Rise of the UK Brand Journalist

*Journalists as Content Marketers*

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# Table of Contents

1. Introduction  
2. Methodology  
3. Key Stats: At a Glance  
4. What Makes a Great Brand Journalist?  
5. The Value of the In-house Team and Who Makes it Tick  
6. Case Study: GE  
7. Bigger Budgets, Better Content  
8. Case Study: Asos  
9. Measuring Value from Social to Sales  
10. Case Study: Telefonica  
11. The Brand Journalist in Five Years  
12. The Brands That Excite Marketers and Brand Journalists  
13. Conclusion  
14. About NewsCred
Introduction

by Shafqat Islam, CEO and co-founder, NewsCred

Brand journalism is undoubtedly gaining both popularity and credibility. With the trend of brands becoming publishers well under way, the talented writers brands recruit are key to producing the relevant and insightful copy that audiences demand.

It is not just a trend. A week rarely goes by without another announcement of a company adding revered brand journalists to their brand-led content team. In March, for example, Metro newspaper hired three more people for its in-house creative division, “Story.” They include Rachel Tarley, who left MailOnline to become one of Story’s commercial editors.

What organisations that invest in brand journalism are discovering is that if storytelling is done well, underlying brand messages will cut through the crowd – if the tone is right, of course. But it’s easier said than done.

In NewsCred’s ‘Rise of the UK Brand Journalist’ report, our survey of 50 brand journalists and 50 marketers reveals the spectrum of pressures faced by both in their quest for creating quality content. These include pressure to secure funding for new staff that understand the brand, tell great stories, and demonstrate a return on investment as well as the demand for being continually creative while producing engaging, relevant, and informative stories.

Creativity is in fact deemed the number one asset for a brand editor according to our research, surpassing writing skills as the most important value and demonstrating that this is now being taken as a given. This isn’t surprising at all when you consider that a brand journalist is responsible not just for creating content, but for being commercially accountable. This formidable combination is proving to be a challenge when
it comes to recruitment. Understanding the commercial element of a brand journalist’s role is so crucial, and perhaps why our research reveals that 82% of marketers actually have an in-house content team, and find this set-up more effective.

This mindset, coupled with the fact that 64% of the marketers we polled are planning to increase their content marketing efforts this year, proves that we have yet to see the best of what brand journalism can produce — especially as just 38% feel their current content efforts are ‘very’ effective.

Brand journalists too are continuing to discover what opportunities lie within the branded content arena. 51% of the brand journalists we surveyed believe their career choice offers as much satisfaction as traditional journalism. 73% feel confident it will be considered a more mainstream professional choice in five years’ time.

In the years to come, the brand journalist will play an integral role not just for the marketing department but for businesses as a whole, especially as the brands as publishers evolution has already begun. The challenge now is how brand journalists make their mark with editorial and commercial prowess and raise the bar for both professions of marketing and journalism.

Shafqat Islam
Methodology

The survey of brand editors and senior marketers was conducted for NewsCred by WITH PR and Redshift Research.

50 UK brand journalists, working both client and agency side, were polled in February and March 2015 using an email invitation and online survey. The 50 brand journalists included heads of content, content managers, e-editors, CRM editors, managing editors, content directors, senior content executives, content strategists, content marketing managers, website managers, editor-in-chiefs, global editors and campaign managers. Industries included travel, fashion, retail, consumer technology, B2B, finance, e-commerce, events, online betting and IT.

The 50 UK senior marketers were polled via a Redshift professional online panel and came from a similar but undisclosed cross section of industries.
## Key Facts: At a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32%</td>
<td>of marketers and 41% of brand journalists consider creativity the core value for a brand editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54%</td>
<td>of marketing companies have a content manager role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63%</td>
<td>of brand journalists find it reasonably difficult to hire content team members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82%</td>
<td>of marketers have an in-house content team, while 56% work with an agency to create content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73%</td>
<td>of brand journalists believe their content budget will increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73%</td>
<td>of marketers say they will invest more in content this year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56%</td>
<td>of marketers feel social media traction is the most important measure, while for brand journalists it is views and shares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84%</td>
<td>of marketers agree that the industry will develop clear standards of measurement for evaluating the ROI of content marketing in the next five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73%</td>
<td>of brand journalists say brand journalism will be considered a mainstream career choice in five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51%</td>
<td>of brand journalists see brand journalism careers offering as much satisfaction as traditional journalism</td>
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What Makes a Great Brand Journalist?

