



Dear Publishing Professional,

Spring is a time for new ideas and new hopes. Where's your opportunity to rev up your business this year? The first two articles in this month's letter might give you a nudge.

9 ways to create a unique editorial style

Brands often use colors, typography, logos, stylized art and other effects to make their content unique, but you can also **make the content itself unique**. Here are nine things to consider for your articles, podcasts, and videos.

- 1. Use a distinctive voice, tone, and narrative style.** You might be authoritative, whimsical, unconventional, challenging, curmudgeonly, flowery, encouraging, or even mean. You could write in the first or the third person.
- 2. Have a focus.** Be strategic, managerial, practical, revolutionary, operational
- 3. Use frameworks.** Every article could follow a pattern like "The Problem," "The Solution," "The Benefit," and "Examples." A step-by-step guide would be a similar concept.
- 4. Create recurring segments.** Include a CEO Corner, Expert Insights, Quick Stats, Tech Innovations, or Market Trends.
- 5. Stretch your vocabulary.** Find some unique words and phrases that fit with your style and message. Or invent them. My friend Lewis Carol coined mimsy and chortle. Use catch phrases and funny names.
- 6. Have a message.** Tie your content back to an ethos, like thriftiness, to a value, like generosity, or to a principle, like local political control.
- 7. Pick favorites.** I know a priest who always quotes G.K. Chesterton in his homilies, and I tend to relate things back to Star Trek – because, if you didn't know, everything you need to know in life you can learn from Star Trek. You can quote your favorite author, or ... 70s rock ballads for heaven's sake. Pick something that will give some color to your content.
- 8. Use characters.** *Highlights for Children* magazine had a section called "Goofus and Gallant." You can create your own character, like Budgeting Betty, or you could tell a story as an interaction between Holmes and Watson. (The copyright on the Holmes stories is a bit complicated, but I think it's fair to use the characters at this point.)
- 9. Incorporate skits.** We often learn through stories. Hone your storytelling ability and express your message in a little piece of drama or comedy.

If you can incorporate some of these concepts, your content will have a distinctive voice no matter where or how it appears.

Track inactivity in your user database

“Pay attention when your customers stop paying attention.” That was part of Amanda Lansaw’s message at the recent MACMA Industry Day event at the Hearst tower.

“Stay on top of inactivity in the database. If a known audience member has not visited in a certain number of days, send an email.”

I’ve seen a surprising indifference to this sort of analysis. It’s surprising because everyone knows it’s easier to keep a customer than get a customer, which means we should be spending a lot of effort on keeping customers. Engagement is key to keeping a customer for most publishing enterprises – whether ad-supported or subscription-based.

This doesn’t only apply to visits, but to every engagement metric you have. That would include ...

- Opens
- Clicks
- Site visits
- Page views
- Time on site
- Video views
- Logins
- Comments

The message is relatively simple. **Keep track of the “engagement trajectory” of your audience and when someone starts trending in the wrong direction, see if you can reverse that trend.**

Your best action might be, as Amanda mentions, sending an email, but you might also need to rethink what “engaging content” means today.

The world changes. A drop in engagement might be because your audience is shifting its preference to a different format – e.g., from article to short-form video. That implies that you have to look at engagement trajectory in at least three ways.

- At the level of your individual audience member
- At the behavior of your entire audience, and
- At social trends – what’s happening outside your audience.

That’s a lot of homework, and if you want to dig even deeper you can add segmentation: not just the individual and the whole audience, but all your sub-audiences as well.

Predictive analytics might also be useful. Some AI-based models can detect “propensity to churn.” **The bottom line is to stay on top of engagement metrics.**

Overlapping functionality in your tech stack

One of the challenges of building a tech stack is that there are always overlaps in functionality. For example, your customer data platform and your email service provider might both be able to manage customer journeys, or you might be able to push data to your reporting tool from your data warehouse or from your CDP.

