

OPINION

Content ascends to marketing throne



By John Obrecht

CALL IT A TRUISM. Call it a cliché. ... No matter what you call it, it's clear that it's becoming increasingly more apt for marketers: Content is king. ¶ While content marketing isn't new to the b-to-b space—Rockwell Manufacturing Co. in the 1950s, for example, and Mobil Corp. in the 1970s ran thought-leadership pieces crafted by legendary agencies Marsteller Inc. and Doyle Dane Bernbach, respectively—it's rapidly gaining critical mass. A good gauge of the growing interest was the Content Marketing Institute's recent Content Marketing World expo and conference, which attracted a little more than 1,000 attendees, up from 600 in 2011.

Last month, *BtoB* released an exclusive research report titled "Content Marketing: Ready for Prime Time," based on an online survey of 440 b-to-b professionals conducted in April and May. Thirty-four percent of respondents said they were "very" or "fully" engaged with content marketing, up from 18% last year. By next year, the percentage of those so engaged will nearly double to 66%, according to the study.

It's no surprise that many of this year's Top Marketers (see special report, page 11) are fully engaged.

George Stenitzer at Tellabs Inc. has long been a proponent of content marketing across a variety of platforms including general and customer-specific newsletters and a print magazine, *Insight*. When Tellabs pursued Telecom Italia, it created an Italian-language version of its website with content specifically crafted to reach its primary target. And it made a big push to land Russia's top three telecom service providers using Russian-language versions of its website and magazine. The result: Tellabs won the business of two of the three.

At Cisco Systems, Blair Christie and her team are creating content that looks at transitions in marketing and society. A topical example: a chart that compared

the data usage between the Republican and Democratic national conventions.

SAP's Jonathan Becher takes a personal approach to content through his blog "Management by Motion." Recent posts include "Origin of the Word 'Upset'" and "Is Brainstorming Brain Dead?" (In, most cases, yes, Becher concludes.) Another recent entry of Becher's, "Writing Tips From Famous Authors," offered pithy advice for content creators from the likes of Hawthorne, Twain, Hemingway and Vonnegut.

I was especially gratified to learn that when asked for tips on better writing, Becher has long quoted George Orwell's sage advice: "If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out." I, too, have shared this quote many times over the years. It's rule No. 3 of six that

Orwell laid down in his essay "Politics and the English Language"—for my money, the best piece of writing on the art of writing. For years I've kept copies of it handy to give to colleagues, especially those who are new to journalism. It's a good read, too, for creators of marketing content in this era when content is indeed king.

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