



CONTENT MARKETING

FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS SECTOR

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Content Marketing is perfect for the performing arts sector. We are surrounded with great ideas, creative people and, of course, a lot of content.

Give your audiences valuable and relevant content and you are well on your way to nurturing relationships. Be consistent, conversational and friendly and you will have long-lasting relationships.

**Show people you care, and they will care about you.
They will also attend your performances.**

WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING?

The Content Marketing Institute offers this definition:

“A marketing technique of creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action.”

Let's focus on three key elements:



Content Marketing is all around us and it cannot be avoided. Consider this, in every minute of 2014:

Facebook users shared nearly 2.5 million pieces of content.

Twitter users tweeted nearly 300,000 times.
Instagram users posted nearly 220,000 new photos.

YouTube users uploaded 72 hours of new video content.

Email users sent over 200 million messages.

Source: <http://aci.info/2014/07/12/the-data-explosion-in-2014-minute-by-minute-infographic/>

**People share, they comment. They like.
And they create their own content.**

WHAT ISN'T CONTENT MARKETING?

It isn't advertising, and it isn't transactional.

It is, however, communication. It is sharing information on a topic that resonates with an interested audience.

It is valuable, relevant and consistent conversations that instill familiarity, build and maintain relationships, and earn trust.

Well-maintained relationships become lasting relationships.



Now consider the contents of a typical newspaper advertisement, which often finds its way into electronic newsletters and social media posts:

- I have a performance
- On this date and at this venue.
- Here is a quote (or a sales pitch).
- Now buy tickets before it is too late.

The constant repetition is predictable and fatiguing, offering little to no compelling reason for anyone to pay attention.

When you stop to think about it, this approach has very little to do with the reader, but everything to do with the marketer, who has only one goal in mind: to make a transaction.

Advertising is about you.

Content marketing is about the customer.

THE CREATION PROCESS

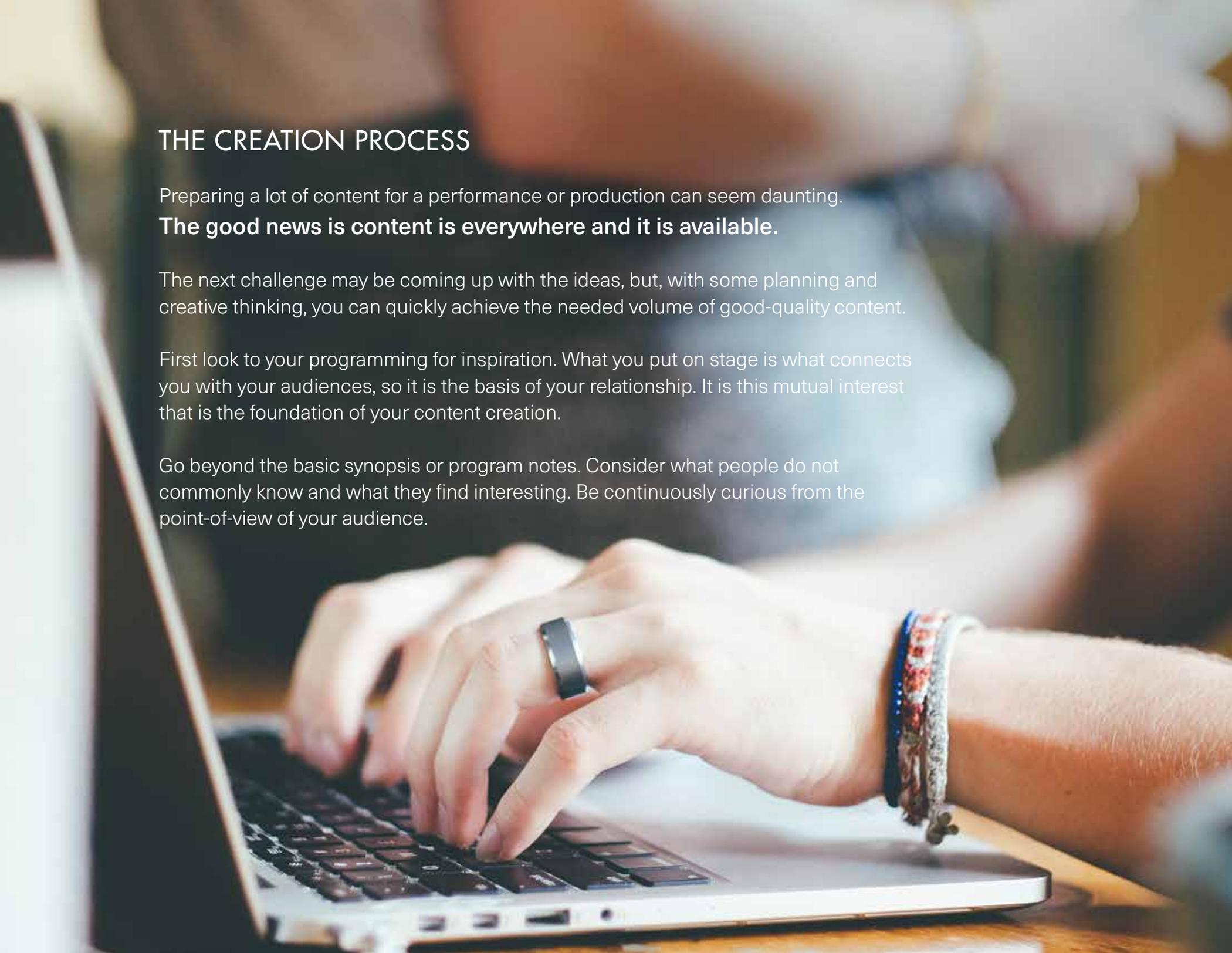
Preparing a lot of content for a performance or production can seem daunting.

