



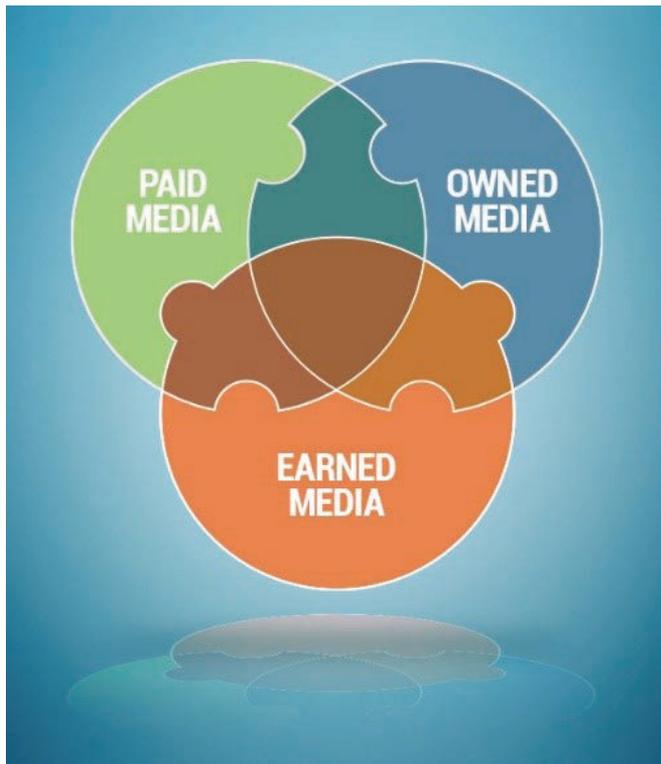
3 Earned Media Strategies to Incorporate Into Your Content Marketing Plan

By BRIAN KOLB

Earned media is that one component of content marketing that is MIA for too many marketers.

If you are just hoping that people will publish or **share** your great content, well, that's like stepping up to the plate without a bat. Generating earned media today must be the clean-up hitter in your content marketing strategy lineup.

Earned, owned, and paid media



To understand earned media's role in your content marketing strategy, we first need to look at the three types of media – owned, paid, and earned.

You likely spend a lot of time on your owned media – the content and distribution channels that you control such as your websites, white papers, newsletters, and social media ac-

Not having an earned media strategy is like stepping up to the plate without a bat says @BrianKolb



counts. For example, if you want to share your insights on the latest trend in your industry, you write a blog post, publish it on your website, and let your followers know through your social media accounts.

With paid media, you buy access in the form of social ads, PPC programs, etc. to promote your content. For example, you conduct pay-per-click campaigns for **keywords** around that trending topic to gain additional visitors to your website.

With owned and paid media, you are in control of the content – after all, both types of media involve your brand's dollars.

Earned media, though, is free. But first, you must attract the interest of the gatekeepers – influencers, media brands, or your fans – who hold the key to accessing their audiences and talking about your company and publishing your content. In our industry-trend example, a media outlet would quote your expert in an article on the topic.

Why earned media is important

With multiple firehoses gushing information at us all the time, your audiences need an effective filter or they'll drown. If you gain earned media, you are more likely to get through your audience's filters. Earned media gives you third-party credibility – someone who isn't paid by your company believes enough in your products, insights, etc. to mention, quote, or promote your brand's content.

Earned media also enables your brand to reach a wider audience – an audience that may not know about you but can benefit from your **content**, products, or services.

Simply said, earned media may take more work because you are not in control of the process and decision-making, but it should be a major component of your content marketing strategy.

3 ways to generate earned media

1. Cultivate influencer marketing

We hear quite a bit about influencer marketing and the importance of building relationships with those industry leaders who reach your target audience. If you can get an influencer to publish your content or talk about your content, that's earned media. In turn, the influencer's audience has the potential to become your audience.

Of course, you likely aren't the first or the last to reach out to your industry's influencers. Thus, you need to make sure your outreach stands out. Before ever contacting the influencer, research what topics they write about, what they share on social media, what channels they use, how they interact with their followers, etc.

With that information, you can craft a pitch that shows you know who this influencer is and how they communicate with their audience. Show how your brand and content would be valuable and helpful to their audiences.

TIPS: Check your LinkedIn connections. Perhaps one of your targeted influencers is a connection of someone in your network. Ask that shared connection to introduce you. That personal relationship can make all the difference.

Don't limit yourself to individual influencers. Identify other influencers, such as industry associations, non-competing brands that publish great content and have their own audiences, etc.

2. Participate in industry trade shows

One of the best ways to get people talking about your brand and sharing your content is to be present at industry events attended by your audience – you likely already know this. The [Content Marketing Institute's B2B research](#) revealed that 81% of marketers use live events as a tactic in their content marketing strategy, and 75% of users rate them as effective. In fact, more marketers cited live events as an effective tactic than any other tactic. But showing up on the exhibit floor isn't enough. You need to create and distribute your content – in text, visuals, video, and in person throughout the event.

