

Content strategy and brand integration: pushing the boundaries with AI

AI is transforming every industry. Ricky Ray Butler, CEO of BEN (Branded Entertainment Network), shares some tips on how to stay ahead.

What is your perspective on where the industry stands with AI?

We are currently living in a time where content is becoming immensely decentralised; millions of pieces of content are uploaded every day. On Instagram alone, 95 million photos and videos are uploaded daily. On YouTube 500 hours of video content are uploaded every minute, and on top of that let's not forget about streaming platforms such as Netflix, and Amazon Prime. There's never been more content – and that's changing the landscape for marketers very quickly.

So we have to evolve and so do those brands that want to integrate into all of the content that's available. They have to step back and reassess, and that's where AI comes into play. With improvements in AI's predictive capabilities, marketers are able to optimise their campaigns and make smarter investments than ever before.



Ricky Ray Butler
CEO, BEN

When it comes to this ‘content deluge’, what market trends should brands be aware of?

Audiences have been shifting their viewing behaviour to ad-free streaming platforms like Netflix, and when they are watching regular commercial television, they are generally skipping ads – in fact, 57% of US viewers habitually ad skip. Online, the use of blockers is soaring – a recent study said nearly 50% of people globally are using ad blockers. You just can’t reach people through commercials or online ads in the way you could even a few years ago.

With this in mind, brands have been spending more and more of their ad budgets on brand integration and influencer marketing, but the challenge has always been ROI – how do you effectively measure the impact of these campaigns? The answer is AI. I think that’s going to cause a shift in focus from casual views and impressions to loyal views and engaged impressions. In the past, there’s been this ideology that we need to get a piece of content out there and reach as many people as possible. Now we’re seeing a shift when it comes to media; millennials and generation Z would much rather see product placement or brand integration than a traditional ad.

They would rather have the brand empower the content

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than be disturbed or interrupted by advertising. This is why content, and integration, need to become a bigger part of the marketing mix.

What do you see as the tipping point for AI? Are we moving towards a space in which the industry shifts from talking about the potential of AI to realising the real business impact?

The tipping point for AI is deep learning’s ability to analyse unstructured data. Only 10-20% of the data out there today is structured. A whopping 80-90% is unstructured. Yet 99% of brands are looking only at the structured data – the metrics that can fit into a spreadsheet: the views, the impressions, the clicks. →



Key figures

57%

of US viewers habitually ad skip

50%

of people globally, are using ad blockers

172%

increase in click-through rates with the implementation of AI

10x

increase in subscription conversion efficiency with the implementation of AI

Unstructured data is the visuals, the audio, the groups of text within all this content. AI can look at tens of thousands of pieces of content within minutes, analyse it from ten million perspectives, and then find correlations and causations to build success. Traditional marketing, on the other hand, has been limited because it hasn't had a lot of data to play with. In order to push the needle forward, you need tens of thousands of videos. When working with influencers, there are millions of different options. It would be impossible for humans to analyse all that unstructured data and to understand what is driving higher views, higher engagement or higher clicks. Even if you had the time to look at all those posts, you would only be able to analyse a fraction of what a deep learning algorithm could. AI is able to think like a human but can scale like a machine.

Do you think scripted drama will be disrupted by a YouTube influencer?

Look up an influencer called Chad Wild Clay or Vy Qwaint. You know when you were a kid you used to play pretend?

That's the type of content they are creating for their YouTube channel. This is a fast growing vertical. There are a lot of influencers right now creating adventurous pieces of content. But I don't think scripted drama is going anywhere, if anything we are seeing more of it.

There's never been a bigger supply of content, but there's also never been bigger demand.

A lot of marketers understand AI can be the future of their businesses, but have a hard time seeing why. Can you give tangible examples of brands that are using it well?

Yes – you see this in Siri, Amazon, Netflix, and Facebook; they all are operating effectively thanks to machine learning. We have also seen a lot of breakthroughs in deep learning, a form of machine learning that supports unstructured data.

In 2018, BEN's AI predicted eight of the top ten new season US broadcast shows. One of our clients wanted to target males between 18 and 30, for a streaming service, but as

we started executing the campaign, AI said we should be targeting mothers or women over 30.

With the implementation of AI, we saw a 172% increase in click-through rates and a 10 fold increase in subscription conversion efficiency.

What else do you see emerging in terms of new content or trends?

One thing that we've learned is audio is a big deal when it comes to conversions. Also, content is becoming much

more niche and diversified.

Right now we're in the middle of a globalisation of content, but probably in the next five years, we will also see more localised, diverse content. Another thing that we've learned is that vlogs and lifestyle influencers tend to convert better than scripted content.

But make sure the data within your organisation is streamlined, that there's not a bunch of red tape. AI is worthless without data. It doesn't matter how sophisticated the technology you're using; you need data for accurate, precise insights. /

