

### **There is a way to do effective travel brand content marketing - :**

Brand publishing, an evolution in the content marketing trend, is based on the idea that brands can and should act like bona fide publishers in their own right. A rare example of getting it right is Compass Magazine, a print and digital magazine published over the last nine years (1 year for the online version) by high-end travel agency Cox & Kings. NB: This is an opinion by Matthew Barker, managing partner at I&I Travel Media. Many travel companies have enormous stores of expertise and knowledge locked up in their brand, assets and employees' heads, and brand publishing could allow the more creative among us to unlock that expertise and put it all to work. The editorial team at Compass Magazine relies heavily on this in-house expertise from Cox & Kings' regional experts. It receives frequent updates on travel news and using them to fact check content on their areas of knowledge. Here, Compass has avoided a pitfall that often frustrates brand publishing: poor communication between marketing and operations teams that prevents access to all that stored knowledge. This is unfortunate as other employees are often the biggest potential source of input and expertise. Print and web integration The online version of Compass magazine is only a year old, but the print publication has been around for nine years. As with the best content marketing assets, the digital content can be accessed for free but only after sharing your email address to receive follow-up newsletters and sales messages. Referral traffic to the Compass homepage is one of the highest sources of traffic for the entire site. In another plus, the large archive of exemplary content has earned a colossal portfolio of diverse, high quality backlinks which play a central role in C&K's dominance of multiple organic search keyword groups. Authentic content marketing as lead-generation I interviewed the folks at Compass magazine for insights. As noted, they began the print publication nearly a decade ago. They've kept with it because it works. It's built up a readership of 50,000. Every feature records a subsequent upswing in inquiries and bookings on the destinations covered and the magazine is particularly potent in generating repeat business from former travellers, with a 15% increase in repeat bookings since the print version was launched. The company was understandably reluctant to share precise figures but the proportion of leads/conversions that are assisted by Compass content are described as "significant." This is clearly an example of content marketing that works, and I believe it's because the travel company has avoided a double-edged problem plaguing many brands. On the one hand, when brand publishing is treated as a regular marketing tool it can appear inauthentic and potentially duplicitous. But on the other hand, when divorced entirely from core marketing strategy and oversight it can quickly become an expensive vanity project, a colossal black hole for resources — with not even a whiff of return-on-investment. Finding the sweet spot between the two tensions between publishing and marketing is the fundamental challenge to successful content marketing. A fine balance To this end Compass is professionally edited by Jennifer Cox (no relation), a writer, editor and broadcaster with over 20 years experience in the mainstream travel media, and is produced with processes familiar to regular commercial publications; tight schedules of commissioning, editing, design and layout, subbing, proofing, print and distribution. As with all successful content marketing efforts, the goal for Compass is to create a publication that can be judged as a quality consumer travel magazine in its own right, as opposed to a hyped-up sales brochure. As Cox explained to me: "We aim to ensure that Compass doesn't look or sound like a brochure. This is crucial for its integrity. When I'm commissioning or setting up interviews, I deal with my professional contacts in the industry: writers or personalities you'll see in the national press or glossy magazines. This ensures that Compass 'rings true'; readers engage with genuinely interesting articles and up-to-date news, rather than just flicking through a thinly-veiled sales

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tool.”None of that is to say that Compass exists as separate and disconnected to the rest of Cox & Kings’ digital marketing strategy. In fact Compass is a logical extension of Cox & Kings’ brand marketing efforts, supporting the company’s position as a leading and well-established authority in high end and experiential travel, staffed by “tour consultants” with the kind of expertise that is reflected in the publication. Although Compass follows the usual standards of journalistic objectivity, the magazine prioritises coverage of countries, experiences and hotels from C&K tours and references specific itineraries and products heavily throughout its features. For instance, a double page feature by Monty Don on a recent trip to India is immediately followed by a detailed reference page compiled by a C&K destination expert, including a variety of related tours and excursions. LEARNING POINTS & TRANSFERABLE TECHNIQUES  
<http://www.tnooz.com/article/effective-content-marketing-how-to/#sthash.7kOxcZCR.dpuf>

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