

Advance praise for *Cashing In With Content ...*

“Content is the life blood of the information economy. *Cashing In With Content* is full of ideas to get your heart pumping”

—Alex Hungate, Chief Marketing Officer, Reuters Group

“Every organization I encounter wants to know, ‘How do we harness the magic of the internet?’ The case studies and practical advice that suffuse this book can help them answer that question.”

—Lee Rainie, Director, Pew Internet & American Life Project

“Content, community, context—debates rage about which is king in a web-driven world. David Scott blows those debates out of the water by demonstrating in real and relevant ways how to use all of them to make cash king. Chock-full of examples and to-do’s—this one is a must-read for anyone running a website and an enterprise. Ca-ching!”

—Anthea C. Stratigos, Co-founder & CEO, Outsell, Inc.

“*Cashing In With Content* is an essential read for any marketer who wants to maximize their website’s power to convert visitors and retain customers.”

—Harry J. Gold, CEO, Overdrive Marketing Communications

“To those of you who may be thinking, ‘another book about the web? I already know everything there is to know about the web,’ snap out of it. The ’90s are over, and so is the idea that the web is all about technology. As this book so astutely illustrates, content—not functionality or transactional capability—is at the value epicenter of the web. Before you embark upon yet another expensive web development project, read this book. You’ll save yourself both time and money as a result.”

—Mike Jensen, Chief Brand Officer, GMAC Insurance/Personal Lines

“If you want to find and keep customers online, you need to understand the ideas and emulate the examples in this book. David M. Scott makes it clear why content is the once and future king of the internet.”

—Craig Danuloff, CEO, The Pre-Commerce Group

“I love the fact that every case study in this book is based on in-depth interviews with top executives at the websites profiled. This isn’t theory or opinion—these are real-life marketing lessons.”

—Anne Holland, Publisher, Marketing Sherpa

“In the Information Age, is it possible that the best web strategy is one that gives visitors—gasp!—something meaningful to read? Scott says it’s not only possible, it’s probable and, most importantly, profitable. *Cashing In With Content* is a must-read book that shows you why and how.”

—Jonathan Kranz, author, *Writing Copy for Dummies*

“The most successful web marketers, regardless of industry, consistently use content to communicate their value proposition to customers in order to get the sale. In this practical book, David Scott provides research, illustrations, and examples that demonstrate the enormous power of content as a web marketing tool. *Cashing In With Content* is compelling in its coverage and its clarity—if you have a web presence, you need to read it.”

—Steven Goldstein, CEO, Alacra, Inc.

“Uniquely and convincingly makes the case that content is the essence of successful digital marketing.”

—Marty Bell, Founder/CEO, Prescients LLC

“*Cashing In With Content* is a highly insightful and useful view into the ever-widening galaxy of companies using content online to build profitable relationships. Rich in valuable case studies that can help any institution use today’s best practices to get bottom-line results.”

—John Blossom, President, Shore Communications, Inc.

“Not enough profit from your website? Read *Cashing In With Content* and grab your share of the growing e-commerce pie!”

—Peter Cohan, author, *Net Profit* and *Value Leadership*

Cashing In With Content

HOW INNOVATIVE MARKETERS USE DIGITAL
INFORMATION TO TURN BROWSERS INTO BUYERS

David Meerman Scott



Information Today, Inc.

Medford, New Jersey

Cashing In With Content

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Finally, to the thousands of marketers who build sites that take full advantage of the opportunities the Web provides by leveraging the value of content: Keep up the good work!

David Meerman Scott
Boston, Massachusetts

When Words Collide

In journalism school, amid learning the basics of publishing and honing my reporting and writing skills, I came to think of marketing as “the dark side.” It was largely unspoken yet tacitly understood that no real journalist would even consider crossing over—that would prove that he or she was driven by (shudder) financial incentives. However, what they didn’t teach us in J-school (nor, as I’ve since learned, in B-school) is that marketing and journalism typically enjoy a precarious symbiosis. These fields demand similar skills and attributes of practitioners—the ability to communicate, to write effectively, to think creatively—yet are often at odds given the marketer’s need to promote a single point of view and the journalist’s goal of providing a balanced perspective.