NewsCred’s research reveals that consistently being able to come up with creative content ideas is considered the biggest challenge for 36% of the marketers surveyed. Creativity is deemed the core value for a brand editor for 32%, compared with the 12% who think writing is the most important skill — despite an obvious need to be a great storyteller. Rather than writing being taken for granted, it appears that strong writing is being taken as a given, and the other elements on top of that are what separate the wheat from the chaff.

The brand journalists questioned in our survey are in line with marketers, with 41% agreeing that the most important skill for a brand editor should be creativity. Consumers are hungry for 24/7 content, but with increasingly short attention spans and growing competition for their engagement, brands face an on-going battle to devise fresh and exciting stories for different media.

Many may find this surprising, given that writing is perceived to be the cornerstone for how a journalist conducts their business day in and day out, whether they work for a brand or otherwise. But this isn’t surprising at all when you realise that a great brand journalist doesn’t just tell shareable stories, but has an important role to play in building credibility and trust in the brand. It just isn’t as simple as replicating the function and role of the traditional journalist when it comes to taking this position brand-side.

It’s official – creativity and commercial awareness trump writing ability when it comes to the top attributes a brand journalist should possess, according to both the marketers and brand journalists NewsCred surveyed for this report.
Desired Skills of a Brand Editor

What is the most important skill a brand editor should have?

**Marketers**
- Creativity: 32%
- Commercial Awareness: 20%
- Analysis: 16%
- Social Media Skills: 14%
- Writing: 12%
- Leadership: 6%

**Brand journalists**
- Creativity: 41%
- Commercial Awareness: 18%
- Analysis: 8%
- Social Media Skills: 2%
- Writing: 12%
- Leadership: 12%
The brand journalists we surveyed are on the lookout for solutions that are conducive to maximising creativity. Their top three priorities for 2016 are to create more original content (a priority for 69%), branch out into new ways of promoting content for free (67%) and expand into new content forms/mediums (63%). 61% also expect to increase the size of their content team.

Our results also show that 37% of the brand journalists surveyed expect to leverage more user-generated content over the next year and 16% will license more content from other publishers to further ease the creative pressure.

While the demand for delivering continual creativity is real, so is understanding how a commercial imperative influences the role and performance of the brand journalist. There can be discrepancies between the brand vision the marketing team is trying to achieve via content and the short-term interests of the sales team. As one respondent comments, “One of the biggest challenges as a brand editor is striking the balance between the need to build brand and story-telling as well as finding the more functional (conversion/lead generation) approach.”

The commercial/creative conundrum is also particularly pertinent when it comes to recruiting content team members. 63% of our brand journalist respondents say it is difficult to hire content team members, perhaps highlighting that there are many candidates who can write, but those who can do this proficiently and be commercially savvy are hard to come by. Among brand journalists, finding people with the right marketing and commercial skills is the most difficult task when recruiting writers for 33% of those surveyed. Unearthing people with the right editorial skills is a close second at 29%, demonstrating that writing isn’t completely overlooked for commercial savviness.

Commercial prowess is perhaps not surprisingly more of a pain point for the marketers we surveyed. 32% say they struggle to find people who understand their brand well enough when hiring. 32% say recruiting people with the right marketing background is a real challenge. This is considered a priority over writing skills, which 24% of the marketers we polled say is important.
**Desired Skills of a Brand Editor**

How difficult do you or your company find it to hire content team members?

