YOUR
EDITORIAL
AUTHORITY
IS YOUR
FUTURE
About Barkley
At Barkley, we take pride in future-proofing business models and modernizing iconic brands. However, we are more than an ad agency. We are integrated business partners who are analytic and innovative at the core, using data to drive marketing conversation and strategies. This culture of innovation allows us to partner with our clients to create the solutions of the future. Our emerging technology innovation practice has built and deployed new technologies that create more engagement with the savviest generation of consumers we’ve ever seen.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Defining Editorial Authority ................................................2

Part 1: Where to Start ..........................................................4
  Brand Idea .........................................................................4
  Deep Consumer Understanding ........................................5
  Cultural Relevancy ...........................................................5

Part 2: Approaches to Establishing Editorial Authority ..................................................6
  Brand Modernization Approach – Brand History ..............6
  Human Approach – Brand Story .......................................8
  Inside-Out Approach – Brand Model .................................9

Part 3: Putting It All Together .............................................11

Contact Us .........................................................................13
For the past five years, we have been studying Millennials and modern consumer trends. From retail buying patterns to flavor preferences to how income differentiates cohorts of Millennials, we have shared a wealth of information about how Millennial consumers behave differently in our market today. However, one of the greatest impacts this generation of influential Millennial Mindset® consumers has is on the way marketing professionals communicate brand stories, messages, values and ideas through a fully-integrated world. We uncovered the truth that social media marketing as we thought we knew it is dead and instead found that brands need to focus more on informative, interactive and engaging content as it is the key driver of consumer love and participation — across generations.

Unfortunately, in today’s market, there are millions of daily distractions that come in between brands and the modern consumers they are trying to reach. As a result, the process of creating genuine relationships with consumers has become extremely difficult and competitive. It is projected that the use of ad blocking software online will increase to 32 percent in 2017, according to eMarketer.

In a landscape where consumers are literally blocking advertising from their view, how do brands compete to earn consumer love? Our answer is an approach that feels much more organic and is focused less on advertising and more on building relationships. The answer is content marketing.

We define content as the communication people choose to spend time with. Content is not segmented to what you publish online and in print. It is any form of communication with which consumers interact. By thinking about your content strategy in silos (social, email, website, etc.) you are missing a holistic view of your full engagement potential.

But, where does this content come from? How can we build relationships with modern consumers through different platforms? And, most importantly, how can we convey our messages in a way that makes sense and resonates in a hyper-connected, digital age?

Throughout this report, we aim to answer those questions. You will learn what you need to know to create an engaging content strategy, starting with building your brand’s Editorial Authority, or rather, the framework for which you build your brand’s value, voice and ability to have conversations that extend beyond just the product or service offering. Editorial Authority enables brands to overcome consumers’ distractions and focus in on what their consumers care about and how they can speak to them.

86 PERCENT OF B2C MARKETERS AGREE THAT CONTENT IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF THEIR ORGANIZATION’S MARKETING. YET, ONLY 40 PERCENT OF B2C MARKETERS HAVE A DOCUMENTED CONTENT STRATEGY. THAT’S A PROBLEM.
EDITORIAL AUTHORITY IS VITAL TO YOUR CONTENT STRATEGY.
As the foundation of your overall communication strategy, your Editorial Authority allows you to build the content pillars that will help you identify what opportunities exist to lead and participate in relevant conversations. These conversations extend beyond your brand, which consists of your Brand Story, your products and services, your value propositions and your brand news. And as we define content as the communication people choose to spend time with, we like to think of your Editorial Authority as your brand’s magazine: When you look at the contents page, what are the articles inside?

Editorial Authority should guide and inspire the actions, stories, profiles and more that form the content your brand would cover in its magazine. Within each of these areas, the key is strategic impact that results from looking through the following lenses:

1. **Brand**: Brand story, products/services, value propositions
2. **Market**: Industry characteristics and standing
3. **Consumer**: Experiences, values and interests
4. **Culture**: Actions and interests of the world outside

With an Editorial Authority that stems from these pillars, companies will reach and build relationships with current, new and larger audiences in more relevant ways.

