

Content Marketing Lessons from the Grateful Dead

It's always a fun day at JD Supra when we can look to the good old Grateful Dead to make a point about content marketing. Tye dyes optional, here we go:

Actually, Paul Krugman has done the work for us already. In his New York Times column last Friday ("[Bits, Bands and Books](#)", June 6; free registration req'd) economist, author, and commentator Krugman referenced technology guru Esther Dyson's 1994 forecast that

the ease with which digital content can be copied and disseminated would eventually force businesses to sell the results of creative activity cheaply, or even give it away. Whatever the product — software, books, music, movies — the cost of creation would have to be recouped indirectly: businesses would have to “distribute intellectual property free in order to sell services and relationships.”

Dyson made this prediction long before Google showed us the power of the long tail in online search (which, alone, is a strong argument for "distributing intellectual property" for free online in the service of marketing). Her example at the time:

... the Grateful Dead, who encouraged people to tape live performances because “enough of the people who copy and listen to Grateful Dead tapes end up paying for hats, T-shirts and performance tickets. In the new era, the ancillary market is the market.”

At the heart of this example is one of the truths driving our love of content marketing. Provide something for free to an audience who values what you are giving, and you create a meaningful connection. Meaningful connections, if done right, lead to undying loyalty.

Which is not to say we want people to sell their homes, buy a VW bus, and follow around a favorite law firm on their next east coast summer tour, but you see where we are going with this.

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Legal professionals are prolific generators of top-quality "intellectual property" - they do it every day in the form of briefs, alerts, articles, forms, newsletters, and the like.

Given that (according to a 2006 comScore study) a quarter of all Americans turn to the Internet in search of legal information, it seems a no-brainer that you'd want to share what you've got. Your daily written work product creates meaningful connections by 1) being helpful to someone, and 2) showcasing your experience and expertise. That's how it begins.

And, as Krugman concludes in his piece, this is not just a marketing but also a business model of the future:

Bit by bit, everything that can be digitized will be digitized, making intellectual property ever easier to copy and ever harder to sell for more than a nominal price. And we'll have to find business and economic models that take this reality into account.

It won't all happen immediately. But in the long run, we are all the Grateful Dead.

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