- Not At All Difficult: 14%
- Somewhat Difficult: 35%
- Reasonably Difficult: 27%
- Very Difficult: 0%
- No Opinion: 20%
- Other: 4%
Challenges in Hiring

What is the hardest part of recruiting the right people for your content team?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketers</th>
<th>Brand journalists</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding people...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32% who understand our brand</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32% with the right marketing background</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24% with the right editorial background</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Having a strong sense of how content can achieve commercial objectives doesn’t just apply to how a brand journalist must orchestrate their work and ideas around this, but how their role fits into the wider organisation, especially when it comes to managing stakeholders. The brand journalists we surveyed report how challenging it can be to get buy-in from senior stakeholders who may drive a hard bargain when it comes to signing off on content budgets and reporting back on ROI.

Additionally, some of the brand journalists we polled who work in-house report feeling a sense of isolation, especially in a highly corporate structure. Corporate environments can be a far cry from the buzz of the newsroom, where writers are encouraged to be objective and were taught early on to understand that there are clear lines of separation between the editorial and advertising departments. This kind of thinking can understandably cause friction within content and marketing departments and further highlights the depth of the task at hand when it comes to finding the perfect content team.

When stakeholders are brought in to content marketing, a challenge can be how to handle their input in a productive way that doesn’t become personal or professionally damaging. As one brand journalist from our survey comments: “There is still a lot of personal opinion from stakeholders and this can make the process slow and therefore frustrating.”
The Value of the In-House Team and Who Makes it Tick

Our findings emphasise the importance of having high performing content teams who understand the brand holistically and is largely why 82% of marketer respondents have an in-house content team. 42% believe this is the best setup for an effective content strategy and 41% plan to expand their in-house content team this year.

Having a solid brand understanding is recognised by 49% of the marketers polled as the biggest advantage of having a content team within the company — and a differentiating factor between content that works and that which falls flat. 22% say they could then work more closely with the marketing team. For 15%, in-house teams are preferred as they feel it’s a more cost-effective solution.

Do you have an in-house content team?

- 82% Yes
- 18% No
What do you see as the biggest value of having an in-house content team?

**Marketers**

- They understand the brand better: 49%
- They can work more closely with the marketing team: 22%
- It's more cost effective for us: 15%
- They produce better content: 10%
- There's more transparency about the metrics and KPIs associated: 5%
Of the 18% that do not have an in-house content team, 56% rely on the marketing team to produce content and 44% work with a third party agency. 11% use other sources such as freelance brand journalists and copywriters.

Among the brand journalists surveyed, 49% work within the marketing team and 31% work in a content team operating in parallel with the marketing department, demonstrating how essential it is for the two areas to function seamlessly. As one marketer tells us, “There is a focus on ensuring we become thought leaders and provide content to support this.”

A team of 3 to 5 people is the most typical (41%) among marketers and brand journalists (25%) alike.
Content Team’s Size

How big is your in-house content team?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketers</th>
<th>Brand journalists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 person</td>
<td>1 person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 people</td>
<td>2 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 people</td>
<td>3-5 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 people</td>
<td>6-10 people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10% 16%
20% 14%
41% 25%
20% 18%

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Numbers aside, what does a content team look like in terms of roles and responsibilities? Both the marketers and brand journalists we polled are consistent in saying that the most common roles are content managers and content executives. Heads of content and senior content managers are less prominent but still reasonably well represented. Broadly, the more senior the role, e.g. editorial director/content director/chief content officer, the less it is accounted for. The results do vary between the marketers and brand journalists we polled, so it is worth taking into account the fact that the amount of senior roles available relate to the size of the company.

The lack of senior editorial roles as indicated by our respondent base may point to the difficulty in finding people with the right skills, especially in higher, more strategic positions where the commercial and creative dichotomy is manifest at a more dramatic level. These senior hires require all-round business skills, an inherent understanding of the company as well as an ability to manage a creative team and lead the content marketing strategy.

