



The Future of Branded Content Looks A Lot Like Content

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"We don't call it branded content, we just call it content," said Juan Woodbury, SVP, creative director and executive producer, Leo Burnett USA, in last week's "Branded Content = Brand Content = Content," at Promax 2019 in Los Angeles. The session included Tom Kaniewski, senior creative director, ad sales creative, A+E Networks and Daniel Sattelmeyer, head of creative and partner, Bark Bark.

What does the future of branded content look like? Just ask these three who are collectively helping to shape it today. From the agency side to the network side, they are finding innovative solutions by making sure the content benefits both sides.

"One thing about branded content," said Kaniewski, "[is that] everyone knows it's two brands coming together. But the second part of it is that it's got to be mutually beneficial for both brands. When we approach branded content, we think of it like we're making content for someone, not for everyone. We'll let the sponsors' commercial cover the everyone."

For Kaniewski, this means getting specific on the audiences you want to reach. He continues, "Let's say [clients] want to target millennials. We have the ability to target millennials who travel, who like sports or music. That's how we dig in

deep."Â

Woodbury shares the same sentiment, saying "It depends on our demographic and who we're targeting. We just want to make sure that we make films, content and music for a specific person, to solve a specific problem for our clients."

As it goes with the digital age, there's been dramatic changes in howÂ branded content is created. Especially within the last five to ten years.

"When I started doing branded content about ten years ago," said Kaniewski, "the most common thing we would hear from our sponsors is 'When are you going to hold up the product? When are you going to say the name of the product?' That's what we got all the time.Â

"Now, it's changed. They really understand the value of storytelling. They understand giving some sort of reward back to the consumer. That's been the biggest seismic shift, and we [have] welcomed that. It's way bigger than trying to sell something. It's the difference between making somebody engage with your content versus somebody enduring through another commercial."

From the commercial side, things are a bit different. Mostly, clients are just trying to sell audiences on a specific product, and it can get tricky.

"For me, it's a little different because we come from the commercial base and we're going to try to sell you on a specific product." said Woodbury. "For my department, we've blurred the lines. We want to be authentic to our clients and consumers. Everybody's aware that they're being sold to so the question for a lot of our clients is 'How do we solve your problem of trying to sell your particular product'. The best thing is to be authentic and to make sure we have a natural connection with the consumer. A connection of 'Can I identify with this brand right here?' Especially for our younger millennials. A lot of them are asking 'What does this mean for me? I understand I need to have toothpaste but what is that brand about?'"

With the changes to branded content comes changes to the length of the final creative. Jow exactly do you sell clients on creating not just the traditional :60 but on longer form content?Â

Kaniewski shared his perspective from the network side: "Everyone loves to do the big splashy spot and we used to like to do it too," he said. "But when my team and I get together, we're always thinking of 'how can we take this one idea and grow it?' Even in the germination stage, how can we create a franchise? How can we build something outside the one-off? We've been pretty successful creating franchises with all our brands. We've been able to do that deep dive and get into these sponsor categories. The storytelling ones have been the most rewarding, where there's a pro-social cause. We love to work on those."

For Woodbury on the agency level, the approach is different.Â

"I don't look at it from just the 30-second spot, even though that might be the main thing in our brief. The first thing I always ask the client is 'How do you want people to feel about your brand? And what do you want the consumer to take away from it?' That's really important. From the creative director side, that's how I form the ideas. As far as a deeper dive, we do that. We welcome different partners. Before, we were just doing the 30-second spot with a simple production company. But now we look at how this affects the consumer. We want to do the big 30- or 60-second splash, but it's about connecting with the consumer."

With these changes, you still have to sell-in these creative ideas. Kaniewski discussed the pros and cons of getting brands to partner with their producing vendors.

"On the network side, you still have these great big tentpole events that we can do together and give sponsors opportunities for. For our brands, on a weekly basis, we have Live PD. At Lifetime, we have It's a Wonderful Lifetime. On History, we do lots of programming around Veterans Day. We did forty pieces of branded content around that. We also have our commensurate social channels to go with it. Appointment viewing is still a big thing, there's tons of opportunities for brand storytelling. Everything from the Superbowl to Shark Week. Unbelievable opportunities are still there on the network side."

The group seemed to agree that collaboration was needed from all sides in order to continue doing branded content the right way.Â

"What I'm actively doing is having those conversations with networks," said Woodbury. "We just did something for Kraft while the government was shut down. We wanted to do a pop-up store and that was all we wanted to do initially. We asked 'How do we want to get this out there?' We opened up the store within 24 hours, and we were able to help out folks. If I had your number (Woodbury points to Kaniewski), we would be able to see how we would bring it to a network. That is where I think the future needs to go."