THE MANIFESTO OF FUCKING GOOD CONTENT

DAN KELSALL

Your content's probably shit.

Don't panic, Susan. You're not alone.

Most people, and companies for that matter, produce content that's about as effective as a crepe paper condom.

Don't believe me?

Take a look at the social accounts of brands. At company blogs. At promoted content that appears on your feeds.

I guarantee the majority of the stuff you look at will have very little engagement, and from the engagement the content did get, very little of it comes from that company's ideal customer.

Why?

Because it's probably one of two things (or often both).

It's either more boring than a weekend on a desert island with Bill Oddy, or it's trying to sell something. And nobody wants to be sold to.

So how do you make sure your content stands out? How do you use your social accounts, blogs and ebooks to drive new customers?

Well, I'm not going to tell you on the first page, am I, dickhead?

Get reading.

Dan Kelsall

IT'S
ALL
ABOUT
THE
RISK

The biggest hurdle for most content producers is fear.

Fear of offending customers.

Fear of bad publicity.

Fear of looking stupid.

But it's all bullshit. The fact is, the more unknown your brand, the harder it is to damage it. And you know what? Most of those 'customers' that you're trying so hard not to offend, probably wouldn't buy from you anyway.

But that's not the worst part about producing vanilla shite. The worst part is, for every blog, meme, video, podcast or social media post that you produce that garners no engagement or brings in no new business, you lose money. The time you spent producing that content cost your company.

Most content that people produce is a loss making exercise. Period.

For any content marketing strategy to work, you have to take risks.

You have to try things that your competitors won't. You have to change your tone of voice to something that your industry has never before seen. You have to produce content that adds value to those you want to buy your product.

Make them laugh. Make them cry. Give them knowledge.

But DON'T. FUCKING. SELL.

OK, so it's easy for me to sit here and tell you to take a risk, when I regularly post polarising, mildly (really) offensive content with hashtags like #chocolatedildo, and #walrussex.

I appreciate that if you work for a brand, or you produce content for a client, you can't really get away with the stuff I do. It probably won't go down well if you run an accountancy firm's social media account and you suddenly start tweeting "Philip Hammond's a dickhead." And that's fine. I'm not saying you should.

The level of risk is different in every industry, but one of the things I absolutely guarantee, is that you can push boundaries much, much, much further than you think you can.

And it is pushing those boundaries that will make your content stand out. It is pushing those boundaries that'll make your customers sit up and take note.

One of the best ways to start, is to ask yourself this:

WHAT DO MY CUSTOMERS WANT TO SAY, BUT DAREN'T SAY IT?

If you can say what they wish they were able to say, you'll immediately garner their admiration and respect.

And what happens when a customer respects you?

They're much more likely to buy from you.

BRAND AWARENESS IS UTTER BOLLOCKS

Brand awareness, as a business goal, is bollocks.

Seriously.

If you're an SME, or a startup, and you get 10 likes on each piece of content you produce, what brand awareness?

No one has a fucking clue who you are.

One of the major issues with the digital marketing industry is the number of agencies that sell marketing campaigns with a focus on 'brand awareness'. They get you to chuck a load of money behind rubbish material that gets a few thousand 'views' and then pat themselves on the back on what they tell you was a job well done.

"Look at the reach!" they'll say.

But, ladies and gentlemen, if it brought in no new customers, or no revenue, or it didn't increase your userbase, 'reach' means diddly squat.

Brand awareness comes as a by-product of producing good content.

Brand awareness develops as a result of consistently winning new business.

Large brands, that control a substantial market share, are the only companies that have the time, and budget, to run 'brand awareness' campaigns.

Why?

Because it's about retention. Their brand names are engrained in their industries. Staying at the forefront of the consumer's mind is really fucking important.

But you, the smaller brand, whom nobody knows or really gives a shit about, can't stay at the forefront of your customer's mind when you were never in their mind in the first place.

Forget about brand awareness for now. You need to produce content that gets results.

