



Industry Leaders

Why Marriott Is a Content Marketing Mecca

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What's that adage? "Give a man a fish, and he eats for a day; but teach a man to fish, and he'll never go hungry." Widely applied to the value of long-term investments, today we'll learn why this biblical entreaty also applies to content marketing. Rather than feed your bottom line with a few entertaining pieces of content, or even a short-term campaign, content marketing can indeed be an ongoing source of sustenance for a business.

No one understands this better than David Beebe, who was VP Global and Creative Content Marketing at Marriott International for several years until just Monday, and a Content Engagement Award recipient at the most recent The CMO Club Awards. Under his leadership, Marriott's global marketing department established its brands as preeminent travel lifestyle authorities through a never-ending storytelling program that focuses first on their audience.

"Now that consumers are in charge," he told me, "we have to shift to not talking about ourselves, but what does that consumer want? How do I entertain them? How do I solve their problems? How do I build a relationship with them and provide value? Then, they're more likely to pay attention to what I'm actually trying to sell." Spend some time with Beebe's story below, and learn how Marriott established its content marketing empire.

Becoming a Content Connoisseur

David Beebe joined Marriott at just the right time. Combining the company's history as an innovator – did you know Marriott began as a hot dog vendor, introduced drive-up service and pioneered in-flight dining? – with Beebe's storytelling background made for a ripe content marketing opportunity. Plus, the CEO recognized that the landscape was shifting towards stories. "Combine all those things with leadership that really believes in that strategy and approach but also gives you permission to fail, and you have a runway to just try it and see what happens," he said.

Beebe and his team sought to establish Marriott as the largest producer of travel lifestyle content. They set up an in-house content studio, focusing first on short films and premium storytelling. For example, "The Two Bellmen" series featured scenes from LA, Dubai and Seoul, showcasing the brand with a story "that entertains people" before selling to them.

Putting Purpose before Process

But not all content worked equally, and Beebe learned that the why behind the content was ultimately more important than the what. "Oftentimes, brands don't know why they're doing what they're doing," he said, citing occasions where Marriott's marketers presented content tactics without any strategy. "They just want to create a film or a webisode."

"If they couldn't explain why," he added, "we sent them back to the drawing table to really understand the purpose of it."

One effective "why" occurred with Moxy, a brand for the next generation of travelers. Beebe's teams created a web series with the

Another film, *FRENCH KISS*, was created to drive revenue. The effort booked \$500,000 worth of rooms in just 60 days. It's a sales package where you get the same experience you saw in the film," including meeting the general manager and enjoying champagne, chocolate, the room, the rate and a private tour, Beebe explains. "You see the features and benefits of the hotel throughout the story, but you never see us talk about it directly to the viewer."

Through these initiatives, Beebe and his team demonstrated how content marketing can drive the business in a sustainable way. "Brands are storytellers and media companies now," he says. "It may not be their core business, but the opportunity exists, and that's just exciting itself."

Beebe's Blueprints

Beebe shared what brands need to properly execute content marketing:

- 1. A storytelling leader:** "That could be, depending on the content, someone like me from TV storytelling, to a journalist, to someone from a general media strategy world. The practice of content marketing is a specialty, and I think a lot of times CEOs don't understand the fundamentals of storytelling versus what's actually a campaign."
- 2. A dedicated budget:** "You can't rely on the brands to contribute dollars for content development. You have to show them what it can do, and eventually start to shift dollars from traditional media to content marketing."
- 3. Creative control:** "Our entire strategy is built around developing creative in-house. We don't take pitches from production companies. We develop what we want to do, and then we go to the creative community to execute this type of creative."
- 4. Internal buy-in:** "The final thing is being able to educate people that content marketing is just one part of an entire marketing mix. You should be creating a content advertising ecosystem versus a bunch of siloed campaigns that don't talk to each other."

