

EBOOK:

PREDICTING THE
FUTURE OF

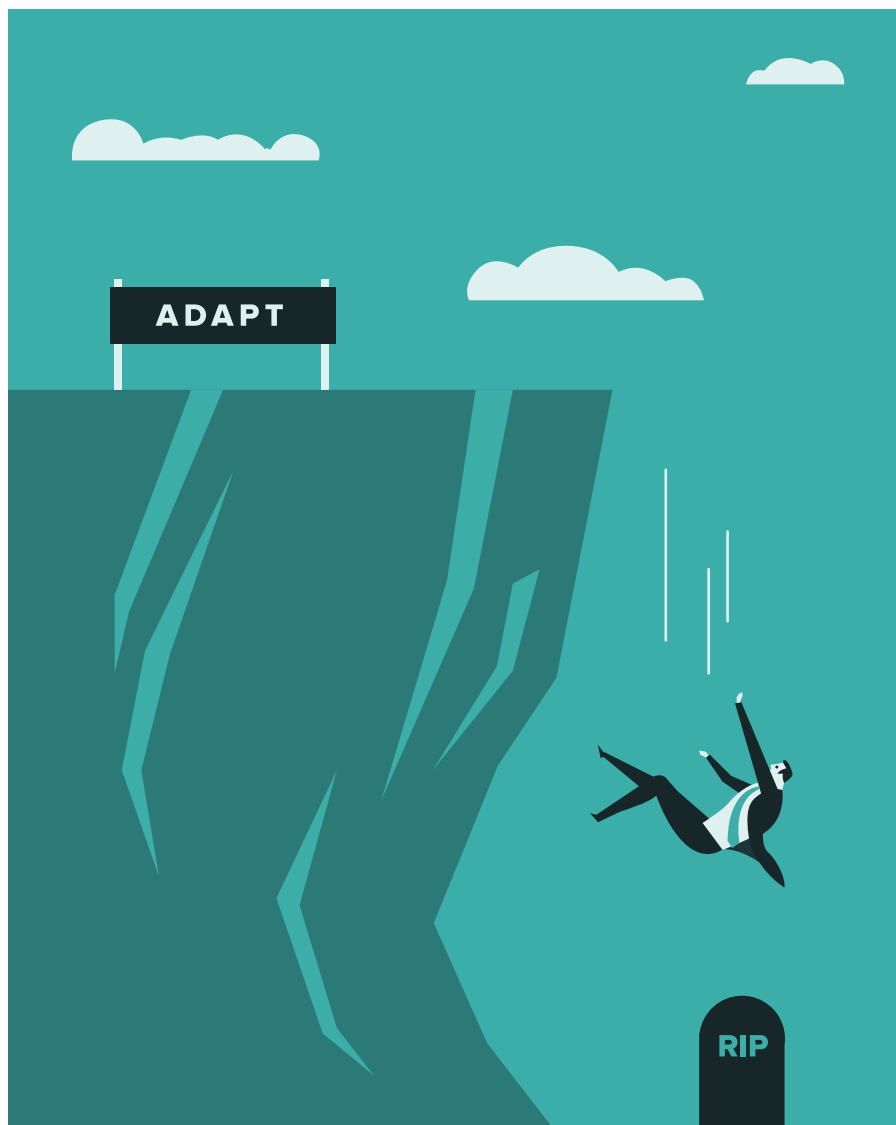
CONTENT MARKETING

By Jeff Baker



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ADAPT OR DIE

Don't expect content marketing to move at the same pace you have witnessed over the past 10 years. If you sit pat with your current strategy, you'll become obsolete within six months. Period.

In keeping with the explosive pace of technology and the artificial intelligence that powers it, content marketing is and will be evolving at ever-increasing rates. The market has hit a breakneck pace, and it's only going to get faster.

So where does this leave you as a content marketer?

Hopefully not resting on your laurels. In order to survive, you will need to evolve with it.

In order to fully contextualize where we are today, we need to examine our origins as content marketers. Let's take a trip back to 2007.

2007



CONTENT FOR RANKINGS (2007)

2007 was the content marketing equivalent of the steroid era in baseball.

For those of you non-sports fans, it marked a time of unprecedented opportunity, and equally unprecedented dishonesty.

We created content for the purpose of fooling search engines into ranking our websites for keywords. We wrote thousands of words for search engines so that they would in turn rank our most important words on the first page.

We wrote content for robots. Period.