THE "STOP RAMMING YOUR PRODUCT DOWN PEOPLE'S THROATS" APPROACH

Put your hand up if you like being cold-called?

Anyone? No?

How about spammed over email?

What about getting stopped in the street by some gimpy student trying to get you to donate a quid a month to a charity that gives wigs to children born without shins?

I thought not.

Well, it's exactly the same when all you put out on social media is stuff about how your company's anal bleaching kit is better than your competitor's.

Nobody gives a shit. People hate being sold to. But, guess what?

People like to buy.

"So, people want to buy but I can't sell to them? Fuck's sake, Dan, you better start making sense or I'm going to roundhouse you in the testicles."

I know. It's hard to get your head around. The thing is, people don't like pressure. They want to buy when they're ready.

So, instead of selling, the smart move is to produce content that resonates with your target audience. Content that provides value, fosters debate and, by saying something your customers wish they could say, helps you to build trust, respect and admiration within your market.

And when those customers are ready to buy, where do they go?

To a brand, or individual, that they trust, A.K.A you.

Make sense?

Because they'd rather buy off you. It's the old cliché, 'people buy people'.

You see, no one trusts brands anymore. Particularly not new ones. That's another reason branded content never does particularly well. It feels contrived. It feels like no matter what a brand pushes out, they're always trying to sell.

Everyone's big on 'personal brands' at the minute.

And I agree. The way to rocket your B2B marketing efforts is to forget about your brand for the time being, and use your people.

Use their personalities to build different, smaller audiences within your target market. If their content hits the right people, your customers will find your brand, and products, as a consequence of the mint stuff they produce.

The problem is, however, people get it so fucking wrong. Most attempts at personal branding involve posting motivational quotes and plagiarising other people's content.

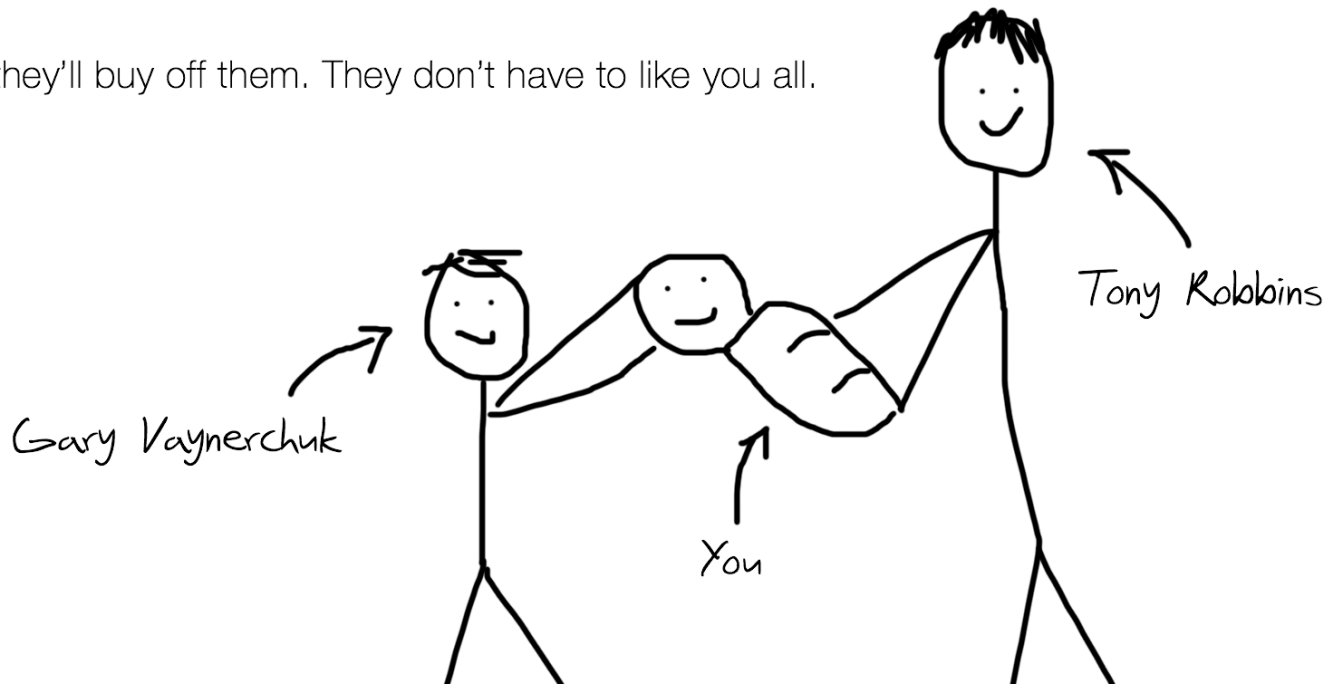
But you're not the motivational love child of Tony Robbins and Gary Vee. You're you.