The Web has altered the way we create, deliver, and consume information in a multitude of ways, and neither the journalist’s nor the marketer’s role has gone unscathed. More than ever, professionals working in these fields are pressed to produce in real time and to communicate directly with the public. For journalists, this has been seen as the natural (though sometimes ungainly) evolution of the medium, but the transformation of the marketer’s role has been less clear, if equally misunderstood by the general public. In the past, press releases were filtered by editors before being reported as news to readers, but today’s marketing professional is often directly responsible for what the world learns about any type of organization through its public face—its Web site.

In their early iterations, Web sites often fell into the domain of IT, with marketing departments offering varying degrees of content support, but these days the Web is recognized as the front lines of marketing. An individual’s first impression of an organization may well come from a visit to its site, and marketers have taken a leading role in making that impression a good one.

Unfortunately, many of them forget the rule that “form follows function,” focusing on creating pretty-faced sites rather than offering the kind of useful information that encourages consumers to linger, to return, and—most importantly—to do business with the organization.

You might say I have a serious relationship with content. The magazine I edit—*EContent*—focuses exclusively on strategies and solutions that help organizations create, manage, and deploy content in order to support larger business objectives. When David Scott first proposed writing a marketing column for the magazine a few years ago, I met the idea with suspicion: Should I, nay, *could I* bring a marketer into the fold? But as David told me then (and as his columns and articles for *EContent* have since illustrated), marketing is an area of the digital content arena that is often misunderstood and poorly executed, with serious implications for organizations. Through his work as a marketing executive for leading digital content companies such as Knight-Ridder and NewsEdge Corporation, David has learned how marketers help lead their organizations’ digital content strategies; on a monthly basis in *EContent*, he eloquently communicates his knowledge of content and marketing. Now—thankfully—he has created *Cashing In With Content* to offer an even broader and deeper view.

The 20 organizations profiled in the book—which range from nonprofits, to corporations, to rock bands—are leaders in content-centric Web marketing. David persuaded them to share their experiences and strategies, and then adds his own analysis of how they use content in order to help marketers in virtually any industry understand how they can, too. He explains that the very best sites provide content that surprises the reader or exceeds their expectations, but doesn’t stop there: He shows how content can (and does) bring visitors back to a site while serving to develop an enduring relationship.

Digital delivery poses new hurdles at every turn but, at the same time, it provides novel ways to enlighten and entertain, to reach people with more immediacy—even intimacy—than ever before. Content may not have been at the forefront of marketers’ work in the past, but it is today and the trend will continue. Over the past 15 years, David Scott has both practiced and preached powerful tactics for marketing with content. In *Cashing In With Content*, he shares successful strategies and offers a wealth of insights and advice that will help you use content to achieve *your* marketing objectives.

Michelle Manafy
Editor, *EContent* Magazine & *Intranets*

Content: The Missing Ingredient

The Web has fueled a new era of information delivery and thousands of organizations have harnessed its power to cash in. There's no doubt: Online content has propelled many an upstart organization (such as Amazon and Dell) to fame and profitability and solidified the position of top-tier established brands (such as Microsoft and the *New York Times*). Marketers working at companies with innovative Web sites know that, first and foremost, site visitors want access to information, not just fancy graphics and advertising hype. The organizations these savvy marketers represent—educational institutions, non-profits, and companies of all kinds and sizes—are emerging as leaders because of an unrelenting focus on the Web as a place for *Cashing In With Content*.

It's simple really. But most organizations forget that the reason people use the Web is to gather, read, interact with, and use content. It might seem evident that certain organizations have content to sell—publishers being the most obvious example—but companies and organizations of all types have available information that can be leveraged in a variety of ways. By putting that content to work, a Web site visitor may actually come to view the organization behind the site as a trusted resource, rather than just a place to spend spare time or dollars. The innovative marketers interviewed for this book understand this and build sites that take full advantage of the opportunities the Web provides by leveraging the value of content.