A SYSTEM RIGGED FOR EXPLOITATION

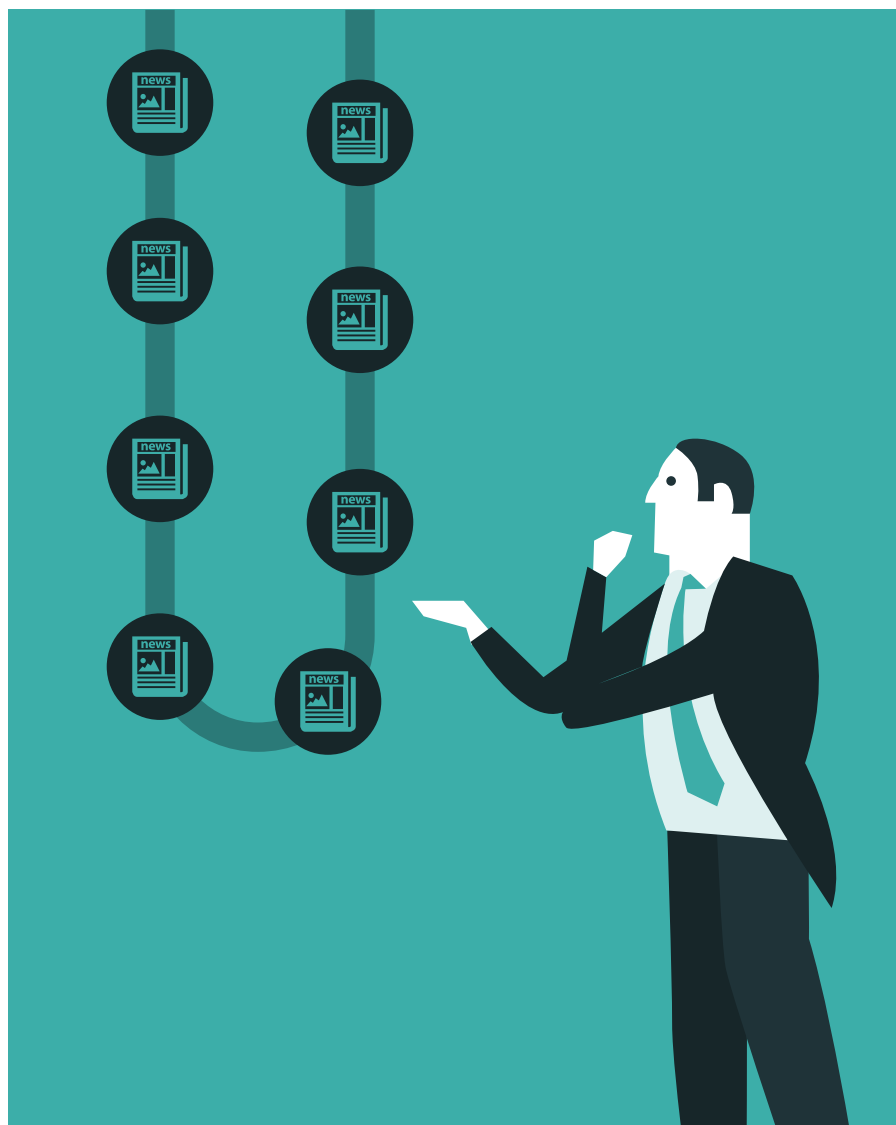
This all begs the question, “How did everyone get away with this?”

Ten years ago, search engines were only as smart as the information you gave them. By manipulating the content on your site, you can manipulate your rankings. If you wrote “Payday loan” on your homepage 50 times, search engines would assume this term was clearly very important and think nothing about the context in which it was used. As a matter of fact, you could use the keywords you wanted to rank for **blatantly out of context** and search engines wouldn’t be the wiser.

Because search engines didn’t understand context or quality, they had to rely on signals such as:

- Keyword density.
- Quantity of inbound links and anchor text usage.
- Meta descriptions and meta keywords.
- Number of indexed pages on a site.

The ranking system was purely mechanical; human interest played no part.



CONTENT MARKETING FINDS ITS NICHE

It wasn't long before search engine optimizers started asking the question, "How do we crank up the volume on these indicators?" The answer was content marketing.

Regularly creating blog and news content allowed us to skyrocket our keyword density and indexed page indicators through the roof. It took black hat SEO and turned its volume up to 11. As content marketers, we were able to supercharge our clients' results with tens of thousands of words per month.