And there is stuff you can say that will massively appeal to people within your target audience. It doesn't have to appeal to everyone in your target audience, though.

That's the beauty of having multiple personalities putting out content.

Different parts of your market will be drawn to the different people in your organisation.

And they'll buy off them. They don't have to like you all.



NOT
ALL CONTENT
HAS TO BE
BRANDED

Marketers used to believe that all B2B content had to be branded. “Brand consistency”, they used to call it. But it’s bollocks. Having the same colour and rubbish spiel on every piece of content you produce won’t bring in business.

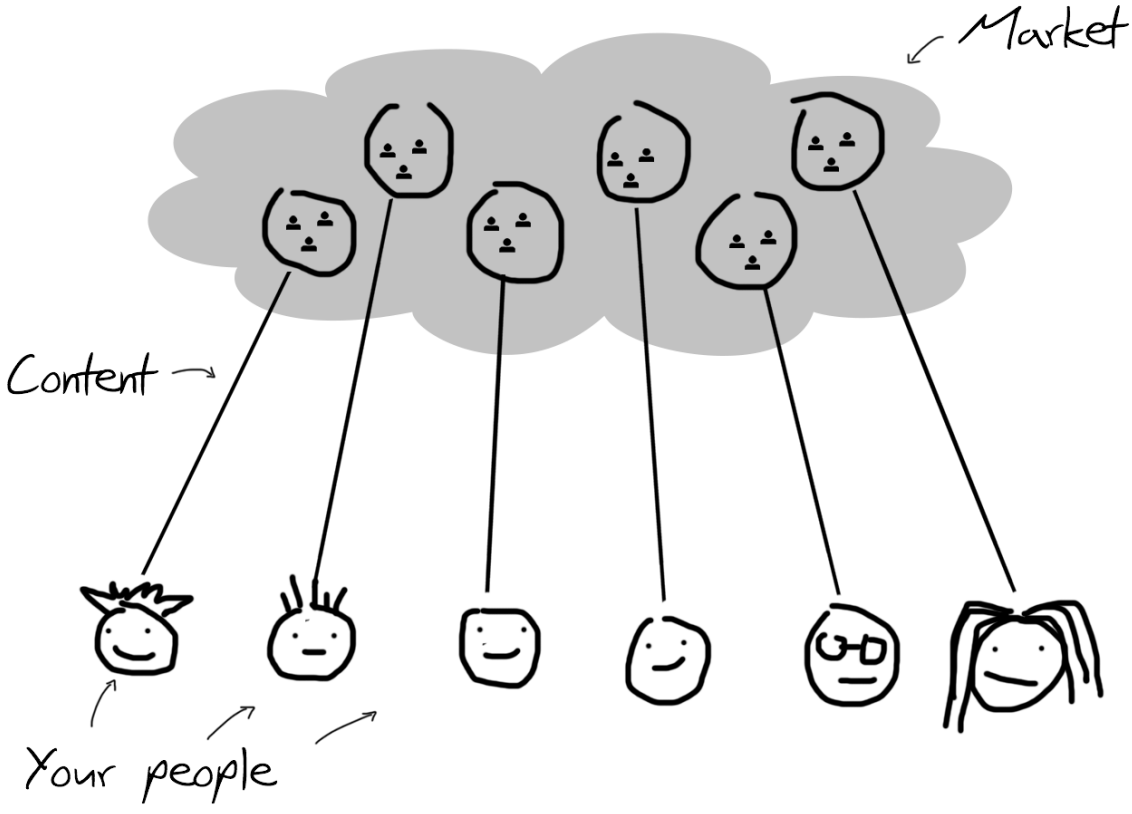
Marketing has changed. The people within your company will have opinions. Knowledge. Stories to tell. Stuff that will resonate with your target audience. Well, some of them will anyway.