As early as possible, explore whether someone from your organization could present on a topic that's relevant to your brand and helpful to the event's audience. If you do speak, ensure that your slides and handouts include your Twitter handles, proper hashtags, and links to make it easier for your audience to share the presentation's content. Don't forget to promote this appearance to media organizations that may cover the topic or the event.

Identify pre-show opportunities to impart your brand's wisdom or insight through the event organizer's media channels (blog, newsletters, social). During the show, get involved with the social conversation. Don't just ask people on your social media

81% of marketers use live events in their #contentmarketing strategy; 75% rate them effective by @cmicontent 

channels to stop by your booth. Instead, use your social accounts to connect with event-goers. For example, tweet a favorite quote from a speaker using the event hashtag and see how many people retweet that content – that's a great way to earn media at a show.

TIP: During or after the event, respond to the influencers, media, and others who talked about your brand and shared your content. For example, if someone tweeted one of your presentation slides, reply with a "thanks" and offer a link or visual that elaborates on that same topic. You also should look at their profiles, websites, etc. to see whether they would be a valuable addition to your influencer contact list or if they offer an outlet to distribute content from you.

3. Engage your fans and advocates

Strengthen your relationships with the people who are talking about your brand, sharing your content, etc. (Don't forget that your employees can be fans/advocates too.) First, add a segment or category called fans/advocates to your media contact lists. Then add them to your media-monitoring or social listening trackers.

Strengthen your relationships with people who are talking about your brand, sharing #content via @BrianKolb 



The image shows a tweet from Lisa Dougherty (@BrandLoveLLC) who is following the user. The tweet text reads: "So excited @BuddyScalera has a new book out! Comic Artist's Essential Photo Reference comicbookschool.com/essential-phot... Congrats friend! #storytelling". Below the text is a book cover for "COMIC ARTIST'S essential photo reference People + Poses" by Buddy Scalera. The cover features a collage of comic book characters and poses. At the bottom of the tweet, there is a caption: "Photo Reference for Comic Artists: Book 6 Now available. Great educational resource for visual storytellers. comicbookschool.com".

If someone on that fan/advocate list mentions or shares your content, interact with them. For example, if someone quotes or shares your content on Facebook, make a comment to thank the person and ask what part of the content she thought was most helpful.

You also should initiate contact with this group – similar to how you would reach out to traditional media – and encourage them to talk about or share news about your brand, whether it’s a new research report, your latest award, or something else. These individuals may be more receptive than traditional media to sharing your news or content word for word, or adding their positive opinion to the news.

For example, Buddy Scalera, a comic-book writer, editor, and photographer tapped into his fan/advocate database when he launched his recent book, *Comic Artist’s Essential Photo Reference*. He shared the news with his contacts and asked them to share the news with their audiences.

Fans and advocates of your well-respected brand often are honored that you have asked them for something and are willing to share because it shows they’re connected closely to a reputable company. That enhances their audience’s perception of them as an influencer in your industry – and at the same time grows your brand’s reach.

TIP: Share your news and wins with your traditional media contacts too. Even if they don’t write or talk about what you want them to, it’s an opportunity to remind them that your brand is a quality company and credible third parties recognize that value.

Other ways to use earned media

Given that earned media isn’t a one-and-done event, you should plan how to leverage it once you get it. While you’re only limited by your imagination, here are some of the more common ways to expand the benefits of your earned media:

- Reprint the content in hard copy for distribution at on-site events or as mailers to prospects.
- Publish excerpts from the earned media on your owned media, such as your blog.
- Share the earned media with your sales team and incorporate it into sales presentations.
- “Like,” repost, and share it on your social media channels.

- Use any true endorsements of your brand by incorporating its logo on your marketing materials and even your product packaging.
- Pull quotes from earned media to post on pop-up displays.
- Include earned media details in marketing and PR award applications.

Get authorization

Earned media might be free for your brand, but it’s not necessarily free to use and it takes time to build these relationships. Remember that you’ll need to obtain permission to use earned media content and you may need to pay a licensing fee. You certainly don’t want to run afoul of copyright laws. You often can determine republishing or logo use parameters on the earned media’s website. If you can’t find the repurposing parameters, make sure to contact the individual or brand that first published the content.

TIP: Make sure to budget for licensing fees.

Conclusion

Earned media should have an important place in your content marketing strategy. That way you’re not just hoping others will find and talk about your brand. You are deliberately and strategically taking the steps to make this happen. As your efforts begin to bear fruit, you’ll start seeing measurable results that will boost your web traffic, search rankings, leads, sales, and brand equity.



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