The tendency to focus more on junior hires also points to the way many organisations still view content as an ongoing experiment. This trend may highlight the continuing difficulty of securing the buy-in of senior management, with top level hires representing a significant business investment.
Existing Editorial Roles

What editorial roles do you have in your organisation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Marketers</th>
<th>Brand journalists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Manager</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Executive</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Content Manager</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Content</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Content Manager</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Content Officer</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Editor</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial Director</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Rise of the UK Brand Journalist: Journalists as Content Marketers
How Editorial Directors Show Value

How do you think an editorial director or a chief content officer can best show their value to the business?

- By proving the leads generated from content: 40%
- By delivering on engagement metrics like reach, views, dwell, and time: 30%
- By developing and setting out clear systems for content marketing: 22%
- By training staff in content marketing: 8%

It is worth noting what marketers expect from a senior position such as editorial director or chief content officer: 40% say they can best show their value to a business by demonstrating leads and sales generated. The fact that measurement is still a work in progress may indicate that it is also difficult to quantify the output of a senior role, especially with such high expectations from above.
GE is determined to show its audiences that its brand stands for much more than just household appliances. But for a large, 100-year-old corporation, it isn’t always easy to explain to consumers the depth and breadth of what it does. Enter visual storytelling as the key to solving this particular dilemma.

GE has taken their role as a brand storyteller seriously by creating a variety of content properties like GE Reports, Ecomagination, Txchnologist, healthymagination, and most recently World In Motion, all of which drive the conversation by explaining complex topics in a simple, newsworthy style.

The crowning jewel of GE’s content strategy, however, has to be GE Reports, the online magazine managed by former tech reporter Tomas Kellner. Using his past experience at titles like ‘Forbes,’ Kellner makes sure that every story is an interesting one in its own right — as well as clearly but naturally showing the brand’s values and point of view.

GE Reports is distributed across 12 markets worldwide and publishes between 20 and 30 stories a week, focusing on the coolest and most innovative uses of GE technology in the world — like the story of a farmer using GE’s LED lights to grow his crops, which was read over a million times. As a result of Kellner’s keen focus on editorial quality, articles on GE Reports are regularly picked up by other publications, ranging from The Washington Post to Gizmodo.

But GE’s impactful content strategy, focusing on people all over the world who actually use GE products, truly excels in its creative use of platforms including Tumblr, Pinterest, and Reddit to engage audiences and generate leads. The company was an early adopter of new social tools and user-generated content through platforms such as Vine, and GE has excelled in creating content that works across the web — stories regularly feature GIFs and infographics for added interest. This just adds more to their online presence, like Pinterest boards devoted to ‘Badass Machines’ or its YouTube channel, which boasts 60,000 subscribers. No matter the channel, GE’s values of innovation and creativity in technology shine through.

And their efforts have paid off. GE has won awards for its consumer-friendly visual storytelling campaigns across social media, positioning itself as a competitive science and technology leader — a perfect reflection of GE’s innovative culture.
Bigger Budgets, Better Content

The need for content is evident, but justifying budgets is still a challenge. This appears to be more prevalent among the brand journalists we polled, who named this as a primary concern, especially when it comes to securing budget for executing ideas and investing in staff.

For marketers, coming up with the ideas themselves appears more an issue than obtaining budget to make them a reality. This could indicate that brand journalists are wary of coming up with ideas that don’t make it past sign off stage — and that they need to work even more closely with their marketing counterparts to shape creative ideas into ones that are commercially viable.

Our findings show that although the majority (88%) of marketers surveyed believe their company’s content marketing efforts are effective, only 38% feel that their efforts are ‘very’ effective. This suggests that while brand journalism is not strictly a new phenomenon in the marketing world, many organisations are still challenged by how to choose the right talent, use them effectively, and train them strategically.

Yet our insight from marketers reveals that 48% will invest further over the next year in producing content that consumers engage with and trust while 36% plan to keep their spend consistent. This commitment to investing in content will go some way toward addressing the creativity challenges and other pressures already outlined.