The good news is content is everywhere and it is available.

The next challenge may be coming up with the ideas, but, with some planning and creative thinking, you can quickly achieve the needed volume of good-quality content.

First look to your programming for inspiration. What you put on stage is what connects you with your audiences, so it is the basis of your relationship. It is this mutual interest that is the foundation of your content creation.

Go beyond the basic synopsis or program notes. Consider what people do not commonly know and what they find interesting. Be continuously curious from the point-of-view of your audience.



A little research will soon tell you what others have written about a stage play or a musical composition. Look for trivial facts, explore historic backstories and consider inspirational influences.

Interview members of the artistic team. Make it relatable and personal to give your readers a captivating glimpse into a world they previously only imagined.

Skip the headshots and make it real with photos and videos of backstage areas, such as paint cans in the scene shop and actors in the lunchroom. There are lots of apps for creating and editing video and photos that will kick your content up a notch.

Paraphrase interesting articles, and share photos found on the internet (and always give credit where credit is due).

Solicit reviews from your patrons and circulate them in your newsletters.

Crowd source ideas among the staff, the artistic team, the performers and your keenest supporters. Find out what your patrons are telling your volunteers, box office staff, and ushers – be open to what you hear and you will discover great ideas for content.

Just remember, quantity should not trump quality.

What you produce should be valuable to your readers and representative of your brand.

IT IS ABOUT THE PEOPLE

When you meet someone you know, you are not likely to talk to that person as if he or she is a faceless stranger.

Think of content marketing as a friendly conversation. Drop the hype and the arts speak, and use simple, well-written English.

Communicate with your audiences like you would with people you know.

It may be helpful to develop one or two personas for your audience members by generalizing their attributes. Also, consider how you talk with your patrons before and after performances.

Create a picture in your mind of your typical audience members and it will be easier to talk with them through your written communications.

Then develop your writing style. Find your voice, tone and language, and give your communications engaging personality.



RECYCLE, REPURPOSE, RE-USE

Repurposing is the superpower behind content marketing.

