

Summary

What will the corporate publishing of the future look like? A number of digital and societal trends have brought about changes in communication between customers and companies. As a consequence, there is hardly anything left of the terms and constants that have shaped the industry so far. This was also confirmed by a survey of more than 500 media professionals: the traditional boundaries between marketing, corporate communication and corporate publishing are becoming increasingly blurred in the digital age, as are the boundaries between media, formats and communication channels. Not even the seemingly clear separation between sender and receiver remains: Today, everyone can be both sender and receiver on all channels at the same time. Everyone can listen to others or tell something themselves.

In the industrial age, the two central concepts of corporate publishing were "message" and "medium". In the digital age, they are replaced by two new central concepts: "conversation" and "stream". Instead of individual, identifiable messages, an uninterrupted conversation takes place, everywhere and with countless actors. For most companies, the stories told about their products are an essential part of each transaction and their business model. But companies are increasingly losing control of this: Who tells these stories and through which channels consumers are best addressed is becoming increasingly unpredictable in the new media world. Because of the diversity of opinions and the power of platforms such as Google, Facebook or Twitter, which generate personalized streams, companies are constantly competing for the sovereignty of the interpretation of themselves and their products.

In order to adapt to these new media conditions, corporate publishing should use five guidelines for guidance:

- Conversations are more important than messages: It's not about proclaiming something but about being part of a conversation.
- Networking is more important than content generation: It's not about what I say but about who I'm talking to.
- Information is becoming an increasingly important part of the sales offer: "I don't just sell a product, but also a story to go with it."
- Competing information for previous prerogatives of interpretation: Anything customers want to know about my product they should be able to learn from me.
- More content for fewer readers/viewers/listeners: Render unto the individual what is the individual's.

Four possible strategic positions can be derived from these guidelines. On one hand, they result from the content of a publication: product information vs. editorial content. On the other hand, from their goal: education vs. sales:

Consumer empowerment: (product information; education-oriented):

Consumers are informed objectively and honestly about products and the company. It is not primarily a matter of selling as much as possible, but of meeting the consumer as a partner on an equal footing. Because only honest and personalized information can hold one's ground in the information competition around one's own product.

Media-driven sales: (product information; sales-oriented):

New media opportunities can be used to offer customers the most positive and exciting shopping experience possible. Facts about products can also be offered as long as they fit into the brand narrative and do not spoil the good purchasing atmosphere.

Corporate service public: (editorial content, education-oriented):

In the sense of social responsibility, companies take on the task of providing information to the public - either through employing journalists or by promoting independent journalism, similar to cultural promotion (e. g. Migros-Kulturprozent).

Image customer media: (editorial content, sales-oriented):

Stories are told which are intended to put the brand in a positive light, increase awareness and arouse positive associations. The stories do not revolve around the company's products, but deal with topics that the brand likes to associate with and shape its brand identity.

Customer communication will obviously become more diverse in the future. Some companies will continue to communicate as a classical sender. Others will become information platforms that provide different actors with information and funds to discuss their own products together. And yet others leave it up to third parties to conduct the conversation about them and observe the events from afar. One thing is clear: companies and brands have long since lost their information monopoly. In the future, they will have to be happy if they are listened at all.