

Content Marketing Runs on Inspiration



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Tata Consultancy Services’ omni-channel promotion for the Amsterdam Marathon surpassed its business goals by going way beyond conventional marketing.

Content marketing is still searching for its purpose. In the past few years brands have been given a “publish or perish” mandate in **article after article** yet, despite the apparent consensus, the business case for investing in great content is not often made clear. Without a definite idea of the unique value that content-driven engagement brings, over and above conventional marketing campaigns, brands will remain inclined to view **success stories** as flukes and stick with what they consider tried-and-true approaches.

A [recent study from Yahoo EMEA](#) brings us closer to understanding what separates outstanding content marketing from just another viral video. The research found inspirational articles or videos linked to a product or brand made consumers nearly twice as likely to make a purchase and significantly more inclined to feel positively about that brand and share the content. These numbers point to a key consumer need: The increasing amount of junk content on the internet has left people hungry to be inspired.

Inspiration is the key driver

Inspiration can't be forced. To capture consumers' emotions, you have to know what they want and be strategic about getting the message out. A great example of how this can work is Tata Consultancy Services' #TCSsuperheroes recent campaign for the annual TCS Amsterdam Marathon (TAM), which won the 2015 Silver Corporate & Financial Award (CFA) in the category of "best use of digital media".

For the last decade or so, TCS has gotten involved in athletic sponsorships around the world as a way to bolster brand recognition and strengthen local ties. After forays into Formula 1, cycling, and other sports, the company chose to focus on marathons and currently partners in seven of them worldwide, including New York, Mumbai, and Singapore. Led from the front by its CEO N. Chandrasekaran, who is a prolific marathon runner, the company had also instituted a major fitness programme for its own employees, who logged 6 million kilometers running for charity (equivalent to 150 laps around the world).

By 2014, TCS - Europe was four years into the Amsterdam partnership and had seen the event grow into one of Europe's largest and most popular marathons. Yet it seemed to lack a unique identity. Its brand identity was primarily a derivative of what the city of Amsterdam stood for. It was time, in line with its growing international status, for TAM to come into its own as a brand. TCS also believed it could do more to get existing clients engaged in the marathon. And, as an additional motivating factor, the organisation wanted to raise more money for TAM's charity partner VUmc CCA, the Netherlands' top cancer treatment centre.

TCS put together a cross-functional team from its branding, communications, events, and social media departments to build a campaign that would dramatically elevate TAM's digital brand profile.

Running Through the Data

The team began by poring over surveys filled out by about 1,000 runners over the previous three years. Two points stood out from the analysis:

- Amsterdam's level urban terrain, as opposed to more hilly cities like Boston, gave the runners a special feeling of high achievement, encouraging them to push toward their personal best times
- The marathon's family-friendly atmosphere made it about more than just the runners and their personal progress.

Runners especially loved that the race began and ended in Olympic Stadium, amidst throngs of cheering supporters. It made them feel that they were doing something amazing not just for themselves but also for their family and community. The idea of seemingly ordinary individuals inspired by others to achieve extraordinary things, crystallised into a campaign using a figure that people of all ages would recognise and enjoy: the superhero.

“Every Runner Is a Superhero”

In order to bring that great feeling the runners received at Olympic Stadium into the digital world, TCS acted to create an online community. It used storytelling to draw people in and introduce the idea that every runner could be considered a superhero – with worthy stories of passion, commitment and grit behind them. **Eight people with compelling stories to tell** —many of whom were affiliated with TCS client companies or partners—were made the focus of written, video, and visual content.

Among the eight was 48-year-old VUmc CCA ambassador **Hans van der Lans**, who was the first to admit, “I’m no fast Kenyan, and I know I’ll be way at the back with the last ten runners. This race is about something else.” Hans shared how, with the exception of his father, cancer had taken every male member of his family as well as one of his very close friends. His wife was a cancer survivor; a recurrence couldn’t be ruled out. “I run to raise funds and support cancer research”, Hans said.

While not every runner has a story as emotional as Hans’s, there is inherent drama to the long, demanding process of training for a marathon, especially when balanced with all the other complex demands of life. When TCS asked runners to share their own “superhero” stories on social media, staff were surprised at the volume and intense enthusiasm of the response. Not only

were runners willing to share details of their personal struggles as they prepared for the big day, but they were also reaching out through social media to support one another. And, thanks in part to a series of print ads made from runner-generated content, the stories were gathering a wider following eager to show their support by donating to VUmc CCA. The #TCSsuperheroes hashtag brought together a community that had not engaged with TAM in this way before.



Advertisements featuring runner-generated content were placed in the Dutch national newspaper De Telegraaf.

The Finish Line

Let's look at just some of the concrete results of TCS' successful community-building around inspirational content:

- The #TCSsuperheroes and #TCAM14 hashtags earned more than 15 million impressions
- The overall reach exceeded 80 million, including engagement with major social media influencers such as Adidas, astronaut Andre Kuipers, and influential sports publication Bleacher Report

- More than €250,000 was raised for VUmc CCA, an increase over previous years

TCS also created extremely strong client engagement with 1200 of its clients from 30 organisations running in joint teams with its 600 employees. This was augmented with a host of marathon-related services, including a special Facebook group for corporate runners featuring exclusive content. The group remains active year-round.

#TCS superheroes did several things right that content marketers would do well to emulate. By maintaining a strong customer orientation from the beginning, it avoided the three big mistakes brands commonly make on social media, as mentioned in a [previous post](#). It deftly balanced [owned, paid, and earned media](#), making all relevant channels sing the same song. But above all, #TCSsuperheroes wrapped all these well-executed pieces in an instantly accessible and inspirational theme that galvanised a community in a way that would have been impossible with a conventional campaign.

No less than marathon runners, marketers need inspiration to carry them across the finish line.

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