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That Time I Fell Down a Sponsored-Content Rabbit Hole



Rebecca Joyner (<https://www.business2community.com/author/rebecca-joyner>)— December 21, 2017



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▲ Interesting

▼ Not Interesting

Every productivity article I've ever read, whether it's geared toward content marketers or not, says to eat the frog first (<https://www.fastcompany.com/1592454/work-smart-do-your-worst-task-first-or-eat-live-frog-every-morning>). Knock out the toughest thing on your to-do list before 9 a.m., and the rest of the day will feel like a treat.

I resist this advice.

I start my days reading. Part of the reason is I hate having a cluttered inbox, and all those email newsletters (<http://www.metiscomm.com/metis-blog/your-marketing-emails-arent-getting-clicked-heres-why>) aren't going to delete themselves – they must get read (or at least skimmed) first. The second reason is I want to remind myself first thing in the morning that the rest of the day should be about creating something, multiple somethings, worthy of a reader's time. It helps to warm up by searching out someone else's wonderful somethings.

Recently, that something came to me from an unexpected place – a sponsored ad.

It showed up in the middle of the Quartz Daily Brief, a simple text ad, just a few lines and no image.

SPONSOR CONTENT BY XEROX

Speaking of Work, the ultimate tale of the modern workplace, is here. 14 world-famous talents contribute to this narrative, including best-selling author Joyce Carol Oates, award-winning novelist of *Jack Reacher* series Lee Child, and singer/songwriter Aimee Mann. Get your free, personalized copy of the [book](#).

I have mixed feelings about sponsored content. As a consumer of information, I want unbiased content – and there's plenty of great, non-sponsored stuff available. As a marketer, I know paid amplification is a necessity in a world gone content crazy (<http://www.metiscomm.com/metis-blog/the-future-of-everything-the-convergence-of-pr-social-content-and-more>).

I had no ambivalence about clicking on that link, though.

Joyce Carol Oates? Roxane Gay? Aimee Mann? Ultimate workplace tales?

I wanted more about all of that.

I clicked.

What I found set the tone for the rest of my frog-free day.

Entertainment + information = content marketing gold

I don't want to keep you from falling down this perfectly worthwhile time-suck, but if you want the executive summary instead, here it is: Xerox built a beautiful microsite, setthepagefree.com (<https://setthepagefree.com/>), to showcase a bunch of technology solutions most of us wouldn't think

we think "Xerox."



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(Saturday Night Live's '90s classic skit, "Making Copies.")

But the brand considered audience, not advertising message, first.

The ebook, available for download on a variety of devices, features work by 14 writers, many of whom I have paid money to read, or at least have made a trip to the library to check out.

On the website, I found the technology "story" behind each writer's submission, as well as accompanying videos, audio clips of the authors reading their work, pre-packaged social media messages for easy sharing, and a cause tied to the whole effort – spreading literacy worldwide through support for the 92nd Street Y (<https://www.92y.org/>) and Worldreader (<https://www.worldreader.org/>).

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I found this all through a text ad in an email newsletter, but Xerox also promoted it for months through media relations efforts.

There was a New York Times story (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/22/business/media/xerox-writers-92nd-street-y.html?mtrref=www-google.com&gwh=240B65424C7201BA37C690A0EB56C16B&gwt=pay>) in the fall, with a photo of author Gary Shteyngart using a voice-activated Xerox printer. Adweek (<http://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/xerox-explores-the-modern-work-habits-of-major-writers-as-they-create-a-book-together/>), CNET (<https://www.cnet.com/news/xerox-speaking-of-work-free-ebook-joshua-ferris/>) and other trades picked up on the content-driven push, as well.



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MEDIA

With Literary Support, Xerox Asserts Its Modern Relevance

Advertising

By MATT KRUPNICK OCT. 22, 2017

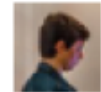


The author Gary Shteyngart used a voice-activated printer to write his essay for Xerox's "Set the Page Free" project. Kaitlin Parry

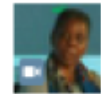
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It was exciting to stumble upon a content-first integrated marketing campaign done big and done well – one that celebrated writers as a vehicle for promoting the technology they use when they create their work.

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And it was reaffirming to see this effort benefited – to some degree – the once iconic brand, now in the spotlight for leadership and financial turmoil (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-xerox-board-icahn/icahn-nominates-four-directors-to-xeroxs-board-idUSKBN1E51BT>).

Content for awareness and lead gen

In an interview with Forbes (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/billeehoward/2017/10/22/marketing-brand-reinvention/#4160329b4324>) earlier this year, Xerox CMO Toni Clayton-Hine noted that a goal of the Set the Page Free campaign was to introduce the modern brand.

She's quoted as saying, "My role is to create awareness and consideration around our current portfolio, with the changing set of people that are buying, selling or influencing our technology every day, and then making sure that that brand is connected not just at that broad awareness level but also down into the field."

But beyond awareness, Clayton-Hine told Forbes this content-first campaign was also about lead gen.

"Every choice we've made in terms of bringing this campaign to life has included some sort of digital signature so that we can then leverage it downstream, albeit sometimes very far downstream, into a potential lead."

Creating content audiences want to consume

Today, the headlines about Xerox (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/11/business/dealbook/bitcoin-futures-trading.html>) are quite different than the literary-flavored campaign that caught my attention a week ago, and the brand's next campaign will likely be all about crisis communications (<http://www.metiscomm.com/guide/crisis-communications-best-practices>).

But, whatever happens to Xerox, its Set the Page Free campaign is a reminder to marketers about the power of an audience-focused idea, fueled by integrated tactics, with content at the forefront.

High quality, big-rock content downloads.

Video, audio and text assets.

Media outreach.

Paid promotion.

Email and social media distribution.

When all these pieces work in tandem, the resulting campaigns stand out in a way that is difficult to ignore.



(<https://www.business2community.com/author/rebecca-joyner>)

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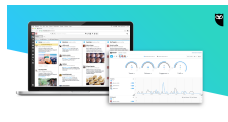
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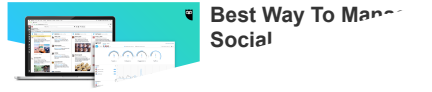
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