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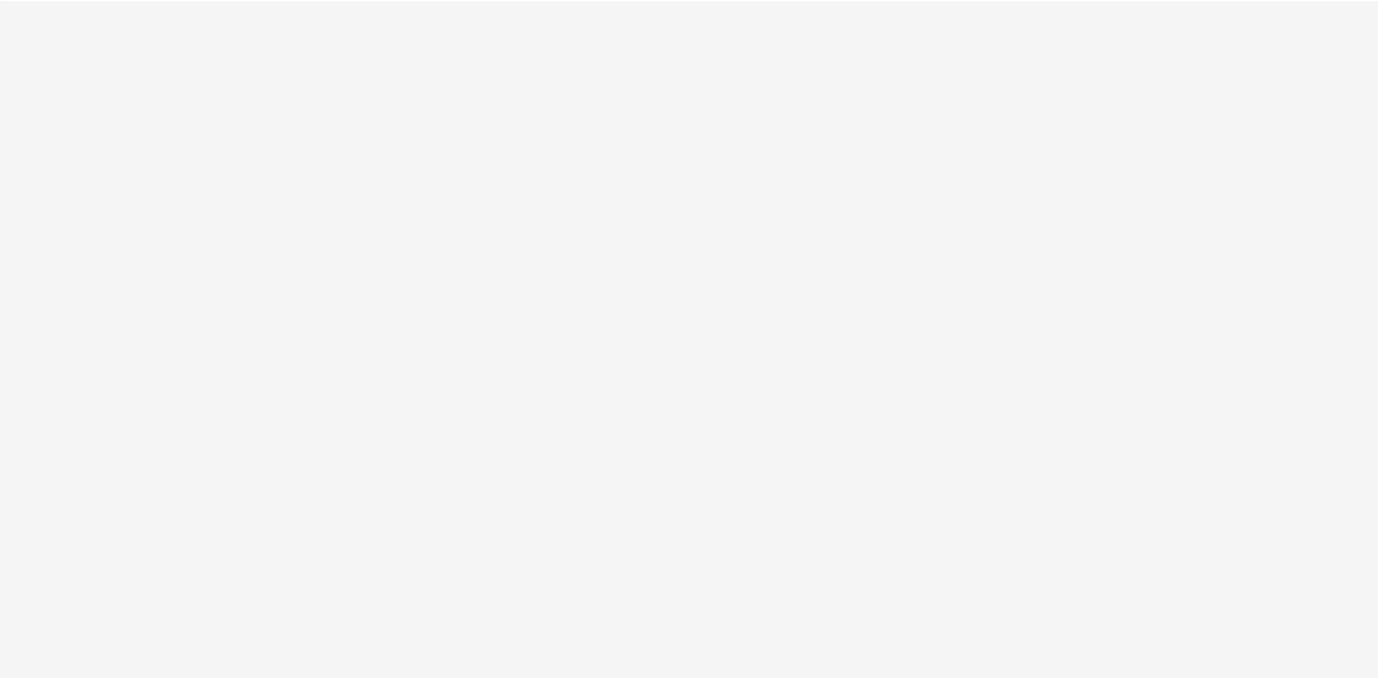
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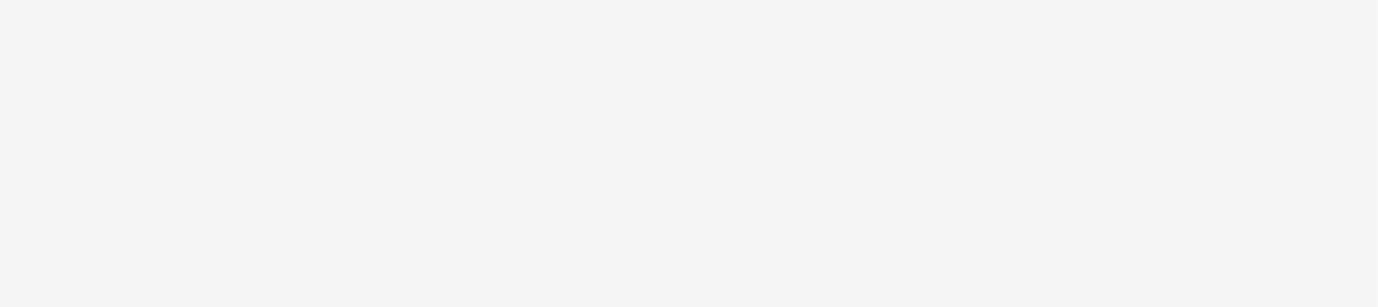
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