

Increase ROI by Reducing the Clutter of Your Content

A few years ago, I said goodbye to my bundled cable service and opted to go with the streaming provider Hulu. For a while, I was in a state of unencumbered bliss. No longer did I have to pay a king's ransom for a hundred channels I will never watch. Gone were the days of weeding through scores of niche content. (I'm sorry, but do we really need the Gem Shopping Network?) I was reclaiming my time, and it felt good.

But then came the streaming wars. Netflix came out swinging with Stranger Things, and I desperately needed to relive the nostalgia of my 1980s upbringing. Amazon then entered the ring when I signed up for its Prime service and automatically gained access to Prime Video. Paramount+, Peacock and Apple TV+ soon followed.

Soon, I found myself right back where I started – wading knee-deep in content I will never watch, from reality competition shows about whether an object is actually cake to more superhero series than I can count. In the end, I watch the same handful of shows that I find entertaining or enlightening and ignore the rest.

The deluge of programs generated by streaming services is not unlike the landscape of law firms that produce a seemingly endless assembly line of content. For the casual business owner, CEO or general counsel, it is a feast for the eyes that is too dense to digest. However, content is the fuel that keeps a law firm's marketing machine running. Without it, your channels would run dry.

In this post, I explore the toll a directionless content marketing program can take on a firm and its personnel. I also provide some best practices for getting a leg up on your competition and developing a unique presence in the marketplace by applying strategic editorial thinking to your content marketing program.

Death by Content

Whether you're the audience or the producer, a rapid cadence of content output can be exhausting. Yes, the actual production of the content itself is a laborious task, but that is just the beginning. A single piece of content does not live in a single place. For maximum effectiveness, reach and ROI, content should be repurposed and repackaged across different channels.

For example, creating a blog post takes planning, research, drafting and editing. Executing the distribution strategy adds an entire list of tasks, from writing social media captions to hashtag research to creating the web page where the blog post sits.

All this work is enough to drain the resources of even a well-staffed marketing



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department. For solo marketers, a content marketing program can eat into all their time, diminishing their ability to give attention to other critical tasks. When this happens, the law firm suffers.

But law firms aren't the only ones suffering from the content mill approach to content marketing. By generating a flood of content, you saturate your audience with so much thought leadership that there is no way they will ever absorb it all. The worst-case scenario is that they identify your brand as one of the main contributors to their content overload and opt to ignore you altogether.

One other negative about cranking out content is that it diminishes the ability of a firm to allocate time to creating genuinely good standout content. Creating good content that differentiates your firm from others often takes a significant investment of time. I'm talking about industry surveys, in-depth analyses, genuinely thought-provoking [blog posts](#), eye-catching and [informative infographics](#), engaging podcasts, and [quality video](#). Unless you have significant internal resources (or an outside agency like Jaffe), you cannot regularly produce both high volumes of run-of-the-mill content and these high-quality deliverables.

Applying Editorial Thinking

Producing lots of mediocre content won't move the needle much for your firm, but producing niche and/or substantive content will. So how does a firm embark on rethinking its approach to content marketing?

The answer is to apply an editorial strategy to the content development process. This includes assessing your brand and your audience, planning your editorial calendar, managing more substantive content projects, and learning to say no to content initiatives that have historically performed poorly and waste resources.

When assessing your brand, take account of your assets. What is your firm known for in the market? What differentiates you from other law firms? Do you have a niche practice group or serve a niche industry? Is there a specific legal issue that your firm handles exceptionally well? Maybe you have an attorney who has the charisma of a talk show host, or a marketer who loves graphic displays of data. Any one of these attributes can help your firm develop content that stands out from the noise. The point is to be different, whether with the topics your firm chooses to cover or with its approach to more general topics.

As for your target audience, you're going to want to understand their interests and their behaviors. What matters most to them? What subject matter or industry information do they need most to be successful at their jobs or for their companies to succeed? What keeps them up at night? How do they acquire information – is it mainly through social media and if so, through which network? Or do they tend to gravitate toward multimedia content, like podcasts and video? Are they looking for quick, bite-size pieces of useful information, or do they appreciate in-depth white papers?

For editorial planning, calendaring and project management, you'll want to devise a system to know when pieces of content will be published. This helps you create deadlines

so you have a steady flow of content rather than a sudden downpour or a long drought. It also helps ensure you are covering a variety of topics, avoiding duplication of information, and producing content across all channels and in different forms of media.

Finally, you need editorial judgment, which means you will have to say no sometimes to producing or publishing a piece of content. For example, you might have a lawyer who wants to author a blog post that provides best practices to clients in response to a regulatory change. This is a great topic, but what if the attorney wants to draft the post well after the regulatory change has taken effect? By this time, you can bet that competitors and journalists alike have written about this change. (A quick Google search can confirm this.) If that's the case, you may want to urge the attorney to find a more timely topic or see if there is an alternative way to approach the subject matter, such as focusing on how the regulatory change will affect or already has affected a specific industry.

Content Is Still King

Make no mistake: Content is still king. But without a strategy in place, content can quickly transform into an unruly dictator that controls your marketing department. Rather than letting the tail wag the dog, take a strategic approach – one with an eye for editorial judgment and planning – and make decisions that benefit your firm, your personnel and your audience.

If you want to learn more about how to create an editorial strategy for your law firm content, contact me, Keith Ecker, SVP, Marketing & Branding, at kecker@jaffepr.com.