CONTENT IS THE COMMUNICATION PEOPLE “CHOOSE” TO SPEND TIME WITH.
PART 1:
WHERE TO START

To create the most robust and effective Editorial Authority, you must first have three vital components: your core Brand Idea, a deep understanding of who your consumer is (their needs and wants, their experiences, their values, their interests, etc.) and a grasp on what cultural relevancy your brand has in the market today.

Once you have these components (effectively finding the overlap of brand, consumer and culture), it’s important to vet and workshop the content pillars developed to ensure they are strategically impactful and inspire the intended content and actions. This will provide you with opportunities to repeatedly prove your Brand Idea to your consumers and obtain the permission to share your Brand Story through multiple channels.

BRAND IDEA

The Brand Idea is a long-term proposition that drives everything your brand does. At Barkley, we refer to this as the “Red Thread.” It guides and inspires every action you take, both internally and externally, and is a part of everything that makes the brand tick. Campaigns come and go, but the Brand Idea is meant to live for years. Think Nike and “everyone is an athlete.” Dove and “real beauty is individual.” Or Dairy Queen and “Fan Food. Not Fast Food.”

Let’s dig into the Nike example.

Nike has built its brand on the idea that everyone is an athlete. As a result, it was able to establish an authority that extends beyond the production of shoes and fitness apparel and move into the lives of those who interact with the brand. On a deeply humanistic level, Nike connects with its consumers and identifies with them based on their interests and needs. Why? Its content isn’t focused on the products it makes, but on the use cases and people that inspire those products.

By thinking about Nike’s content strategy in this way, we can explain how it has become one of the most loved brands to date and how it has the ability and permission from consumers to continue exploring new innovations. In alignment with the idea, Nike has created an entire ecosystem that supports athletes on their journey toward health and high performance, beyond just what they are wearing.
DEEP CONSUMER UNDERSTANDING
Why do we love Netflix so much? Because we didn’t know we needed it until we had it. The best brands solve unmet consumer needs before they fully surface. Most consumers couldn’t have gone much beyond their dislike for late fees in articulating the problem with the corner video store — until Netflix solved it. As technology advanced, so did the company, because the Brand Idea was never “we rent DVDs by mail.” Having a bigger Brand Idea — “video entertainment anytime, anywhere” — enabled Netflix to move seamlessly into streaming, overcome early setbacks and take the brand global.

As time has progressed, so has the Netflix Brand Idea. To reflect the advances of our connected market, Netflix has added “make quality content available to all” to its idea. How is it able to successfully do this? Netflix has spent millions of dollars investing in in-depth consumer research to better understand its target consumers — from what they want to watch, to when they watch it, to how they watch it. Not only has this improved the customer experience for the platform, but it has also allowed Netflix to invest in its own high-quality content production. This has only furthered the overall success of the brand.

Just like Netflix, it’s important for brands to ask, “What exists today that we can make better?” and “What can we do to make people’s lives easier and more productive?”

CULTURAL RELEVANCY
To create a great Editorial Authority, you must understand what cultural relevancy your brand has in the market and with your consumers. If your audience does not have equity in your brand and what it stands for, they will likely not feel bad about leaving you as soon as the next best thing comes around. The goal is to determine where the overlap between your brand culture and consumer culture exists.

For example, students at the University of Oregon don’t love their team because they love Nike. However, they have developed a strong relationship and brand affinity for Nike because that is what their team wears and what they are surrounded by across campus, from their state-of-the-art, Nike-sponsored training facility to the bookstore.

“We are the University of Nike,” Jeff Hawkins, senior associate athletic director, said in an interview with The New York Times. “We embrace it. We tell that to our recruits.”

The overlap between consumer culture — Oregon’s school pride — and brand culture — Nike’s sponsorship of that pride — has created a culturally relevant partnership that allows Nike to have a stronger voice with a new audience.
PART 2:

APPROACHES TO ESTABLISHING EDITORIAL AUTHORITY

Once you have established your Brand Idea, found understanding of your consumers and determined how you can be culturally relevant, you will be able to identify the content pillars that are the base of your Editorial Authority.

In fact, developing your pillars and your Editorial Authority is more about “unearthing” than about creating.

You need to work with the equity you have already established to determine innovative ways of relaying your message. This isn’t about creating something new. It’s about being aware of what credibility your brand has to make you a leader and participant in the conversations that matter.