The brand journalists surveyed are also optimistic for budget growth over the coming year. While 24% say their company or clients currently spend less than 10% of their marketing budget on content, 73% expect the budget to increase over the next 12 months. 42% of marketers polled say they will be pouring more resources into hiring brand journalists and content creators to fuel their efforts.

Brand journalists expect to see spending increase on producing original content (61%) and think they will pay more to promote and amplify content (55%).
What proportion of your company or clients’ marketing/media budget goes towards content?

**Brand journalists**

- Less than 10%: 24%
- Between 11%–20%: 12%
- Between 21%–30%: 18%
- Between 31%–40%: 6%
- Between 41%–50%: 2%
- Between 51%–60%: 0%
- Between 61%–70%: 2%
- Between 71%–80%: 2%
- Between 81%–90%: 2%
- Over 90%: 0%
- Don’t know: 33%
Do you plan to do any of the below in the next 12 months?

- Increase spend on original content initiatives: 61%
- Increase spend to promote/amplify content: 55%
- Branch out into new ways of promoting content for free (such as reaching out to influencers): 67%
- Expand into new forms or mediums for content: 63%
- Grow your content team by hiring more freelancers or permanent staff members: 61%
- Create more original content on a weekly or daily basis: 69%
- Utilize more user-generated content: 37%
- Use more licensed content from other publishers: 16%
- Other: 0%
When it comes to brands excelling at content marketing, fashion brand ASOS is hard to beat.

The style site is always up on the latest trends both in fashion and marketing, from working with celebrities like Ellie Goulding to jumping on Vine with clever video campaigns.

For all their innovative digital strategies, however, print is at the heart of ASOS’ content strategy, with the monthly ASOS Magazine. Launched in 2007, this free print magazine has grown to reach an impressive circulation in the UK of 480,000 readers at a time when many publishers are struggling to keep circulations stable.

The magazine is clearly geared to ASOS’ younger audience, featuring interviews with up-and-coming celebrities like Transformers’ star Nicola Peltz, and trend-led photo-shoots that, of course, feature ASOS clothing front and centre.

Yet the magazine steers clear of reading like a catalogue with genuinely creative combinations of clothing and styling advice that will appeal to any fashion lover.

The secret to ASOS’ success in publishing? Treating it like a ‘real’ magazine. The fashion brand has clearly invested in the publication: the magazine boasts an editorial team that would rival most women’s magazines, which is where most of the staff have come from. ASOS has created a clear and efficient organisational structure with editors, sub-editors, and brand journalists working together to put out excellent issues, month after month — just like any non-branded magazine would.

This investment pays off for the brand two-fold. In addition to the high-quality glossy mag reaching readers’ doors, it also provides extra material for the website, which is already full of content like their Daily News Feed. It doesn’t hurt that the online content links directly through to those items for sale on the site — but this marketing strategy wouldn’t be nearly so effective if the content itself wasn’t so strong.

Considering how frequently the brand journalists in our survey referenced ASOS as one of the best brands out there in terms of content, it’s clear ASOS’ strategy is paying off among both peers and consumers.
Measuring Value from Social to Sales

Art meets science when it comes to content marketing ROI. Measuring its effectiveness is still not clear-cut.

It’s clear that people who find content informative, relevant and helpful will share it on social media, and marketers recognise this, with 56% of those we polled saying social media traction is considered the most popular content metric, more so than leads generated or hard sales, although these still feature highly. For our brand journalists, views and shares of their content were the most prominent measures of success, with leads generated sitting next to social media traction. There are a reasonable amount of respondents on both fronts who say they are still experimenting with just how to track their content.

Marketers remain frustrated by the lack of industry benchmarks when it comes to robust measurement. Yet 84% of those polled agree that the industry will have developed clear standards of measurement for evaluating the ROI of content marketing in the next five years.

