



## Writing Great Branded Content Starts with Telling the T.R.U.T.H

The world we now inhabit has a disjointed relationship with the truth. In fact, [the very definition of that word, “truth”, has become incredibly murky](#). This is evident in the strained bond between politicians and citizens, brands and consumers. Focusing on the latter dysfunctional union, [Melanie Deziel](#) - a powerhouse in the branded content industry - champions a remedy that requires transparency in brand storytelling.

### Living in your T.R.U.T.H

Over the years, advertisers have played it fast and loose in their use of sponsored content. The resulting effect is consumer backlash, an erosion of trust, and the rise of Ad blockers: a strong indication of resentment and a tool for defiance against a perceived lack of empathy. So, what does the road to redemption look like?

In a keynote address at the [Native Advertising DAYS](#) conference, Melanie Deziel offers words of wisdom for effective brand storytelling. Her gospel is simple: businesses need to start telling the T.R.U.T.H., an acronym that means:

- **Timely and Teach:**
  - **Timely** - Brands should infuse themselves into the conversations they’re having (be it in current events, trends, holidays, etc.). What this does is to give your story texture, nuance, and above all, a much needed translucency. It offers readers a bayview window into how your brand understands itself in relation to such occurrences. Not only that, you’re able to leverage the immediacy of such an incident as a tool to drive awareness, increase attention (a rare commodity these days), and ultimately, build brand affinity.

- **Teach** - In line with timeliness, another chief goal for inserting one's brand into the zeitgeist is to offer something didactic to your customers. After consuming a piece of content, you want to ensure that the reader/viewer is left with an item of value - something sticky to ruminate over so you're top of mind. Borrowing a political adage, brands must remember that when it comes to storytelling, they shouldn't only "campaign in poetry, but also govern in prose". Translation: be inspirational *and* pragmatic!
- **Reputable:** We live in a "trust but verify" world. Gone are the days when businesses could make unsubstantiated brand claims and the John Q. Public took what they said hook, line and sinker. For this very reason, brands should find credible sources (a rich mix of quantitative and qualitative data) as a way to establish thought leadership, inspire trustworthiness, and take their sponsored content past the label of "fake news". Keep in mind that nothing ruins reputations quicker than erroneous information; as the idiom, "give a dog a bad name and hang him" suggests, once a person's reputation has been tarnished the individual will suffer hardship.
- **Unique:** [Brands should think like journalists](#) when creating great branded content (and this doesn't mean a career change for Advertisers). What Deziel is hinting at is the essence of journalism: to unearth stories that help readers understand the world and themselves through a fresh and unblemished perspective. By adopting a journalistic mindset, businesses are able to highlight (brand, consumer and/or cultural) insights in their narratives and connect these nuggets to a universal truth. The result: your sponsored content becomes timeless (transient content is difficult to repurpose), it sets you apart from your competitors, and forges an intimacy and trust between brand and consumer.
- **Tension:** Consumers, like people, connect with struggles, risks, obstacles and high stakes. Revealing these traits in your content makes your brand vulnerable. That said, vulnerability doesn't come easy to businesses. Why? They have been built to thrive and optimize in secrecy. Deziel's recommendation (which requires a kind of unlearning) is for brands to divorce themselves from the notion that financial gain exists in the shadows, and to adopt a new line of thinking that embraces openness as part of their storytelling to deepen reader engagement.
- **Honest:** Honesty is a profitable policy, tragically, one not many brands care about ([as seen in this hilarious skit by John Oliver on the deceit of Native Advertising](#)). To be honest is to embrace everything about your brand - strengths and weaknesses alike - own it, and then communicate it to your audience as faithfully as you can. It will transform your content in enviable ways that reach the minds and hearts of consumers, and converts them into raving fans. Still skeptical? [Check out these examples of brands who use radical honesty to their advantage.](#)