BRAND MODERNIZATION APPROACH
- BRAND HISTORY

One good way to unearth Editorial Authority is to pull insights from a brand’s historical roots: How can your brand equity become a powerful unfair advantage? Smart brands lean into their historical relevancy to learn what has truly engaged their most loyal consumers over a long period of time. The key is not to just look at last year or the year you were founded, but rather explore your entire history and invest your resources in truly understanding what it is about your brand that built long-term relationships. The question then becomes, “How do we make our history relevant in today’s market?”

For Barkley client Dairy Queen (DQ), this meant reviewing the company’s 75-year history. Traditionally, DQ was all over the place. Each DQ was different from the next one, and there was often a lack of consistency in pricing, structure and even menu items. However, we found that this was not necessarily a bad thing — each customer had an unwavering love for his or her own DQ!

The key insight was that people rooted for their DQ when in reality, they couldn’t care less what the other franchises or even competing brands were doing. The Brand Idea became Fan Food. Not Fast Food. We learned that for Dairy Queen’s biggest fans, the brand was personal, not corporate. This led us to the foundation of our “Hometown/Smalltown” content pillar in the DQ Editorial Authority, in which we celebrate the hometowns of the brand’s biggest fans.

So, when it came time for DQ to pick its next fall flavor, we realized the decision was not up to the corporate office because the brand belonged to the fans and the hometowns that supported them.
In the Dairy Queen Blizzard Battle, we skipped fall flavor clichés (we are as sick of pumpkin spice lattes as you are, trust us) and created a hometown rivalry between the Pumpkin Capital of the World (Caro, Michigan) and the Apple Capital of the World (Wenatchee, Washington) to promote the Pumpkin Pie and Apple Pie Blizzards. We seeded friendly mayoral “trash-talking” between the two towns (much like you see in the World Series) and had the mascots of the two towns rally the DQ nationwide fan base around one flavor. We didn’t promote the flavors; we promoted real-life people in each town who loved the flavors. Ultimately, the idea was born from the combination of the Brand Idea and one of the powerful Editorial Authority pillars: Hometown/Smalltown.

While each hometown DQ store embraces the things that make it different, we also found one overarching similarity among every store, town and customer. For DQ fans, the brand means summer and represents the warmth and fun that it entails. This insight fueled the development of our second content pillar, Summer, which allowed us to have conversations about more than just ice cream, but also about summertime and what that means for each individual customer and brand advocate. We asked ourselves, “How do we make summer timeless?”

In DQ’s #SUMMERNOW campaign, we went straight to the people who needed summer the most — Boston’s snow removal workers. At the time, these service men and women were on the front lines battling one of the most horrific winters to date, so clearly, they needed a little summer. We honored their service with a lifetime Blizzard pass and a celebration of an early arrival to summer across the DQ fan base.

While Hometown/Smalltown and Summer are only two pieces of the Editorial Authority we established for DQ, the concepts have allowed the brand to have a strong presence in conversations that genuinely matter to its consumers and have mattered throughout the brand’s history. By investing in the right conversations that align with its Editorial Authority, DQ has experienced the highest engagement scores and comparable same-store sales numbers in its 75-year history.
HUMAN APPROACH – BRAND STORY

Another method to determine Editorial Authority is what we refer to as the human approach.

Consumers today expect brands to be transparent, authentic and support more than just their bottom line. They will not stand idly by if those requirements are not met. According to a recent Unilever study, one-third of consumers are buying brands based on their social or environmental impact. It is clear that consumers want to engage with brands they can trust and that operate in a way that mimics human behavior rather than corporate dishonesty.

If you approach your communication strategy in an automated way and simply adhere to traditional mass marketing techniques, you will miss the valuable one-on-one connections with consumers that build the trust they are seeking. The most inspired brands have quickly realized this new paradigm shift and are instead leveraging their Editorial Authority to help guide them toward a more authentic, human approach to marketing. Millennials and modern consumers want to hear about things that really matter to them, not merely the fluff that has previously defined advertising.