You might ask: "Content? What's content and what's it got to do with me?" Specifically, content is whatever data, photographs, stories, specifications, or information people desire that a site provides. Content could be, for example, a book review, the latest specs on a set of snow tires, or 10 steps to a healthy heart. Perhaps content is a list of every song the Grateful Dead ever played at New York's Madison Square Garden or it could be the number of people in

California who speak Cambodian as a first language. A company might possess a great deal of information about a promising new technology. Some individuals could track a political candidate's issues platform and how she compares to the other candidates. Others might provide readers with lively and informative stories and photos about each of the sports teams, service organizations, and clubs offered by a favorite school. But no matter what form it takes, corporations, government agencies, educational institutions, nonprofits, and individuals all possess compelling content that could be valuable to someone right now. And, through effective content delivery, organizations can deliver a powerful marketing message at the same time.

Selecting Content-Smart Sites

In order to discover the Web sites profiled in the 20 illustrative case studies that appear in the book, I cast a wide net for candidates. The initial process included asking friends and colleagues to send me to their favorite sites. I looked at the sites of marketing and advertising agencies (the so-called “Web marketing experts”) and hit featured client sites. In social situations—cocktail parties, at my daughter's school events, or on a plane—I'd turn the conversation to Web sites and quiz people about their favorites. Whenever I saw a new URL, I would click through and take a peek and, over the course of a year, I checked out about a thousand sites.

While researching, I came across many examples of marketers using Web content in interesting and compelling ways. I learned how content tells a story; I found out how content drives people to make decisions—by anticipating what visitors need and why. I also discovered how content turns browsers into buyers (or subscribers, contributors, employees, or students) and what gets site visitors to return again and again. If a site was particularly interesting and innovative, I reached out to its marketing team for possible inclusion in the book. I wanted to profile as many varied sites as I could, so my goal was to find fascinating examples from the worlds of e-commerce, business-to-business, nonprofit, education, healthcare, music, and politics. I also wanted to find examples of innovative smaller sites from less well-known organizations. Sure, sites from organizations like UPS and the *Wall Street Journal* are profiled, but so are tiny Kenyon College and ServiceWare. The common ground is that all of these organizations cash in with content. I talked to marketers at a wide variety of organizations that use content to create profitable action on their Web sites. It was important for me to profile sites from older established companies with extensive offline businesses as well as much

newer companies formed exclusively to exploit the Internet. Profiles range from 100-year-old *Fortune* 500 companies, such as Weyerhaeuser, to e-commerce start-ups, like Esurance. While I profile traditional e-commerce sites, I also look at the sites' of organizations that cash in through other methods: Booz Allen uses its site to attract and retain the best employees at a lower cost than traditional methods, while Dermik Laboratories uses its Skin Health Solutions site exclusively to build awareness—cashing in occurs offline.

The content found on the sites profiled here varies tremendously: photos of Aerosmith lounging backstage are vastly different from the aluminum casting specifications Alcoa provides to jet engine manufacturers. Notes from the campaign trail found in Howard Dean's Blog for America couldn't be more different than the detailed floor plans of an office tower in Melbourne, Australia (on the Colliers International site), or Booz Allen's descriptions of what it would be like to work at its company. While the content differs widely on the 20 sites discussed, the ability to cash in for success remains constant.

I was fortunate to have interviewed dozens of successful Web marketers to learn how they use content to cash in. I thank them for their participation (and apologize to those not included in the book). The case examples offered in these pages are told in the marketers' own words so we can learn from their personal experience.

I'd be the first to admit that my selection process and criteria weren't scientific, but neither is successful marketing—which is as much art and intuition as business process. I'm sure there are many worthy sites that have not been included in the book. However, I'm confident that each of the 20 sites profiled here vividly illustrates how to cash in with content.

It's also worth noting that dozens of innovative marketers declined to speak to me and their stories remain untold. The fact is that the effective use of Web content is a competitive advantage and marketers at some organizations felt they would be exposing trade secrets by telling their stories. I reached out to marketers working for major computer manufacturers, a large online book-seller, business-to-business technology companies, pharmaceutical firms, consumer packaged goods companies, and nonprofit organizations who, for their own reasons, didn't want their sites to be profiled. Clearly, the marketing people in these companies reveal the power of content as much by their decision not to participate as others did by the choice to tell their tales.