### How do you measure the success of your content?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketers</th>
<th>Brand journalists</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Social media engagement</td>
<td>1 Views/shares</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Views/shares</td>
<td>2 Tie:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Leads generated</td>
<td>Leads generated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Conversions/sales</td>
<td>Social media engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Product/service sign-ups</td>
<td>3 Product/service sign-ups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 We are still experimenting</td>
<td>4 Conversions/sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with how to track our content</td>
<td>5 We are still experimenting with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>how to track our content</td>
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CASE STUDY

Telefónica: Broadcasting Innovation

Being captivating and imaginative with branded content is key, and Telefónica has seized on the opportunity to demonstrate just this with their web series, “Digital Futures.”

Hosted by experienced broadcast journalist and self-confessed ‘technology fanatic’, Shivvy Jervis, the YouTube series looks at the hottest digital tech topics, from big data, to the Internet of Things, to crowdfunding.

Launched in February of 2013, the Digital Futures series is slick, fun, and features interviews with global tech leaders and game changers like Aaron Levie of Box and Michael Rolph of YoYo. Episodes regularly result in over 50,000 views, with some reaching over 100,000.

As one of the biggest telecoms companies in the world, with mobile networks all over the globe and over 500 enterprises reliant on their mobile solutions, Telefónica could have easily fallen into the trap of talking only about their own offerings. Yet under the expert journalistic eye of Jervis – who has previously worked at CNN and Reuters – Digital Futures has excelled by talking about the digital world outside Telefónica. By demystifying complex technology and providing objective, expert insight, Digital Futures reaches tech influencers as well as consumers.

It doesn’t hurt that the audience and ethos of Digital Futures lines up well with Wayra, Telefónica’s technology startup programme. The Wayra Academy provides startups with infrastructure, guidance, and a €50,000 investment to help them develop their own innovative technology.

Telefónica proves that a strong viewpoint and independent editorial angle are more valuable than promoting products or services — with better results, too.
Judging by marketers’ predictions for content marketing in 2020, the future looks bright. Especially when it comes to stronger measurement, the further entrenchment of content in the marketing mix, the rise of the in-house content team and the anticipated growth in the number of brand journalists considering branded content as a viable career option.
Marketers will have developed clear standards of measurement for evaluating the ROI of content marketing. There will be new metrics in place to measure content marketing’s effectiveness. Content marketing will be an established part of the marketing mix. The majority of brands will have an in-house content team. More brand journalists will seriously consider branded content as a viable career. I will be putting more effort into hiring brand journalists or expert content creators for my brand. Content marketing will have become less important for brands.

*Multiple choice
So where does this leave journalists in terms of their desire to work in branded content? While there’s no doubt that the number of opportunities will grow exponentially, the jury is still out when it comes to journalists’ mindsets. Views are fairly evenly split on whether brand journalism offers as much career satisfaction as traditional journalism, as well as whether the discipline can be taken as seriously as a traditional editorial career today.

As one respondent tells us: “Most of the branded content I see is fairly perfunctory, and not up to the standard of independent journalism in the same sector. But I’m sure there are people doing a good job – I’m just not seeing it. In fact, one of the issues with branded content is the lack of visibility of the good stuff. It’s hard to find material to show what clients could aspire to.”

Do you think brand journalism as a career offers as much satisfaction as a career in traditional journalism?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>21%</td>
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Do you think brand journalism as a career can be taken as seriously as traditional journalism?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Some of our brand journalist respondents feel that traditional writers can view them as having “sold out” for the corporate dollar. Certainly, for some journalists there are still ethical perceptions to overcome before they can be convinced to work for brands. Yet, as brand journalists see more of their colleagues being hired by brands and agencies, this cynical view may soften, especially as they see the sports and fashion brands they love producing their own magazines with editorial content that is as credible and relevant as anything being produced for traditional media.

Over the next five years, the roles of content marketers and brand journalists will continue to converge. Conventional publishers will be creating more editorially-objective content to please their advertisers, and brands will be creating more provocative content to align with their unique values and stand out from their competitors.