None of these words were ever intended to find human eyes. But it didn't matter. Content marketing was the new Holy Grail that everyone needed to get a piece of, and they all paid a premium for it.



A MARKET CORRECTION

Exploitable gaps in any market never last. As soon as someone finds a shortcut, the market is quick to respond by closing any opportunity to cheat the system.

Over a series of hard-hitting updates, the new front-running search engine, Google, severely penalized those who sought to exploit its weaknesses. Businesspeople who relied on their manipulated rankings to survive were chopped off at the knees.

People lost jobs. People were fired. Businesses went under.

The Penguin, Panda and Hummingbird updates were the teenage growing pains that we all needed to pass through to ascend to a higher level of quality search.

As bloody as the early 2010s were, it was a necessary evil.



A NEW WORLD OF CONTEXT (2017)

Google now understands searcher **intent**. It doesn't just use the words typed into the search bar, nor the words on the indexed pages of results, but rather, it reads in between the lines to understand what the searcher truly cares about. It then delivers the content that best satisfies that intent.

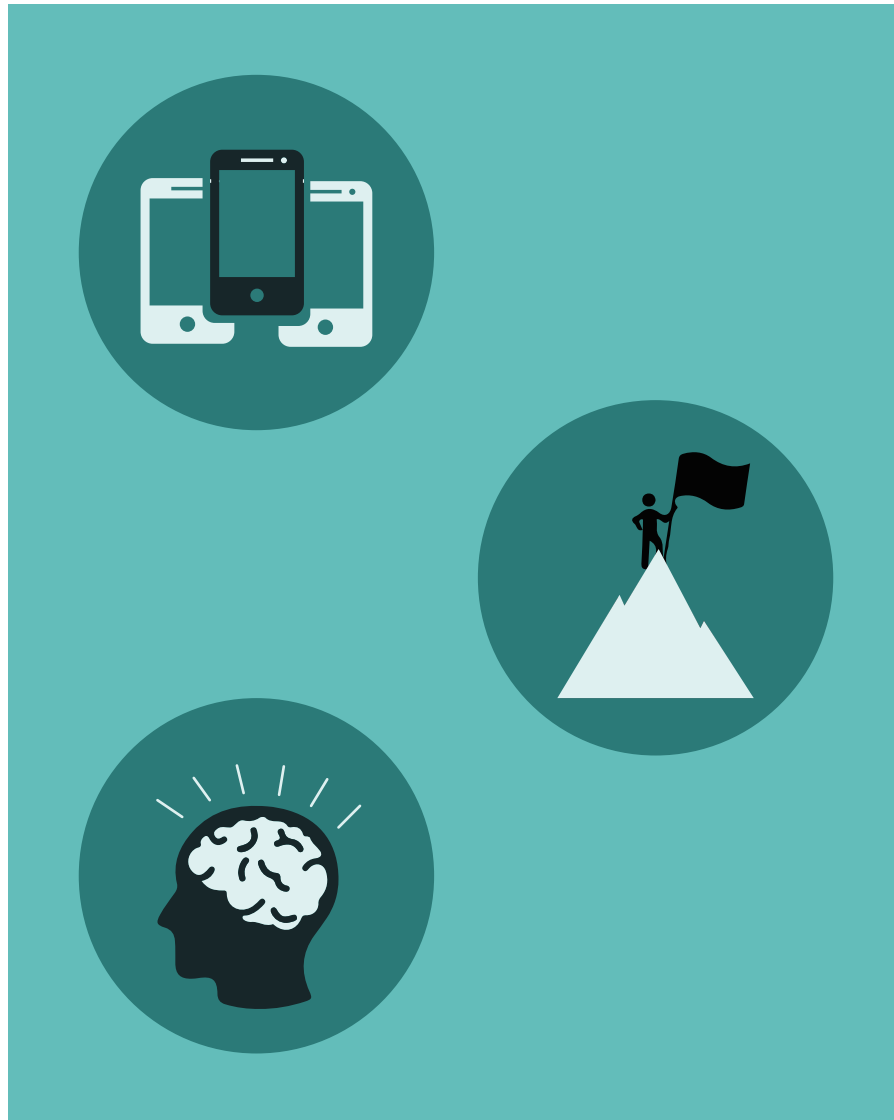
This is a vast departure from simply telling Google what you want to rank for. Now it's a two-way conversation, with Google always getting the last word.

