



INSIGHTS PAPER

Impact on your brand & business



How to *drive* *brand success* with content & creation

Edition - Content & Creation



The story of a brand is made with content. But for the next few years, the main question isn't just going to be about what content you create, but how adaptable and genuine your brand remains across an ever-expanding digital landscape.

Platforms are diverse, audiences splintered, and attention spans shorter than ever.

How do you make sure your messages not only reaches but resonates with the right people?

After reading this Insights Paper, you will have a comprehensive understanding of audience complexity, platform dynamics, the impact of AI, evolving content formats and the brand power of content.

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1. Building a brand with content

A brand is formed through a combination of factors. The product or service. The people who deliver it. The customer service specialists. The receptionist. They all contribute to the brand experience. With content, you can make a significant contribution to the desired brand perception.

Today, the world has embraced the power of content to build brands. Good news, you might say. On the contrary, we say.

Anyone can do it, but few do it well.

More, more, more

Many brands produce more and more blog posts, videos, and social media content without any thought to strategy or results. They have fallen into the trap of creating content for content's sake. That causes a big content overload, much of which is of low quality.

Over the past few years, an excessive amount of content has been produced with little or no brand identity, resulting in little distinction between content produced or used by brand A or brand B.

Add that to the fact that consumers are increasingly overwhelmed and selective about the content they engage with. They've developed filters to ignore anything that doesn't immediately grab their attention or provide clear value.

It's high time to tap into the power of content to build a strong brand.



The challenge is to create compelling content that is deeply intertwined with your brand.

Start from one core story

A brand - the entire brand - is built upon a deep **customer insight**: a problem for the target audience that is solved by the brand.

This insight must be translated into a **narrative**. A storyline. A plot that brings together the insight and the brand's solution. A story that can be told by everyone, both within and outside the company. A distinctive story that forms the foundation for **all your content, advertising and communications**.

A strong narrative is the key to effective brand building

All brand communications should originate from that exact same narrative to provide your target audience with a consistent perception that contributes to shaping your brand in people's minds.

This means that the format idea in content works with the same **ingredients** as the commercial spot and the message on a billboard.

All content is then firmly anchored to the brand. Every touchpoint conveys the same underlying story, be it the pre-built PR story, video content, infographics, articles, as well as commercials and banners.

- Keep it simple.
- Be consistent.
- Start at the beginning: your strategy.
- Dig deep for unique consumer insights.
- Write the narrative – in a maximum of two short paragraphs.
- Encapsulate your idea in a single, powerful (compound) word.
- Start with content (preferably a serial format).
- Think of – if possible – a twist in the content format: a joke or something that sticks.
- Translate to advertising. Use the same twist there.
- Develop a maximum of three simple brand images. (Ambition level: iconic. Minimum: recognisable)
- Without design, no recognition and (usually) no brand.
- Be visible: without media pressure, no brand.
- One idea is enough.



Discover how to leverage content, advertising, PR, and all the other tools in your brand tool kit to build a powerful brand.

[Read the \(Dutch\) eBook](#)



“A great idea that works in both a commercial spot and a content variation: that is the major challenge that brands face. The goal, after all, is consistency in your brand story.”

AART LENSINK

Managing Director iO Campus Utrecht

2. Tailoring content for diverse and niche audiences

What messages hit home - and what falls flat?

Are you still crafting messages for “Millennials” or “Gen Z” as target audience groups? If so, read further.

About one or two decennia ago, traditional media channels like television and print dominated, with Facebook as the primary social media platform.

Although there were some customisation options, **audience targeting** was primarily based on broad demographics and basic interests.

Today, the explosion of media options, along with the rise of personalised algorithms and on-demand devices (smartphones, tablets, smart TVs) has caused **audiences being spread across media.**





Audience fragmentation

The mass audience has been divided into smaller, more specialised groups, each with its own **unwritten rules, content preferences, culture, and audience expectations**.

To succeed in this fragmented (but still interconnected) media landscape, brands must understand that **audience fragmentation is not about age or demographics**.

Targeting the right audiences is now about psychographics (values, lifestyle, opinions), interests, and online behaviours. It cuts across traditional boundaries, meaning targeting doesn't limit itself to broad categories like age or gender but instead uses specific, actionable insights to reach the right people in the right way.

A middle-aged gamer might have more in common with a teenager who shares the same passion for video games than with her own age group.

Truly understanding audiences

Audience fragmentation has big implications for brands: it demands a much more **nuanced approach**.

A one-size-fits-all approach is no longer effective.

Content needs to be tailored to specific interests and behaviours rather than broad demographic groups. Not only in messaging, but also in tone, style, format and the choice of the media platform itself.

Brands have to invest heavily in understanding their niche audiences. Of course, by using data and AI for identifying and targeting these nuanced audience segments. However, technology alone is not sufficient. It also requires intuition, **a human touch** —a finger on the pulse of constantly changing trends and conversations.



Case



Toyota Material Handling Belgium focuses on the specific needs and behaviours of their target group

Toyota Material Handling Belgium asked iO to assist them in boosting the online sales of their compact warehouse trucks and accessories. They supply to a broad target group: from supermarkets to major players in construction, port, logistics, and industry.