What then would be our brand journalist respondents’ dream content job? The comments are diverse. While some like the challenge of writing for multiple clients in a dynamic agency environment, there is also a trend to gravitate towards consumer content, be it sport, fashion, travel or beauty. B2B brands perhaps have their work cut out for them even more so when it comes to attracting the right talent to execute their content strategy. As with any career though, the opportunity to become more senior is a key motivator for brand journalists moving brand-side.

Most importantly, though, journalists want to write about a brand they really believe in. This is crucial in ensuring brand journalism has credibility in the eyes of the writers themselves, as well as among their audiences. For brand journalists, the growth of content marketing and the opportunity to make a good living and work with interesting brands has created new career paths as the media landscape has changed. It is a journey more of them will begin over the next five years — which will not only please the marketing directors who need to hire them, but will make for a heightened content space that will see brands really become publishers.
The Brands That Excite Marketers and Brand Journalists

A range of exciting, forward thinking consumer brands and media owners have made significant strides in content marketing, inspiring our brand journalist and marketer respondents.

On the consumer brand front, marketers cite Coca-Cola’s wide variety of content formats and channels as impressive. Drinks brand Innocent is mentioned for its genuine and fun approach to content, while the NFL has built a reputation for expert content that can be trusted.

Red Bull of course gets a mention for its ability to continually come up with new ideas and diversify. Kellogg’s too is regarded as innovative and McDonalds’ “Our Food Your Questions” content campaign is praised. ASOS is also name checked for its tailored, consistent, quality mix of promotions and editorial.

Respected media owners include the BBC, Google and Virgin for exciting and clever content. Disney/Pixar is hailed for the way its content links with its movies and properties to improve the overall commercial success of its licensing and merchandising. The Guardian is also a respected brand in this space, with the launch of branded content division Guardian Labs to combat the company’s slowing newspaper print circulation.

On the corporate side, Microsoft is praised for its content designed to make the consumer more intelligent than the business, while Nationwide’s strapline “On Your Side” is described as brilliant because it allows the building society to disassociate itself from other banks whose reputations were tainted by the recession.

Sport England, with its “This Girl Can” campaign, is picked out for its strong understanding of the target market and the relevant use of digital channels including YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.
Conclusion

For those who will be filling the growing ranks of brand editors and journalists in the coming years, many aspects of this report will become increasingly relevant. Creativity, along with true skill when it comes to writing and grammar will continue to be sought-after traits, but you still must understand the industry you’re writing about. Many millennials who graduated into the recession and have dabbled in both editorial and marketing roles will find themselves at an advantage as in-house content marketing teams continue to grow along with the demand for an increased content cadence. But the value of brand journalists and marketers will continue to be measured by how many leads and sales are generated from content as well as the amount of traffic and social engagement.

In the words of Xerox’s VP of Global Advertising and Media, Barbara Basney: “Anybody who says they know where it’s all going and they’ve got it figured out is totally lying because nobody does right now. But it’s certainly a really exciting time to be in this business and we’re all figuring it out together. If you’ve got the stomach for that, it’s the best time ever to be in the industry.” We couldn’t agree more.

Barbara Basney
Xerox’s VP of Global Advertising and Media
About NewsCred

NewsCred is the leading content marketing platform. Pairing cutting-edge software with world-class content, NewsCred transforms brands into storytellers.

NewsCred's software provides the easiest end-to-end solution for content planning, creation, publishing and analytics. In one place, brands gain unprecedented access to the world's largest content marketplace, including licensed content from over 4,000 publishers and original content from NewsCred's award-winning brand journalist network.

Through NewsCred, global brands like Pepsi, P&G, Dell, General Electric, and AIG have seen explosive growth in social sharing, engagement and lead generation.

Founded in 2008 by Shafqat Islam, Iraj Islam, and Asif Rahman, NewsCred has offices in New York, London and Dhaka and is backed by FirstMark Capital, Mayfield Fund, IA Ventures, Greycroft Partners and others.

Learn more at newscred.com and follow us on Twitter @newscred