As a result, content marketers now need to work a lot harder to obtain the results they desire. They need to:

- Measure the interest of a topic.
- Understand the intent of a searcher searching that topic.
- Write the best piece of content on the web regarding that topic.

This process takes math. It takes subject matter expertise. It takes intuition and hard work. Hard work and multi-talented content marketers are the way of the future.

6 PREDICTIONS FOR CONTENT MARKETING IN 2022



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We can make some strong assumptions on the direction of content marketing based on current market trends. We will extrapolate on the implications and possible direction of each. Starting with some of the most obvious candidates...

1. MOBILE BECOMES UBIQUITOUS

We have a craving for instant electronic satisfaction, and no technology has satisfied that need as much as the smartphone. Look for search-enabled mobile devices to continue to take market share from desktop devices.

2. THE BEST CONTENT MARKETER WINS

Hard working content marketers with an insatiable desire to go through the rigors of modern keyword research and produce ridiculously thorough content will win. Thin content and old tricks will die a quick death.

3. OUR ATTENTION SPANS WILL CONTINUE TO SHRINK

The human attention span is shorter than that of a goldfish. Expect this trend to uncomfortably follow us into the future.



6 PREDICTIONS FOR CONTENT MARKETING IN 2022, CONTINUED

The less-obvious questions are also those that make everyone a little uncomfortable to talk about: Who's going to lose their jobs?

4. SEO WILL BE AUTOMATED

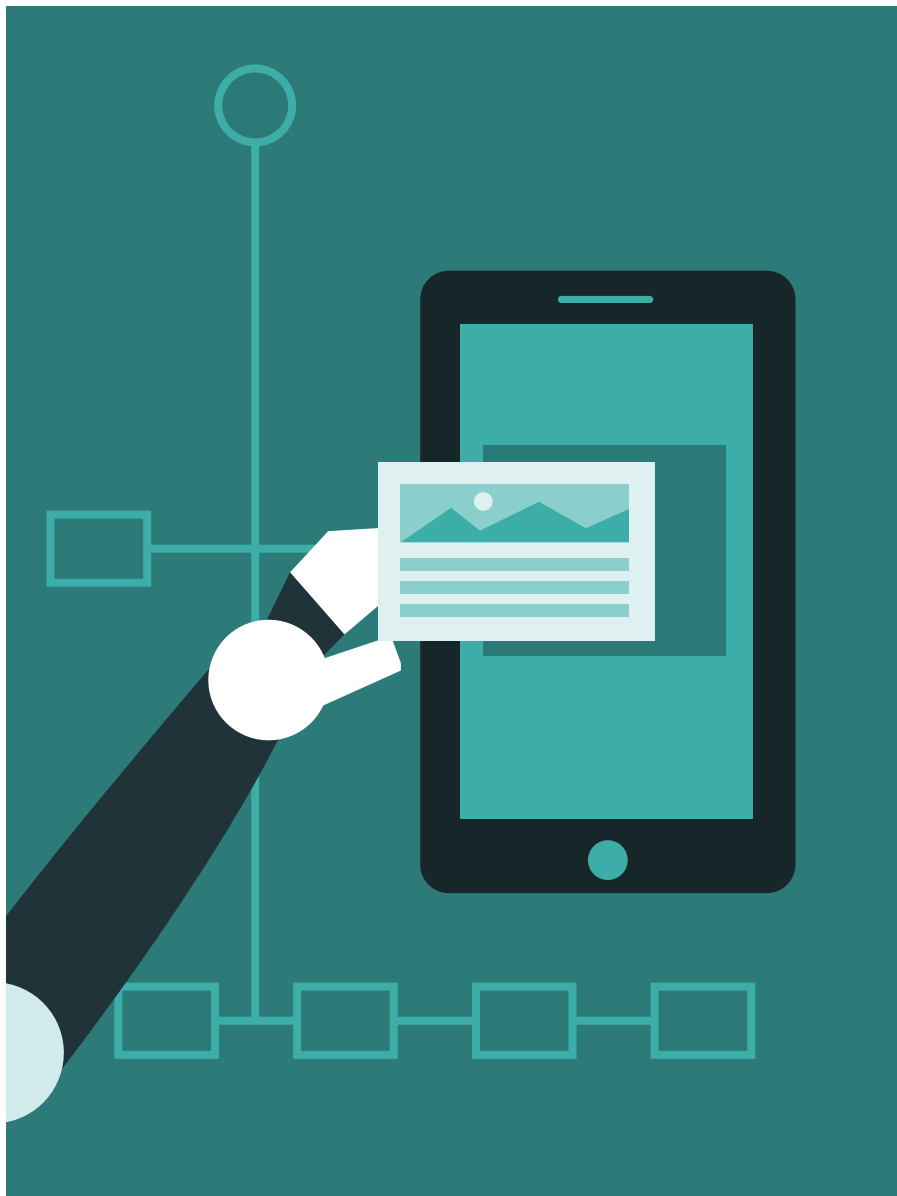
As search engine optimizers, we like to romanticize about the nuance and art that goes into everything we do. But that's just not true. On-site optimization is currently near-mechanical, and soon will be completely mechanical. We SEOs need to diversify our skillsets.