From an efficiency standpoint, it seems that it would be nice to avoid such duplication in functions. I don’t endorse that perspective. First, I’m not sure it’s always better to have only one tech option for any given function. Second, no two technologies will perform a given

function in precisely the same way. Third, it's impossible to eliminate all duplication, so rather than trying to fight it, learn to manage it.

Assuming that you will have duplications in functionality, here are some issues to consider (in no particular order) to decide which technology you'll use for any given function.

1. Industry standards. If there's an industry standard for some function, which system is closer to that industry standard? This matters for a few reasons.

- Integrations will be easier if you follow an industry standard.
- It will be easier to find staff or consultants who can work on something that's standard.
- It's likely that something became the industry standard because it's better. That's not always true, but it's worth considering.

2. In-house expertise. Do you already have in-house expertise with one of the systems? That would argue for using the system where you have expertise. However, in-house expertise isn't permanent. People do change jobs.

3. Your tech road map. Do you want to decrease your reliance on one of your current tech solutions? Your tech roadmap might include transitioning out of one of the systems you currently use. If so, it's wise to start moving functions out of that system.

4. Cost. Some systems charge based on usage while others don't. There might also be integration costs. For example, if System A easily integrates with the rest of your tech stack, but System B requires a custom integration, that would argue for System A.

5. Security. Some systems are more of a security risk than others.

6. Privacy. This is especially relevant in certain regulated industries.

7. Agility and Scalability. Peer into your crystal ball and consider what options you may need to accommodate down the road: such as more users, more products, more database fields, etc. Does one technology scale better?

8. Competitive advantage. Is there something unique in your industry where one technology gives you a leg up? For example, a magazine publisher has to deal with gift options to a greater extent than a B2B newsletter publisher does.

9. Reputation. When it comes time to sell your business, will it look better to be using one technology over the other?

10. Data consistency and integrity. Little things can cause big problems. If one system relies on zip+4, and another system only accommodates a 5-digit zip code, that's trouble.

11. Regulatory Compliance. You might need to store user information, or report on it, in a particular way to comply with the law.

12. User experience. How does your tech choice affect your customers and your employees? (Just because you pay them doesn't mean you have license to annoy them.)

If you're re-evaluating your tech stack, give me a call. I'd love to hear what you're thinking about.

Will the third-party cookie ever die?

Google's recent decision to once again delay the demise of the third-party cookie makes it tempting to wonder if this alleged death will take its place alongside other ill-predicted deaths – such as the death of print, the death of cinema, and the death of wrist watches.

“Die” might be the wrong word. **The 3p cookie will fade into a shell of its former self to be replaced by cooperatives of first-party cookie data.** That's what Bombora is doing.

The key to any successful replacement of the third-party cookie is to keep it out of the reach of the tech giants. The demise of the 3p cookie is a way for Google et al. to corner even more of the market. It has nothing to do with protecting privacy.

A/B testing vs. style and good taste

Why do you need creative people to fuss over copy when a moderately creative technocrat can get a 20 percent lift by optimizing the color of the “buy now” button, and a 30 percent lift by changing the product image?

People don't read anyway, and there are plenty of tricks to manipulate them into taking the actions you want them to take. Why all this fuss over words?

I'm exaggerating, but there's a point to it. A/B testing only measures certain actions – like clicks, or purchases. **A split test can't tell you how many of your prospects think less of your brand because you used a childish emoji in the subject line of your email.**

Two things can be true at the same time: (1) the emoji won the split test, and (2) it alienated a large portion of your audience.

A focus on results without any regard for style or good taste can increase your sales and kill your brand's image.

By all means look at the data, but don't give the analytical, data-focused marketer a blank check. The winning panel isn't necessarily or always the best choice.

Sincerely,



Greg Krehbiel



P.S. – Please let me know if there's any way I can help you succeed, or if you know someone else who could benefit from my services.

P.P.S. – Remember to follow me on LinkedIn. I post my “Something I Learned Yesterday” podcast there almost every workday.