Consider a 10-question interview with the Artistic Director (or musician, conductor, dancer, or actor). Chances are this piece can be delivered over two electronic newsletters. Pull a few special quotes and you have material that will extend the life of the interview over several more newsletters.

With a little rewriting, the question-and-answer format can also be turned into an article.

Create 10 or more Facebook posts and tweets and share the images accompanying the interview with links to the original article.

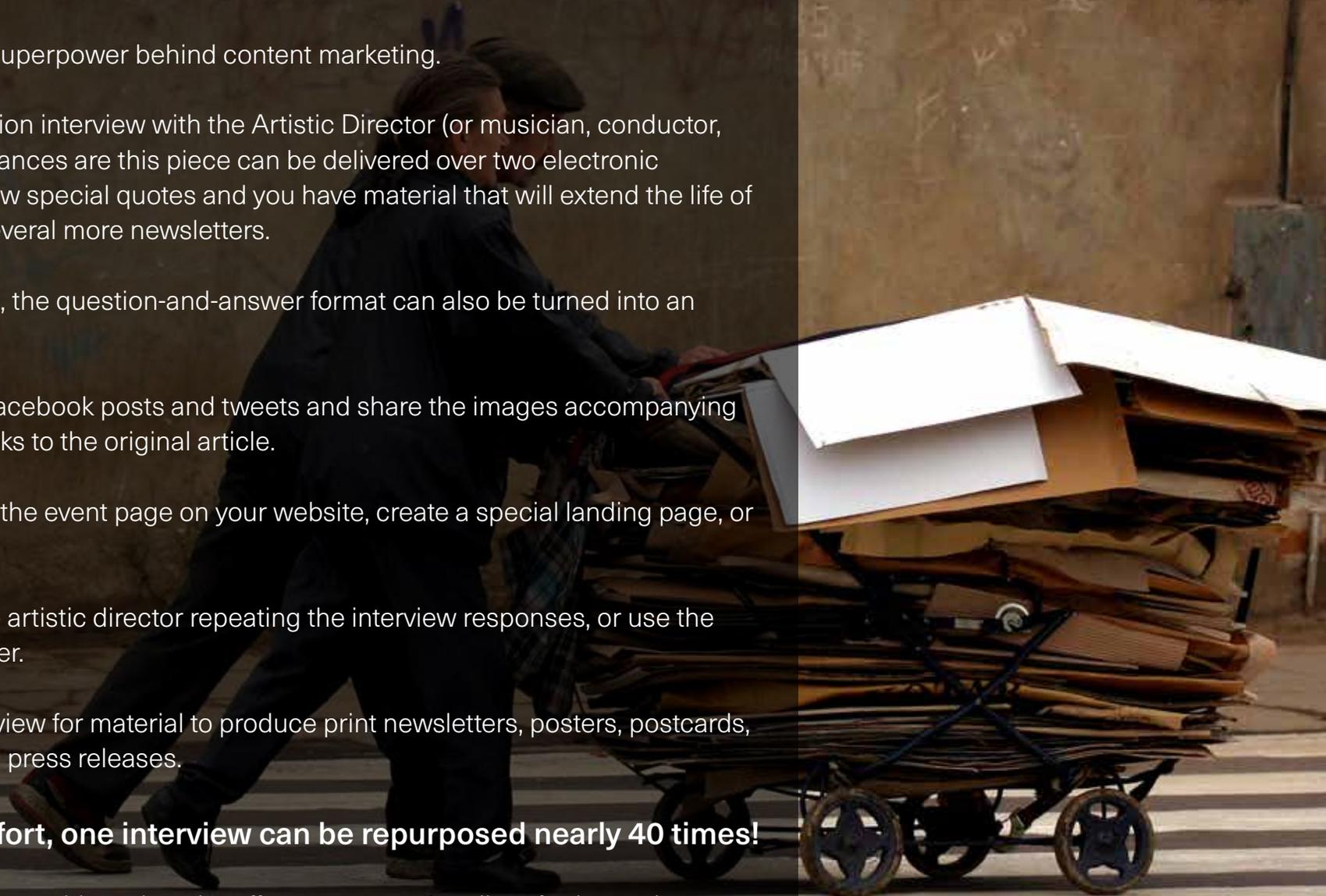
Add the interview to the event page on your website, create a special landing page, or add it to your blog.

