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Insights and smart practices from your content team

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WHAT'S YOUR STRATEGIC STORY?

The pressure to continuously churn out fresh content has driven most marketers at one time or another to "borrow" ideas from other people's web content just to get *something* out the door.

This may be expedient, but it dilutes thought leadership because your organization loses the opportunity to share its own unique perspective. So how do you communicate that perspective and keep pace with content demands?

A little bit of smart process goes a long way:

Be strategic. Give focused consideration once or twice a year to what your organization wants and needs to say. Use that as your compass to guide decisions about what to publish when and in what forms. Keep it simple. Are you looking to brand-build, drive sales, raise awareness or reposition? The answers will help define your priorities.

Flesh out your story. Once you know your strategy, you can tease out campaign-specific subthemes. Which differentiators do you most want to promote in the next content cycle? Make these your strategic stakes in the ground.

Create an action plan. "Operationalize" your messaging with an editorial plan. Work out content angles and formats to deliver the stories you've identified. Some may work as one-offs, some as series. Some may be fodder for blogs, others for eBooks or videos. Think about how frequently you need to publish, and lay out a calendar for the next quarter, six months or year.

Involve your thought leaders. Yes, their time is usually pressured, but if you can nail down when you need their input most and get it through a quick interview or email questionnaire (rather than a rambling, blue-sky meeting), you'll be putting your organization's own best thinking out there instead of cribbing someone else's.

Obviously, some flex needs to be left for adjustments as reality unfolds, but having a map to guide you can relieve a lot of the pressure around content development. Instead of wondering, "What will we throw up on the blog next week?" ask yourself, "What is our strategic story for the next fiscal year?"

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THE CONNECTOR: A FEW FACTS ABOUT THE COLON

A lot of writers shy away from the colon because, outside of setting up a list of items, they're not sure how or when to use it versus its cousins the dash and semicolon.

This is a case where knowing the "origin story" can help. "Colon" comes from an ancient Greek word meaning "limb," "member" or "portion." It used to mean a particular *section* of text but over time came to refer to the connector between ideas in a sentence.

And not just *any* ideas: the idea that comes after the colon completes the thought that the clause in front sets up.

This is what makes the colon different from the semicolon. The clauses around a semicolon are equivalent but related (e.g., "I have a big test tomorrow; I can't go out tonight."), while the colon leads to a conclusion.

If you're not sure whether to use a colon or semicolon, try flipping the clauses around. If the sentence takes a semicolon, you can put things in either order: with the colon, sequence matters. (Case in point, the title of this article!)

THE NAC ORCHESTRA UNVEILS ALEXANDER SHELLEY'S SOPHOMORE SEASON

Ascribe was delighted to support the NAC Orchestra once again with writing its 2016-2017 subscriber brochure -- announcing a brand-new season of music under the baton of dynamic, adventurous music director Alexander Shelley.

NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE CENTRE NATIONAL DES ARTS
Canada is our stage. Le Canada en scène.

With spotlights on imaginative new programs and renowned soloists, the brochure conveys Shelley's passion for bringing a fresh experience of classical music to audiences young and old alike.

shout-out*

DALE MORRIS A FINALIST FOR 2016 BUSINESSWOMAN OF THE YEAR AWARD

The Women's Business Network Businesswoman of the Year Awards (BYAs) celebrate the most accomplished and inspiring women in Ottawa's business community. The entire Ascribe team is proud to congratulate president Dale Morris for placing as a finalist in this year's Entrepreneur category for her business acumen, leadership skills and community involvement. Dale and the Ascribe team attended the signature BYA Gala on April 21. [Congratulations](#), Dale!

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SAY IT AND IT'S TRUE: THE TWITTER ELECTION

FDR went down in history as the USA's "radio" president. JFK was the "television" president. If Donald Trump takes the Republican nomination and wins next year's contest for the White House, he'll undoubtedly be known (among other things) as the "Twitter" president for daily gems like this:

Donald J. Trump ✓
@realDonaldTrump

⚙ 👤+ Follow

The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive.

Even if Twitter's 140-character limit allowed any room for factual substantiation, some might wonder, "Why bother?" Controversy gets headlines, and with this pre-election campaign it seems there's no such thing as bad press.

Bad information, however, shouldn't be tolerated. Especially as nearly two thirds of 18- to 29-year-olds think Twitter and Facebook are the best way to keep up with political news.

Social media may be the frontier of a new era in human communication but it also underscores the value of some age-old truths. In this case: "You can't always believe what you read."

TIME-SAVING TECHNIQUES FOR TABLES

Things can go wrong fast in Word when you're trying to manually format tables (or worse, trying to fix a table when the formatting has gone awry). Applying these two automated formatting techniques can save you a lot of grief:

Auto-fit rows and columns

To make a group of columns or rows all the same width or height:

1. Select the columns or rows you want to make the same size.
2. Click **Table** from the top menu bar.
3. Select **AutoFit and Distribute**, then click **Distribute Columns Evenly** or **Distribute Rows Evenly**. Your cells will automatically shrink or expand as needed.

Keep rows intact

If you have a row at the bottom of a page and want all of its content to stay together rather than split across pages:

1. Click anywhere in the row you want to keep together.
2. Click **Table** from the top menu bar, followed by **Table Properties**.
3. In the **Row** tab, make sure the **Allow Row to Break Across Pages** checkbox is empty.

NOTE: These instructions are for Microsoft Word for Mac 2011. In some versions of Word for Windows, the table formatting options are found in different places.

c.1440

Johannes Gutenberg invents mechanical moveable type (aka the printing press), enabling the true democratization of knowledge by making it easier than ever to disseminate new ideas.

1971

Michael S. Hart creates what many consider to be the first ebook, adapting the Declaration of Independence into a plain-text document that can be viewed on many devices.

2004

Sony releases the LIBRIé, the first ebook reader to use an epaper display that mimics the appearance of ink on paper -- bringing together the best of both the print and digital worlds.

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