For each marketer who understands that effective Web sites are built around content, there are many more that just don't get it. While I was researching, only a small percentage of the Web sites I reviewed were considered for inclusion in the book. For the most part, sites simply lack a content

strategy and for that and other reasons, fail to help companies accomplish business objectives. Sure, the site may look pretty and may even win awards; the graphics might be cool, displaying the latest technology at its flashy best. But these superficial sites fail, at least in part, because they don't offer the visitors anything worthwhile to read (yes, read). Further, they miss the chance to better leverage the rich content opportunities the Web provides—opportunities to download, view, or interact with content.

Asked and Answered—Marketing on the Web

Looking at less successful sites, I uncovered commonplace marketing tactics that are not as effective as focusing on content. I found that marketers at most organizations focus on two ineffectual ways to market on the Web: what we might call *answer marketing* and *ad marketing*, while at the same time they don't focus on the most effective form of Web marketing: *content marketing*. Many organizations create sites or build online marketing programs that either mimic a search engine (answer marketing) or adopt a slick advertising style (ad marketing). Sites that focus on simply providing answers to questions or deploying slick graphical images may serve the needs of some people, but without effective content—organized in the way people think and browse—these sites do little to advance the objectives of the organizations behind them.

Surprisingly, many people visit a site expecting to be told what to do next. These readers want to be pointed to the right place to learn more. Just as with a leisurely read of the Sunday newspaper, where they aren't necessarily looking for anything in particular, people often visit sites with little more than a vague idea about what they want. Most sites aren't built for these readers. When content is optimized for searching alone, a whole category of Web browsers is left out.

At the broadest level, there are exactly two ways to use and deploy content on the Web. Most organizations put too much effort into one way: *Answer my question*, while not spending enough energy on the other: *Tell me something*. Too often the content that's deployed on sites helps visitors with only half of their needs. To avoid this pitfall, it is better to conceive of site navigational design in a way that provides valuable information visitors might not think to request in addition to answering any questions they may have. To illustrate this concept, consider one of the Web's best known sites, Google (www.google.com), which in its purest form exists only to answer questions. With a site or content product organized only around answering questions,

users must already know what they want before proceeding. But people also need services or sites to tell them something. Contrast Google with another famous site, Drudge Report (www.drudgereport.com). Drudge Report doesn't exist to answer questions; rather, it tells visitors things they didn't think to ask. While it does provide search functionality (far down the home page), Drudge Report provides content that's meant to be browsed.

Many sites of all types are built to act like a search engine, but in most cases this a mistake. Those who design their sites to be navigated primarily through search functionality apparently believe that the average visitor is looking to answer a specific question, or to satisfy a clearly defined need (for instance, they want a price quote or the latest product specs). This form of online marketing—"answer marketing"—is only effective if visitors know just what they're after; since many do not, such visitors represent lost prospects.

For example, many bank and brokerage firm Web sites organize around simply searching for rates such as mortgage loans, certificates of deposit, or stock prices. But visitors may just be browsing for investment ideas. If none are readily apparent, they click away never to return. These sites miss out on a major audience: people who do their own research and take time to consider options before committing to a decision. Sites that only focus on fulfilling free quotes for mortgage rates lose the opportunity to educate and enlighten potential customers—and develop relationships along the way.

While people use the Web for much more than searching, too many Web marketers haven't actually thought about the differences and what these distinctions mean for the content on their sites. Web browsers typically have hundreds of subjects of interest to them: work-related issues, industry data, family, hobbies, music, art, travel, kids, health, and much more. People can't possibly do a search on each and every relevant topic. People like serendipity, so their online lives are organized in a manner that allows them to stumble across interesting and useful content. Bookmarked sites, e-mail newsletters, and blogs tell us what we want to know and many things we didn't think to ask. Smart marketers know that the most effective Web strategies anticipate needs and provide content to meet those needs, even before people know to ask.

The Web Isn't TV

Another common mistake organizations make is designing sites that feature slick, TV-influenced, one-way broadcast messages that feel like advertising. This type of online marketing (ad marketing) is the least effective of all.