There will also be people in your business that are about as about as interesting as a Friday night in watching repeats of University Challenge with a falafel wrap and a glass of water. They’re probably not the best choice as content producers.

And of course you can have a bit of the branded stuff. But without an audience, who the fuck’ll read it?

Like I said earlier. The brand sits behind those people. It’s on their social profiles. It’s subtly placed at the end of ebooks. And it’ll be found if they’re pushing out top quality content to your target customers. Their job is to capture little pockets of your market. To create small audiences that love the stuff they have to say.

Why? Because they’ll like the cut of an employee’s jib, see amazing content from them all the time, and go and check out what it is they do. Even if that customer isn’t ready to buy yet, they’ll be aware of your product or service and, when the time’s right, they’ll buy.



NOT EVERYONE
WILL BUY
FROM YOU

Let's go back to the point I made earlier about how you'll never get 'everyone' to buy from you.

It's impossible.

What you want is to attract the customers that are like you. Their values are the same, their opinions similar, and their business objectives mimic your own.

Why? Because, in short, it's miles easier to work with customers you gel with than those you don't.

So, what's the best way to attract a likeminded audience to your content?

Yep, you guessed it. Be yourself.

"But what if I put myself out there, and people don't like me? What if I piss some potential customers off?"

So what? How do you know they'd buy from you in the first place? And, if they did, I'd guess that if they're not the type of person you'd get on with, chances are they're likely to become a difficult customer.

They won't get your jokes. They won't resonate with the stuff you say. They'll be harder to talk around when things go tits up. And this is business. Things always go tits up.

By producing content that attracts potential customers that are like you, you'll begin to build an audience. The more that audience grows, the more likely others are to notice. And eventually, your company's brand will surpass your personal brand, and whether or not people like you won't matter anymore.

Plenty of people don't like Branson, but it doesn't stop them using that shite train service, does it?

In fact, this is probably the wankiest thing that I've ever written, but people need to stop trying to be Virgin, and be Branson instead.

Actually, fuck that. FUCK. THAT.

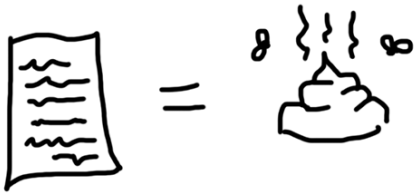
MARKETING
IS ON ITS
ARSE

OK. That's a pretty strong statement. But, in many respects, it's true.

Marketing, for many companies, looks a lot like this:

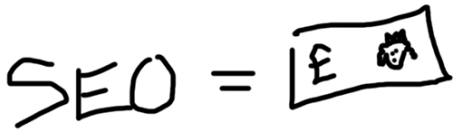
Hire a marketing person who has a marketing degree that was taught by old blokes that haven't marketed anything since designing WWII propaganda posters.

Spend weeks writing a marketing strategy that you don't stick to because…well…it was a pile of shit to begin with.

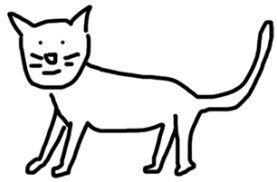


Set up accounts on every single fucking social channel. "Are you sure we need Instagram to market our incontinence pads, Barry?" Then push the same rubbish content out across all channels every single day.

