickly deem a source of information untrustworthy if they feel duped.



Brian Colbert, chief revenue officer of About.com

Consequently, brands have to be ultra-diligent when distributing content. "There's so much content on the Web that users really want and need curation," said Brian Colbert, chief revenue officer of [About.com](https://www.about.com), New York.

While luxury brands can assume control of most of their content curation because of large online communities, they have to gain credibility boosts from independent sources. To accomplish this brands often turn to social influencers.



Peyman Nilforoush, CEO and co-founder of inPowered

As the role of social influencers has expanded over the past few years, brands have developed sophisticated methods of vetting potential partnerships.

Panelists of the “Inside the Mind of a Social Influencer” session stressed that the key to harnessing a successful social influencer is understanding that a partnership rather than a one-sided recruitment is taking place. Indeed, social influencers often vet brands to a degree tantamount to how brands vet them ([see story](#)).

Truth in numbers

Tommy Cheng, vice president of strategic marketing science at [Nielsen](#), presented research examining the attitudes of consumers regarding user generated content, brand content and expert content.

The UGC came in the form of user reviews, brand content came from Web sites and expert content came from online article and blogs. Nine hundred consumers participated.

Consumer reactions were measured according to familiarity with product, affinity to brand and consideration of purchase.

Across multiple price points and product categories, consumers had higher rates of familiarity, affinity and purchase intent after being exposed to expert content.

In fact, expert content lifted purchase intent 38 percent more than branded content and 83 percent more than UGC.

Many brands already leverage a mix of these sources on their Web sites where they feature user reviews, news articles and branded editorials.

For example, precision-cut crystal maker Swarovski gave brand loyalists an immersive look at the inner workings of the jewelry world with a blog from creative director Nathalie Colin.

Wink by Nathalie Colin includes social media channels and a blog detailing the creative director’s many inspirations, fashion tips and aspects of her daily life. Efforts to improve brand transparency develop stronger connections among enthusiasts by reminding them of the human element that powers the company ([see story](#)).

Also, Apple held a series of conversations with fashion players at its SoHo store in New York to show its place and connections in the industry.

The talks included conversations with Vogue editor Anna Wintour, luxury shoe designer Manolo Blahnik and Net-A-Porter founder Natalie Massenet ([see story](#)).

However, brands should be wary about native advertising, a method of gaining exposure that can seem expedient.

"The implementation of [native advertising] needs to fundamentally change, so that it builds trust with the user and is completely transparent," inPowered's Mr. Nilforoush said.

Final Take

Joe McCarthy, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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