5. CONTENT WRITERS WON'T LOSE THEIR JOBS

Technology is only as smart as the input you give it. Should there be a day when machines can write content better than humans, those machines are still going to need to know **what** to write and **how** to write it. Writers won't lose their jobs, but they'd better get comfortable talking to machines.

6. ATTRITION IS COMING

The days of buying content marketing services and automatically reaping rewards is over. Marketers will be counting every dollar invested in content marketing and measuring the results under a microscope. Only the strongest programs will make the cut.



PREDICTION 1: **MOBILE DEVICES PROLIFERATE**

More than 50 percent of all searches come from mobile devices. With a biological imperative to constantly fuel our need for instant gratification coupled with the cost-accessibility of devices, this trend's only going to rise. This means a couple things content marketers need to care about:

- 1.** If your site isn't mobile-optimized, you're very late to the party. You will not survive the winter. And winter is here.
- 2.** Your content needs to be *perfect*. With the speed at which users multitask on their devices, only the most thorough and brilliantly written content will capture and sustain their attention.
- 3.** Your content needs to be formatted for rapid consumption. Mobile searchers don't read content as much as they scan it for bullets and takeaways. You need to use this fact to your advantage. Use bullets, headers and imagery to enable rapid consumption.

TAKEAWAYS: Sites need to be mobile-optimized, content needs to be concise and thorough and formatted for quick consumption.



PREDICTION 2:

WHAT A 2022 CONTENT MARKETER WILL LOOK LIKE

The days of content marketing steroids have long become whispers of a bygone era. The advent of semantic search has forged a new type of content marketer that will prevail with the following skills:

- 1. ANALYTICS SAVVY** – Content marketers are going to be amongst the most proficient web analysts, making metrics-backed decisions about content development. Further, they'll regularly produce the most advanced keyword research the market has ever demanded.
- 2. CREATIVITY** – Content will need to answer the impossible-to-answer questions. Consumers and search engines will only reward the deepest and most elegantly written content.
- 3. HARD WORK** – Content marketers will start feeling the monetary impact of losing the bet on mediocre content. Those that succeed will do so by writing the best content the market has ever seen.

TAKEAWAYS: Those who are able to harness the skills of analytics savvy, creativity and hard work will come to define the market.



PREDICTION 3:

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING ATTENTION SPAN

From 2000 to 2015 our attention span shrunk from 12 seconds to 8.25 seconds. This is the result of a number of factors working together to create a vicious cycle of concentration issues.

The first issue is our biological predisposition to respond more favorably to visual stimuli than text. This natural inclination toward imagery lends itself well to content that utilizes diverse types of visual media, such as infographics, embedded video and inline calls to action.

The second issue is our human need to feed the dopamine monsters in our brains with instant gratification. We check our phones 46 times per day, up from 33 in 2014. That means the content you provide needs to be written and formatted for quick and easy digestion.

TAKEAWAYS: Content will need to be visually rich and easily consumable in order to capture our short attention spans.



PREDICTION 4:

AUTOMATED SEO IS HERE TO STAY

In its truest sense, SEO is a process of big data analysis, technical implementation and A/B testing.

Today we trust in humans' ability to collate massive amounts of data, choose the best solution, implement and manually A/B test other options, if they get that far. This is precisely the type of work artificial intelligence programs can perform more efficiently and accurately than humans.

Brace yourself, this is not science fiction. A company named RankScience has developed an advanced algorithm that A/B tests multiple versions of metadata on a page and delivers the result that produces higher average rankings. All automatically. No human needed.

TAKEAWAYS: Machines will perform SEO faster and more accurately than humans. This isn't the future, this is now.