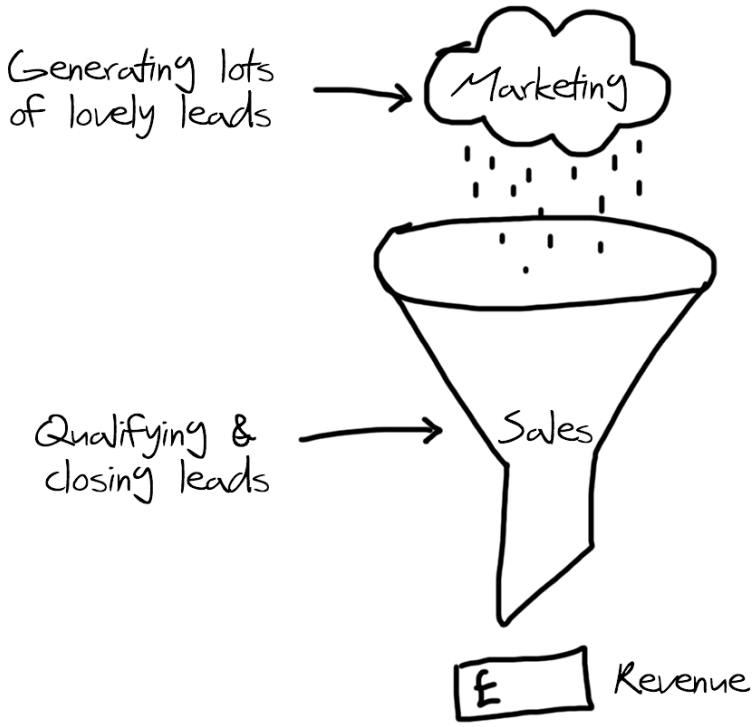
Dabble in PPC, lose a load of money, then litter your website and blogs with so many keywords that it doesn't even sound like English anymore, just because some gimpy 'consultant' told you it's all about the SEO.



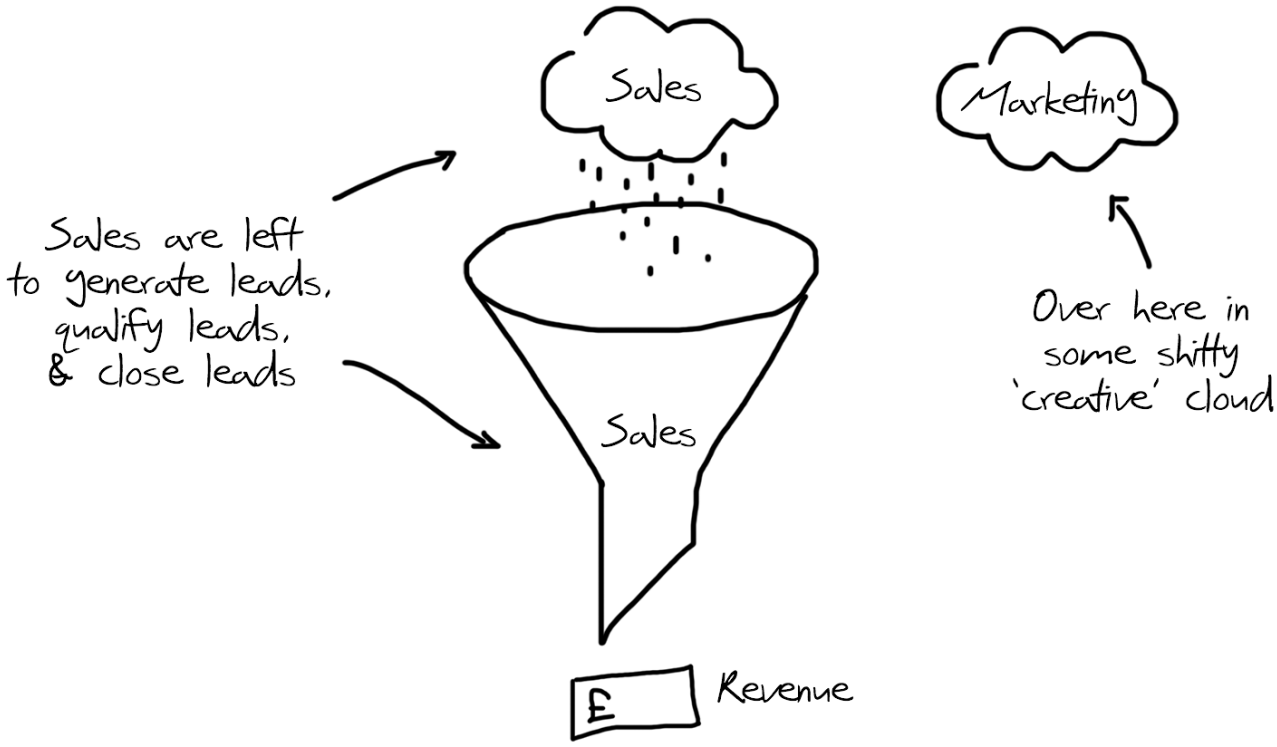
Get absolutely no return on investment because you don't have fucking clue what you're doing, but keep doing it anyway in the hope that, one day, shit "5 ways to…" blogs will become the biggest trend in marketing since cat memes.