Take Coca-Cola, for instance. With an Editorial Authority inherently rooted in human emotion, the brand has successfully created a communication strategy that leverages and fuels human connection. The famous “Share a Coke” campaign was one of the largest and most successful campaigns in Coca-Cola’s history, and it came to fruition because of a single insight:

Customers wanted to be treated like a human — not like a number on the bottom line.

The “Share a Coke” campaign was a solution to the problem. It created a new way for people to relate to the brand on a personal level, replacing the traditional Coca-Cola branding with the brand of “you.” The campaign also encouraged fans to submit the names of people they wanted to share Cokes with, leveraging the desire consumers have to take ownership of their brand experiences. It also gave consumers a way to connect with others and leverage the “sharing economy” — a direct result of modern consumers’ aptitude to share anything and everything on social media. The shareable packaging of Coke bottles resulted in an uptick of meaningful brand interactions thanks to the fact that everyone now has an internet-connected camera in the palm of their hand.

So, how can you find the human side of your brand?

1. **Embrace core brand values**
   Ask yourself, “What human values do we want to support as a brand? Where does our brand fit most naturally in the spectrum of human emotion?” Increasing profit is not a core value. Articulating and embracing brand values helps you tap into the true human emotion that correlates with your product or service.
2. **Determine what really matters to brand advocates**

Don’t assume you know what your brand advocates like. Listen to them. Ask them. We live in an era where crowd sourcing is the norm. From new cereal to vacation destinations, Millennial Mindset consumers are not shy when it comes to asking the opinions of others. As a brand that acts as a human, why not do the same thing? Find out what matters to your fans and use their responses to help establish your Editorial Authority.

**INSIDE-OUT APPROACH – BRAND MODEL**

The beliefs, practices and business model that brands embody internally are what become their external baseline of proof points.

The most salient, successful companies right now treat their business model and Brand Idea as one and the same. They’re simply thinking inside-out. Effectively, the brand is everything, leading us to our last method for building Editorial Authority.

Consider TOMS, one of the most notable modern brands to embrace this way of thinking. When Blake Mycoskie, founder and chief shoe giver, came up with the idea for the company, he wanted to create a sustainable, for-profit business that was not reliant on donations. As a result, the One-for-One branded business model was created. The business model is the brand with the buy-one-get-one sales approach. This is not just a small ‘do-good’ company; it is a successful global brand with a purpose based in its core values that are shared across a vast array of communities and consumer groups.

As a result, this business model has directed the content and communication strategy for TOMS. The company uses footwear as an avenue to discuss larger issues on an international scale. If this were any other company, however, consumers would not buy into it. But, because TOMS built itself around the core belief of improving people’s lives by providing sustainable footwear, it has credibility in conversations about international issues that may not make sense for other retail brands.

This inside-out approach hones in on the modern consumer demand for brand transparency. The more consumers can see behind the scenes, the more likely they are to buy-in to brand actions and messages.

However, this isn’t just applicable to philanthropic brands. For Barkley client Spirit Airlines, this inside-out approach was the best possible opportunity to establish an Editorial Authority that extended beyond just air travel and into the idea of consumer control. After all, being transparent about pricing structure allowed consumers to understand why Spirit does the things it does and, as a result, take greater control over their travel costs. Spirit rebranded its à la carte, low-cost price model as the **Bare Fare** to quickly educate consumers about what they got with their ticket and developed a four-part curriculum to teach people a new way to fly — the Spirit Way.
“If you book a Spirit flight and expect a Delta experience, you’re going to be disappointed,” says Bobby Shroeter, VP of Marketing at Spirit Airlines. “We’re not an airline for everyone, but once we started flipping our business model inside-out with brandings such as Bare Fare, people got it.”

Unfortunately, some brands make the mistake of acting from the outside-in. Starbucks, although a well-loved modern brand, was the focus of a major controversy when it released its “Race Together” campaign in 2015. The campaign encouraged baristas to write the phrase #racetogether on coffee cups to inspire their customers to have deeper conversations about racial issues. What might have seemed like a positive move in the right direction at the time resulted in a quick and extreme backlash from the Twittersphere.

“The campaign has drawn sharp criticism online, with many commenting on the company’s lack of diversity in hiring and whether employees are equipped to engage in these discussions, among other issues,” the Los Angeles Times reported.