Visitors who actually want to learn something aren't satisfied and sales are lost. For example, most automaker sites are organized with the assumption that the site visitor is ready to buy a car immediately. These sites employ slick TV-style ad marketing with Flash Video introductions and pop-ups offering discounts or low financing. Often automaker sites try to hook visitors into the dealer network before they're actually ready to buy. While there certainly are people who visit an automaker's site to find a dealer, learn about financing, and even buy right away, the large number of visitors who are simply browsing aren't satisfied by these sites and quickly leave. Automaker sites that don't provide detailed vehicle information, for example, miss out on a major audience: people who shop and compare, considering a purchase over many months before making a commitment. Sites that are too busy advertising lose not only the opportunity to educate and enlighten potential customers, but also the chance to build relationships with them that may pay off in the long run.

Perhaps the reason so many sites adopt an advertising model on the Web is because decision makers entrust their organization's valuable Web site to an advertising agency. In the auto business, hundreds of millions of dollars are spent on television and print advertising, with a Web site representing a small part of the marketing budget. With these numbers, advertising agencies are focused on grabbing attention in print and TV advertising models, not in a content-marketing Web model. But guess what? When a visitor gets to a Web site, there's no need to grab their attention; you already have it. So, on the Web, the challenge has shifted from grabbing attention to informing and educating visitors through content. However, since most advertising people don't understand this, they create ineffective sites. Remember, people aren't looking for TV commercials on the Web, they are looking for content.

Branding Is for Cattle

Another common mistake marketers make online is focusing on aesthetics over information. Imagine if the people who publish newspapers and magazines only cared about how the publication looked. What kind of magazines would we have if no one was in charge of the content, yet dozens of people worried about cover color palates and graphic placement? What kind of publishing world would it be if Pulitzer Prizes were only given for design, usability, and functionality but not the actual content? Yet this is exactly the current state of the Web. Companies build sites based on design, rather than content. In short, many sites are built around the wrong assumptions and the organizations behind them suffer as a result.

Branding, as an advertising and marketing term, has as its origins the visual mark burned into a cow's butt. Branding was one of the most over-hyped concepts forced on Web marketers by the media and advertising agencies in the dot-com era. The result was that countless Web marketers got their knickers in a twist about the outward manifestation of an organization's brand—including logos, image ads, and tchotchkes—all at the expense of content.

Even today, when marketers consider “the brand,” they think visually, rather than about Web site content. Yes, the visual aspects of branding are certainly important to Web marketers, but what's really at stake—in fact what branding's really about—is a focus on the customer. As each customer builds an emotional response to a company, that emotion becomes the brand-image for that person. Fortunately, some great Web marketers understand that the provision of quality Web content, together with useful layout and reliable customer support, does more to build brand than pretty logos, cool design, and hip color choices.

Many of my interviewees recalled going against the suggestions of self-proclaimed “Web marketing experts” when planning a site launch. In many cases, people from marketing and advertising agencies and Web design firms tried to convince them to focus on the sizzle instead of the steak. The advice was to pay more attention to colors and graphics than to the information content; typically marketers were told to include attention-grabbing images or Flash Video introductions on their home pages. Fortunately nearly everyone I interviewed rejected this well-meaning but flawed advice. The innovative marketers whose cases are profiled here knew instinctively that providing excellent content would yield successful sites. These marketers have learned to think like successful publishers: It is important to make a book or magazine readable, and attractive, but not at the expense of providing something worth reading.

The New Publishers

Back in the days of print domination, there were basically two choices an author had to getting content published: Go with a traditional book or periodical publisher or do it yourself. We've come a long way. The Web has turned all kinds of companies, nonprofits, and even rock bands and political campaigns into just-in-time and just-right publishers. Organizations—the new publishers—churn out boatloads of content to the benefit of many constituents. Until recently, nobody ever thought of these organizations as publishers; a newspaper, magazine, university, or book company was a publisher. But that's all

changing. Self-publishing Web-style is mainstream and organizations large and small are doing the publishing.

All types of firms are now publishers in every sense of the word. For example, the corporate sites of many software companies now include reams of detailed information on viruses, worms, and other pests that affect the products sold and supported. For these companies, frontline technical support is actually Web-based content. Because the papers were published by a trusted source and given the company's stamp of approval, the authors' works are read by millions, just as if the material had appeared in a major computer magazine or technology book.