Sound familiar? Well, I thought I'd put together a really shit diagram to illustrate what I believe the purpose of a marketing function is. Particularly in B2B land.



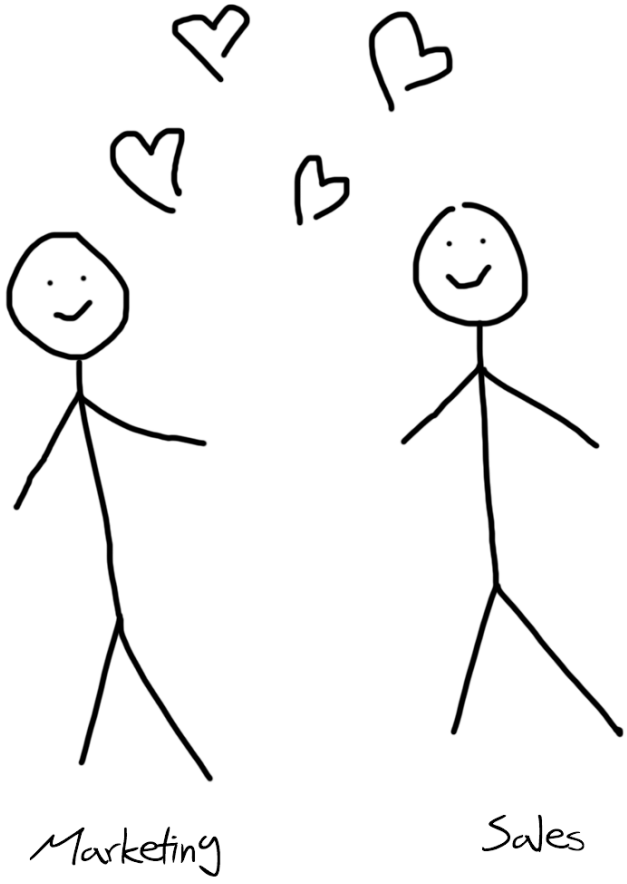
And, in contrast, this, lads and ladettes, is what marketing actually looks like in most establishments. See the problem?



You see, the issue is, marketing is always supposed to generate a return on investment. It's supposed to encourage people to buy from you. But, somewhere along the line, the marketing world became fluffy and began to focus on stuff like 'brand awareness' or 'reach' without actually measuring what that meant for the bottom line. Meanwhile, sales people, who should be focussing on the thing they're good at, closing deals, are spending 80% of their time generating their own leads, whilst marketing smoke crack, roll the bottoms of their chinos up, sip herbal tea and come up with gifs and shit listicles.

