How Centralizing Your Global Content Strategy -- With Help From AI -- Can Increase Your ROI

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Clicks, eyes and conversions aren't important. The only thing that counts is ROI, and to calculate that, you need to understand what you're trying to achieve.

A marketing strategy that increases conversions tenfold looks impressive — at least on the surface — but unless those conversions have value, it's failed. A handful of qualified purchasers are worth infinitely more than ten times as many new recruits who forget your message a few days later.

So, where do you find these worthwhile prospects, and how does an international brand connect with them?

The Opportunities Of Homogenization

Global tastes have never been more similar. From London to Lagos, we all lust for the same phone, watch similar films and spend much of our time engaging with a handful of web mega sites. The secret sauce for the brands behind them is centralized marketing, in which a corporate team dictates global strategy while giving regional offices latitude to tweak minor details to fit their own demographic.

Developing a global approach to research, intelligence and marketing simultaneously enables successful brands to cut costs and increase ROI. With a narrow range of creative to choose from and centrally defined guides handed down for its use, regional teams do not need to rethink every campaign or risk diluting a parent brand and its message, even if that message has been localized for a smaller market. That's because a successful global strategy conveys the same idea worldwide using messages rather than translations.

AI has a key role to play in this process of localization because while a parent organization retains custody of the brand values that underpin its success, only a series of comprehensive customer profiles can effectively mold it for local use. Such profiles are formulated with reference to a broad demographic and correlated against expected future actions, not just past behavior. With so many variables to

consider, manual (i.e., human) manipulation of such large datasets would be impossible.

From Global To Local

Managing content globally increases sample size, allowing what's been learned in one market to be rolled out in another. We can see this happening in politics, where parties with similar outlooks are adopting the tactics that won elections for ideologically similar parties in demographically comparable nations. Thus, commentators have noted a swing to the right in what looks very much like a political franchise operation. In reality, in most cases, it's merely an example of observation, iteration and refinement.

AI can help brands avoid embarrassing slip-ups by accurately gauging future response through natural language processing, which understands not only the literal meaning of words, but their cultural significance.

This latter point is key because each electorate is subtly different, and if we count a political ideology as a "brand," each local party — effectively a branch office for that ideology — is tailoring the message, if not the language, to suit the local audience. It works because messages cross borders unharmed the way language sometimes doesn't, as

countless tales of translation trip-ups recount: KFC urged Chinese consumers to "[Eat your fingers off](#)" in an all-too-literal translation of "Finger-licking good." The American Dairy Association's slogan "Got milk?" became "[Are you lactating?](#)" in Spanish, and HSBC [spent $10 million rebranding](#) after the dynamic "Assume nothing" was transliterated into the passive, far from businesslike "Do nothing." What each of these examples illustrates is that message is key, and a good message should never be sacrificed through slavish adherence to slogans, which may work in the home market but not overseas.

Global Versus Local

It's a matter of striking a balance between what head office deems right and what regional teams understand of their local audiences. Writing on the Sprinklr blog, [Taylor Howard, lead content strategist at Alibaba](#), recommends that brands start at the bottom and work up from there: "You must think about what your customers want and need from you across regions, personalize that content, and then bubble that up to form the big picture," she says. "In this case, the big picture should be a conglomerate of a set of localized efforts, rather than a universally applied global approach."

Alternatively, the head office may choose to separate brand values from sloganeering entirely — particularly if it understands that the most striking marketing often needs no

words at all.

Coca-Cola is known less for any slogan than the shape of its bottle, Nike for its swoosh and Starbucks for Siren, the mermaid on its cups. In 2011, Starbucks took the radical step of [removing its brand name entirely](#) from a lot of the places where it had previously appeared. Yet, far from reducing its impact, the coffee chain is as strong as ever. As Starbucks creative director Steve Murray [explained](#) on the corporate blog, "We really refreshed the logo and took the words 'Starbucks Coffee' off of it. ... I hope when people see the siren on their cup, of course, it's going to stand for what they're going to get from Starbucks. If the siren is on that cup of coffee, it's going to be awesome."

Yet, despite hanging its brand values on a single global image, Starbucks can still be responsive to regional customer persona: for example, selling a [maple macchiato in Canada and mushroom sandwiches in the Philippines](#). And, on the basis of its success, Starbucks may choose to simulate demand in other markets where it has a significant presence. If those simulations prove successful, London and Lagos may see similar products.

With AI and big data, brands are becoming smarter about the way they market themselves, their products and, crucially, their values. In doing so, they're maximizing ROI in ways never previously possible.

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