Create a video of the artistic director repeating the interview responses, or use the sound for a voice-over.

Repurpose the interview for material to produce print newsletters, posters, postcards, print advertising and press releases.

Without much effort, one interview can be repurposed nearly 40 times!

And it didn't cost you anything – just the effort to create 10 well-crafted questions. (Not sure you can come up with your own questions? Search for “interview artistic director” and you will find lots of inspiring material.)



IT'S ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP

Continuing the preceding example, it is highly unlikely your interviewee will mention your box office number, the ticket prices, the address of the venue or anything else that will be found in a typical ad.

The interviewee is, however, likely to talk about inspirations and passions, personal ambitions and artistic vision.

That is the significant difference between content marketing and conventional advertising.

It is all about interesting, relevant, valuable, memorable and sharable information. It is about conversing with audiences and showing them you care about them as people. It is about building lasting relationships.

Of course, there is plenty of opportunity to include box office phone number and the venue location in your well-designed communication pieces. It just doesn't have to be the focus of your communications.

KEEP REGULAR AND OTHER GOOD TIPS

Commit to a regular schedule of communications to help establish expectations and maintain curiosity.

Test different delivery times for your electronic newsletter and social media posts, so that you reach the highest engagement. Facebook, Twitter and email delivery services offer loads of analytical information to help guide your delivery decisions.

Decide on a rate of delivery and then do more. If you give your audiences valuable information, and avoid the constant sales pitch, they will stick with you.

Spend time writing enticing subject lines for your electronic newsletters and give your open rate a boost.

Wrap your communications in good design and manage the ratio of text to white space and images. A large block of text is not inviting; images are what we “read” first.

Never be afraid to repackage and re-use your material. Repeat your posts and tweets and re-write your articles. People consume information at different times, at different rates and through different sources.

Consider Creative Commons when you are taking images from the internet and always credit your sources.

If you want people to read something, do more than supply a few words and a link. Mail Chimp suggests the click-through rate for the Arts and Artists category is only 2.8%. Put some effort into it and give them the complete (yet short) article, or at least provide a good summary.

Always keep it conversational and always keep your eye on building and retaining your relationships.



PUTTING IT TO THE TEST

Marketing a run-of-the-mill Christmas concert is not easy. What is there to say about yet another program of The Nutcracker and Christmas carols?

Well, actually there is a lot to say – and much of it is only a Google-search away.

Here are ideas taken from a seven-week content marketing campaign:

Is It Christmas Season Already? Blame It On The Victorians.

Every year we complain Christmas advertising starts a little earlier. With a little research, you will find the Victorians were masters of early marketing.

Christmas Cartoons and Carol Curiosities.

Share seasonal comics and trivia.

Sing Along With Us. You And Your Health Will Be Glad You Did!

Research indicates singing is good for us and so is the Christmas Sing-along.

Wombats, Radios and Missiles

A look at the different versions of carols found around the world. (The words in the title come from an Australian version of *The Twelve Days of Christmas*.)

Team Sports And The Magic Of Choral Singing.

An interview with the conductor, who compared choral singing to team sports.

Hallelujah For The Messiah!

History and trivia about the Christmastime favourite.

The Time Has Come!

The final emailer summarizes what to expect at the concert.

These articles, each researched and written within two hours, were circulated through an electronic newsletter that achieved an open rate of over 40%.

With an average of 400 words per article, there is also more than enough material for an engaging social media campaign.

A photograph of a white desk with a smartphone, a white mouse, and a keyboard. A blue jacket is draped over the desk in the background. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Thank you for reading
Content Marketing for the Performing Arts Sector.

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