THE FUTURE OF CONTENT MARKETING PREDICTED BY BRAFTON EMPLOYEES

“SEO and SERPs will be so crowded that no one can break in - only shareable, unique, meaningful content will succeed, and every website will contain automated ranking enhancers so there’s no need to constantly optimize or revise or beat competitors. You’ll just have to tell your story, and tell it true”

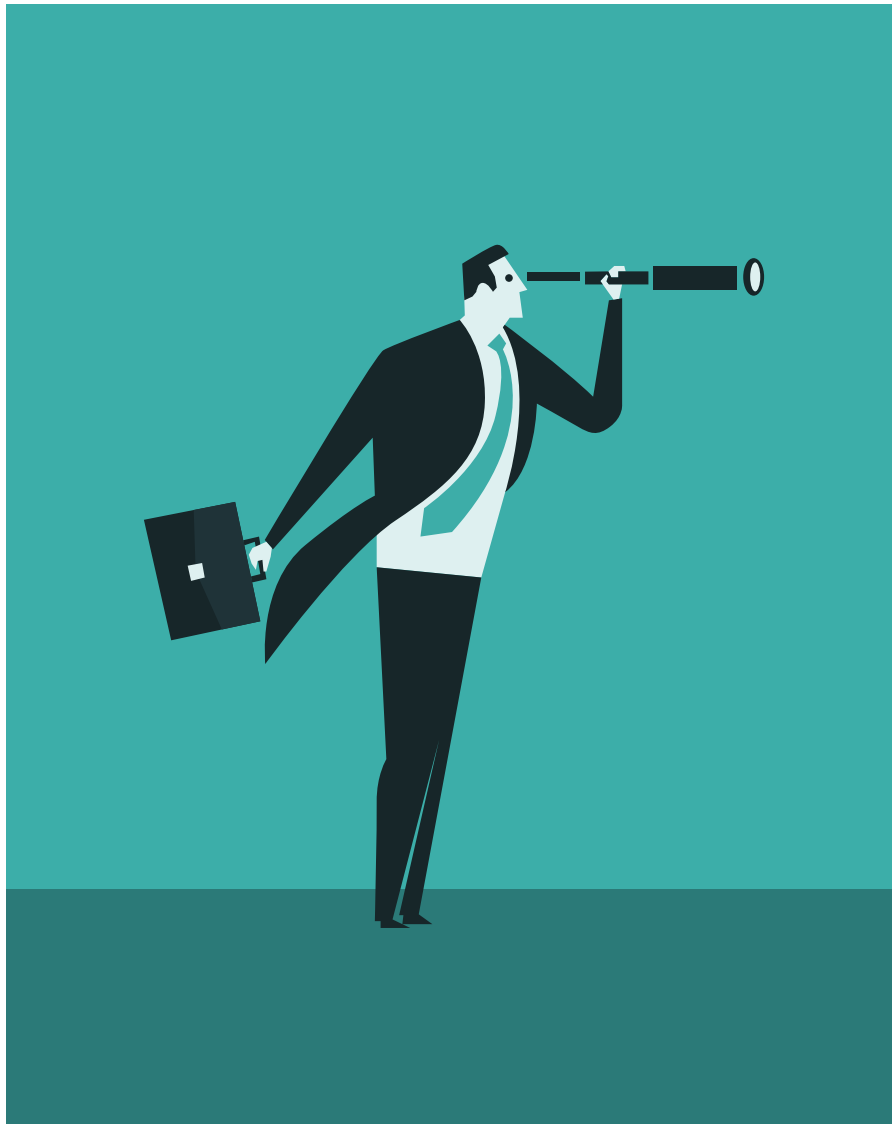
-Mike O’Neill, Content Manager

“I see a more AR (augmented reality) type of 2017. Where content based on personal preferences and trends is feed to you more directly and automated syncing with your everyday activities, without people “requesting” that content.”

-Deryk King, Director of Technical Services

“Humans have become cyborgs (ever try to separate a phone from someone today?). This trend will continue which means the future content marketing will be shaped by the relationship between humans and machines.”

-Walt Clark, Senior Social Media Strategist



THE FUTURE OF CONTENT MARKETING PREDICTED BY BRAFTON PRESIDENT TOM AGNEW

*“Everything is moving in the direction of personalization and customized web experiences. From advertising to content consumption, web users are not going to have any tolerance for content that is not anticipating and solving for their needs and wants. The game of meeting a **broad audience’s** needs has transformed into a game of laser-focusing in on **individual** wants, and creating an experience around those wants.”*



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