What a lot of places need to get back to is marketing that actually brings customers to the table. Imagine what completely inbound would feel like. That's the ideal scenario, right?

Sure, it's unlikely that a business' sales function will ever be entirely inbound. Outbound sales will always have a place in my view. But I honestly believe every business can generate a decent percentage of inbound leads if they get their message right.



BECOMING
A SEXUAL
GENIUS
WIZARD
NINJA GURU
OF
CONTENT

So what does good content do? What does it look like? How do you produce it?

Firstly, good content never sits on the fence. Ever. People, and small brands, are so scared of polarising opinion. But why?

Did Nike sit on the fence with Colin Kaepernick? Nope. Did it damage their brand? Nope.

Did Protein World worry about putting skinny models on advertisements on the underground with the caption, “Are you beach body ready?”, and apologise when feminists lost their shit about it? Did they fuck.

In both cases, profits shot through the roof. I’m not saying I agree with Protein World’s message, in fact I massively don’t, but it spoke to their target demographic, and because of those that thought defacing posters with lipstick and girl power slogans would make a difference, the brand ended up all over the national news. Prime time TV slots and not a penny paid for it.

So, who came off better in the end?

The fact is, good content gets results. It says something powerful that strikes a chord with your target market. It has personality. It doesn’t force products or services down people’s throats. It’s engaging.

And it always says something that your target market wish they could say, but daren’t say it.

We have a miriad of channels available to us to distribute content to the right people. Everyone has the tools at their finger tips to drive more traffic to their business.

Good content can’t make up for a shit product.

But one thing is certain. Good content will always work, no matter the social channel, no matter the advertising method, no matter the market.

If you get your content right, if you get your message nailed, if you find a tone of voice that makes you stand out, everything else will fall into place.

THE 10 RULES OF FUCKING GOOD CONTENT

1. Stop trying to produce content on every social media platform. If you sell false teeth, your target demographic probably aren't on Insta, are they? Nobody wants to look at pictures of gummy old people dribbling soup onto their cardigans. Find out where your customers are and get really fucking good at one or two channels. For most B2B stuff, LinkedIn's your man.

2. As wanky as this is going to sound, think outside the box. And, what I mean by that is, ask yourself, "what are my competitors doing to market themselves?" and then DON'T DO THAT. I don't care how well it works for them. If you do the same thing, as a lot of companies seem to think they have to do, one of two things will happen. Either, you'll produce marketing that looks like a poor man's version of the stuff your competitor is doing, or you'll bring more of the same stuff to market which will bore your customers and ruin the party for everyone.

3. Start with simple changes. You don't have to ride a zebra through a hospital, shouting, "The NHS can pull my plonker!" whilst naked and carrying a giant flag with your logo on, just to make people aware of your new healthcare software. In a lot of industries, content - and marketing efforts in general - are so ridiculously shit that even something simple like a different, casual tone of voice can make your content stand out.

4. Get your message and tone of voice right before you try anything else. You don't need to jump straight into videos, memes, ebooks and keynote speeches. Start with really simple content. Refine it until you get a decent amount of engagement, then analyse the shit out of it until you've figured out what works. Only once you know the sort of stuff your target audience react to should you start diversfying your content.

5. Stop wasting time writing 100 page marketing strategies before you've even tested your content on your market. Think up a load of ideas for content that won't take up a shed load of time and resources, push it out, analyse what worked, and then begin to build your strategy and campaigns around the topics that resonated with the people you're trying to reach.

6. Don't put money behind any content before knowing that your target audience want to see it. If you have an infographic that took you 5 hours to design but only got 3 likes because, in reality, it's shit, putting money behind it will only push it out to a wider audience, who will also think it's shit.

7. You probably don't have to produce as much content as 'experts' will have you believe. If you're a small business, or a business without a marketing team, you probably don't have time to produce daily content. Being creative is taxing. If marketing isn't your main job, you've only got limited time to come up with stuff. It's much smarter to produce one piece of decent content per week that gets a good amount of engagement from your target audience, than 2 posts a day that get less interest than a dick pic on Tinder.