Consumers were quick to voice their opinions, claiming Starbucks (a company whose leadership team is predominately white male) had no business investing in these types of conversations. Ultimately, Starbucks had invested in the cultural background pieces (the importance and relevancy of solving racial inequality) but made a claim without the needed authenticity. Because diversity was not a core value embedded into the infrastructure of its model, the second the company began pointing fingers externally without first embracing its own recommendations, it opened itself up to criticism.

Although Starbucks will continue to be a well-loved brand (and has since corrected its approach to culture), this campaign fell outside of its Editorial Authority. This is a perfect example of how a brand that pushes its authority too far and structures itself from the outside-in rather than from the inside-out risks disconnecting with all consumers, even its brand advocates.

The key to an inside-out approach is to remember that it must be an authentic model that your brand embraces in its entirety, not just on the surface. Your Editorial Authority is your foundation, not just your image.
PART 3: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The great advertising pioneer Howard Gossage once said, “People read what’s interesting to them, and sometimes it’s advertising.” This is vital to understand about Editorial Authority. Developing your Editorial Authority gives you an opportunity to engage with, comment on and create content that will propel your brand into the hearts and minds of the people with whom you wish to connect.

Remember, your Editorial Authority is your brand’s magazine. You have your audience, you have your established purpose, now you must prove that purpose with the actions you take and the content you publish. But if you think you can just go on and on about your products and services, you haven’t paid close enough attention.

Let’s go back to Nike. If you were to open its magazine, you wouldn’t see a picture of a shoe. You would see a young woman bent over catching her breath after running her first marathon. If all Nike talked about were shoes or gear, readers would quickly lose interest. Your Editorial Authority lies in what your audience wants to read about and what they find relevant.

Having a strong Editorial Authority also gives you the tools you need to identify the right conversations where you can add value. **This is entirely different from the conversations you own.**

Marketers often have a strong desire to be the first ones to the party — to set trends or to be the first to make a comment. However, there is a wealth of power in determining the right conversations that already exist in which your brand can have a voice. Owning the space is smart but knowing when to own versus when to invest is genius.

Ultimately, adding to the conversation in real-time does not necessarily mean it is the right time. Investing in relevant conversations to your Editorial Authority and focusing on a higher level of impact when it comes to the quality of your brand presence in conversation is what matters.

Today’s modern consumers have fluidity across both digital and physical channels. That keeps them constantly connected to each other, and they expect the same connection to their favorite brands. This accessibility comes from being in the right place, at the right time, with the right message — and each of these things stems from a strong and well-thought-out Editorial Authority.

By now, you should realize that your Editorial Authority is one of the most valuable cornerstones of your brand and content strategy. Without it, you risk losing your cultural relevancy and a deep fundamental understanding of your consumers: who they are, what they want to hear and with what content they want to engage. Beginning to think about your Editorial Authority through the different lenses of historical relevancy, humanization and an inside-out business model will enable you to begin building not only a great content strategy, but also a greater capacity for relationship building that will turn your consumers into genuine and loyal brand partners.
To summarize, here are seven key points to remember:

1. **Center your Editorial Authority on your core values, interests and experiences** – as a person grows and has more experiences and relevant understanding, so does a brand and its authority.

2. **Make sure your Editorial Authority stems from your Brand Idea** – and you can’t do any of this without knowing who you are at the core.

3. **Embrace your past, present and future, and don’t get tied down by real-time marketing** – focus on right-time marketing.

4. **Continually evaluate cultural trends** – and see if there is a fit for your brand.

5. **Define the conversations that your brand wants to be a part of** – you won’t (and shouldn’t) always be the owner of a conversation.

6. **Look for overlaps between your brand culture and consumer culture** – this will create meaningful content that builds relationships.

7. **Listen to your consumers and advocates** – don’t be afraid to ask their opinions, either.

IN SHORT, EVERY TIME YOU’RE TEMPTED TO ACT LIKE A STERILE CORPORATION, ACT LIKE A TRUSTED ALLY INSTEAD. EDITORIAL AUTHORITY WILL DEFINE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE PEOPLE WHO MATTER MOST TO YOUR BRAND AND ITS FUTURE.
CONTACT US
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