As a new form of grassroots politics has emerged on the Web, campaign sites have become a significant publishing forum; academic papers go straight to university sites, often bypassing peer-reviewed print journals or university presses; pharmaceutical companies publish detailed information about medical concerns and products on well-organized sites for health care professionals and the general public alike.

Every organization possesses particular expertise that has value in the new e-marketplace of ideas. The Web has made it easy for smart organizations to publish that expertise in the form of Web content, allowing companies, institutions, and nonprofits to function much like traditional publishers and broadcasters. Organizations gain credibility and loyalty with customers, employees, the media, investors, and suppliers through the content supplied on their Web sites.

On the Web, content takes many forms and includes such offerings as product information, Webcasts, photos, how-to guides, white papers, and more. Savvy organizations have started to look at when and how customers and prospects will turn to each type of content and develop a process to publish accordingly, producing content for each stage of the consideration cycle.

Organizations everywhere are taking the role of the new publishers. In today's world a publishers' brand name is still critically important but it's not just McGraw-Hill, Oxford University Press, or the *New York Times* anymore. The new publishers are nonprofits like AARP and the NRA, companies like Pfizer and Nike, politicians, rock bands, and upstart e-commerce companies. As organizations of all types begin to behave like publishers, many are adapting to the rigors of the publishing business and learning the editorial process. At the same time, new rules are emerging as *digital* publishing continues to mature.

In an increasingly competitive marketplace, all organizations are searching for the elusive key to success. Well, look no further for the key: Content will

unlock success in almost any product category—even in highly competitive industries where small players are ordinarily eclipsed by larger competitors.

Getting the Most Out of this Book

Cashing In With Content explores how successful organizations publish content on the Web and organize it to get the readers of that content to do something: buy, subscribe, apply, join, or contribute. These Web sites use content in effective, unusual, and innovative ways and succeed in bringing in the numbers. This isn't a new concept: For years, successful Web site marketers at Dell Computer, for example, have convinced people to buy computers online by providing useful content about computers. Executives at Amazon.com have built a billion dollar business selling books and other consumer goods by organizing offerings like a content site. Many businesses were launched or expanded on the Web and have been successful for years. But because the vast majority of “Web marketing experts” and how-to books devote their attention exclusively to Web technology, graphics, organization, and branding, the content aspect has been under-appreciated and misunderstood—until now. With the innovative marketers behind successful sites telling their stories here, content finally emerges in its rightful place at the forefront of a plan for success.

While every chapter offers insights that will aid any type of organization, to make it easy to quickly choose individual profiles to read, the book is divided into sections based on the types of organizations profiled. The sections are Part 1: E-commerce, Part 2: Business-to-Business, and Part 3: Nonprofit, Education, Healthcare, and Politics. Although the profiles are organized in sections by sector, these are not rigid descriptions of each site's category. In fact, many of the sites profiled were appropriate for more than one category. For example, Design Within Reach is in the e-commerce category, but many of its sales are business-to-business. Alcoa is in the business-to-business category, but employs e-commerce components on its site. The profiles can be read in any order based on your interest. Because the ways that companies can profit from a successful content strategy transcend given industries, these strategies and practices can provide valuable ideas for a variety of different organizations.

The last section of the book, Part 4: Putting Content to Work, pulls together top techniques employed by the savvy Web marketers featured in the profile chapters. In Chapter 21 are a dozen best practices taken directly from the

research I conducted over many months, organized thematically to help you, the reader, put these lessons to work in your own organization.

I was a little surprised by the amount of strategic overlap among the variety of firms I profiled, which is apparent in the best practices. For example, nearly every marketer described a focus on editorial consistency and the need to have all content speak with “one voice” to create a distinct site personality. Some interesting best practices emerged in regard to the use of humor and photographic images. I consistently heard from marketers a disdain for flashy movies and other heavy graphical elements on their sites: “Clean and fast” is a common preference.

In the pages that follow, you will encounter 20 organizations that have built and then reaped the rewards of content-based Web sites. One constant among these informative case studies is a focus on using content to drive action. Content does more than just sell itself, a product, or an idea—it sells an organization by branding it as an expert or a trusted friend. The marketers interviewed here understand this. They use content as a tool to turn browsers into buyers. In presenting these stories and the best practices that result from them, it is my hope that you too will use Web content to make your own organization more successful.