8. Build an audience. Content marketing isn't a quick fix. In fact, no types of marketing are a quick fix. It takes time to build your audience, and it can take a while to start producing material that they actually want to see. But, if you take the time to capture an audience, you'll be able to sell anything to them. That's why, even though Kylie Jenner is the epitome of everything that's wrong with society, she could probably come out with a brand of fake eyelashes made from the pubic hair of homeless greek men, and her fans would snap them up.

9. You don't have to talk about subjects that relate to your product all the time. Your target market will have other interests. Maybe your ideal customers are accountants with their own practices. They're business owners too, so produce content that relates to them in that respect. You can even talk about hobbies, your company culture, hiring, or managing people. To build an audience, people want authentic content. Not just industry 'expertise'.

10. Don't buy the bullshit. In the cloudy world of marketing, full of shady agencies, tinpot qualifications, and 'influencers' with fake audiences, it can be easy to get drawn in by the bollocks. But don't listen to anyone that says something like, "[insert channel here] is dead." You see it all the time. Twitter's dead. And yet, there are millions of people still using it every day. Postal advertising is dead. And yet, people still have letter boxes. I used to be guilty of it. But, those who say things are dead, just haven't been creative enough. Imagine wrapping your leaflet around butt plugs and posting them through the letter boxes of potential customers. Are you honestly telling me that wouldn't get people talking? You can have that idea for free.

IT'S NOT
ALL
SUNSHINE
AND
RAINBOWS

There are, as with anything, things that can go wrong with content. Especially when you make it personal and include the opinions and stories of those within your business.

Firstly, there are things that you might say that could damage both your company, and personal brand. You know the sort of things I mean. My rule has always been, your content should never really attack an individual. Take the piss out of stereotypes? Sure. Attack social norms? Go for it. Use celebs in weird analogies? Of course. But never get personal with people. Never be malicious. And never, ever fucking dream of discriminating.

But that's an obvious risk, right? We all know opinions can be dangerous. People may not take what you say as intended.

There are a few other less obvious risks though.

I always say three things. Be yourself, polarise opinion, and be honest.

But here's the issue. If you polarise opinion outside, there is a danger you'll polarise opinion inside your organisation too. The guys working for you will also see your content. There's a chance they won't agree with the things you say. Or, for that matter, the things your company says. That can cause problems.

It's also important that, if you're going to talk about your company on social media, especially when it comes to things like culture and management, you better be sure that you practice what you preach. Think about it for a second. Imagine writing an article on why it's a dickhead move to micromanage employees. On how getting the best out of your people means leaving them to do their job. But, in reality, you have the self-awareness of a brain damaged goldfish, and didn't realise that most of your team feel as though you stifle their work by breathing down their necks every 5 minutes. What do you think that will do to your working relationships when those who work for you think the content you're pushing out to the rest of the world is complete bollocks?

Do you see what I'm getting at? Transparency has to exist on both sides of the business. What you push out has to paint an honest picture of what actually goes on inside your organisation.

Otherwise, whilst your sales go from strength to strength, your internal culture will nosedive.

“So, Dan. Why end on a negative, you massive fun gobbler.”

Because that’s reality.

You don’t have to always end on a high note. You don’t have to be positive, for the sake of being positive.

There are risks to this, like anything else.

But if you don’t take those risks, your content will remain vanilla.

Dry.

Boring as fuck.

And if you sit on the fence all the time, no one will give a shit about you.

So be bold. Be daring. Try stuff that no one else has. Be weirder than a bat’s vagina.

After all, it’s our differences that make us stand out.

And so I leave you with something that was said at the ‘Take Fucking Risks’ event last night in London.

This isn’t word for word, as I’d had a few beers, but here goes.

“If you always act based on knowledge, you’ll never do anything different.”

How fucking true is that?