However, neither the company size nor the sector determines the type of product that their prospects are looking for. A giga warehouse can also purchase small pallet trucks.

Rather than relying on traditional audience segments based on company size or industry, Toyota recognised the diversity of its customer base. We implemented an inbound marketing and content strategy that enabled Toyota's target audiences to self-identify their needs and interests.

Through digital data capture and micro-segmentation, we were able to link contacts to product categories based on their content consumption, allowing for highly targeted messaging. The relevant and hyper-targeted content resulted in an opt-in rate of more than 50%, and 16% of the visitors converted into a marketing-qualified lead.

[Read more about the case](#)



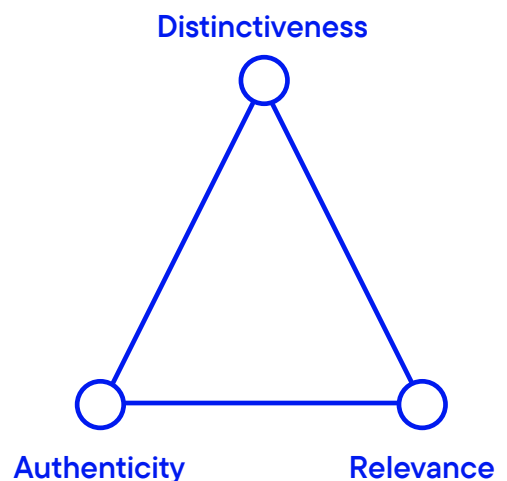
Truly touching audiences

Targeting and touching the right audience is even more challenging because people today have **low tolerance for content that does not feel genuine**.

At iO, we have identified three ingredients for genuine communication: authenticity, relevance, and distinctiveness.

- **Authentic** aligns with who you are. Brands often make the mistake of communicating what they want the audience to believe - which often backfires. Allow your audience to draw their own conclusions by showing your identity and expertise through your content: **'Show, don't tell'**.
- **Relevant** content is not self-centred, it focuses on the audience's perspective. A lot of content is 'garbage' because it prioritises the message the brand wants to convey rather than what **the audience is open to hear**.

- **Distinctiveness** (or originality) is about standing out. Even if content is both authentic and relevant, it can still be extremely dull. Have the courage to do something new, something different, something that deviates from the benchmarks or best practices. Especially in the competition for attention amidst the overwhelming amount of content, it is **worthwhile being original**.



When conducting a content review with colleagues, take a moment to assess: is this story aligned with our brand and truly **authentic**? Is it **relevant** to our audience and does it truly **stand out** in the way we're telling it?

ABN AMRO MeesPierson addresses specific concerns of their high-net-worth niche audience



As a private bank, ABN AMRO MeesPierson targets high-net-worth individuals. They asked iO to help position ABN AMRO MeesPierson as **the expert in asset transfer** and to eventually **attract new customers**.

A nuanced content strategy

By investing heavily in understanding the specific interests and behaviours of this niche audience, **we moved beyond broad demographic targeting**. We recognised that these people had **unique concerns beyond typical financial matters**, so we developed a nuanced content strategy focusing on the often-overlooked human aspects of inheritance.

The campaign addressed sensitive topics like wealth inequality and family dynamics, demonstrating ABN AMRO MeesPierson's deep understanding of their clients' unique challenges.

We knew that **this audience values in-depth, meaningful content**, so we created a multi-faceted campaign.

This included:

- a TV documentary exploring personal stories from heirs of well-known businesses
- a digital platform with always-on content
- and a physical card game to facilitate difficult family discussions about inheritance.

RESULTS

All objectives for this campaign were achieved. On some targets, the online benchmarks were beaten by over 100%. With this campaign, we helped to profile the bank once again as the Netherlands' private bank par excellence and we contributed to a large influx of new leads (90% above target). In terms of number of leads, this was the bank's most successful campaign ever

[Learn more about the case](#)





“Creating the right message for the right target group isn’t just about tweaking the copy across formats. It’s about deeply understanding the worldview of each target audience.”

RUTH NYS

Strategy Director Content



PLATFORMS

3. Understanding platform nuances

Go native – or go home

Sticking to a corporate voice or sharing identical content across all platforms may seem like the easiest way of working, but it's a recipe for failure.

Building a brand requires **consistency**. It's important to convey your strategy and brand story across all platforms in a cohesive manner, using the same style, visual language, and core principles.

However, with a media landscape more diverse than ever, that is easier said than done.

The modern media landscape has exploded into a complex ecosystem. Beyond social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and TikTok, we have streaming services (Videoland, Netflix, Disney+), podcast

networks, digital radio, interactive gaming platforms (Steam, PlayStation Network), content platforms (Newspapers, Reddit, BuzzFeed) and even virtual reality spaces.

Every platform is home to its own diverse audiences, each with its own **unique preferences, behaviours, and content consumption patterns**.

As a brand, it's crucial to have a strong presence in multiple places, ideally with a recognisable identity.

If you're not visible, you simply don't exist.



Platform native content

If you do not want to completely miss the mark, you need to understand platform nuances.

Truly understanding a platform requires more than knowing the size requirements for image or video, character limits, or allowed file formats.

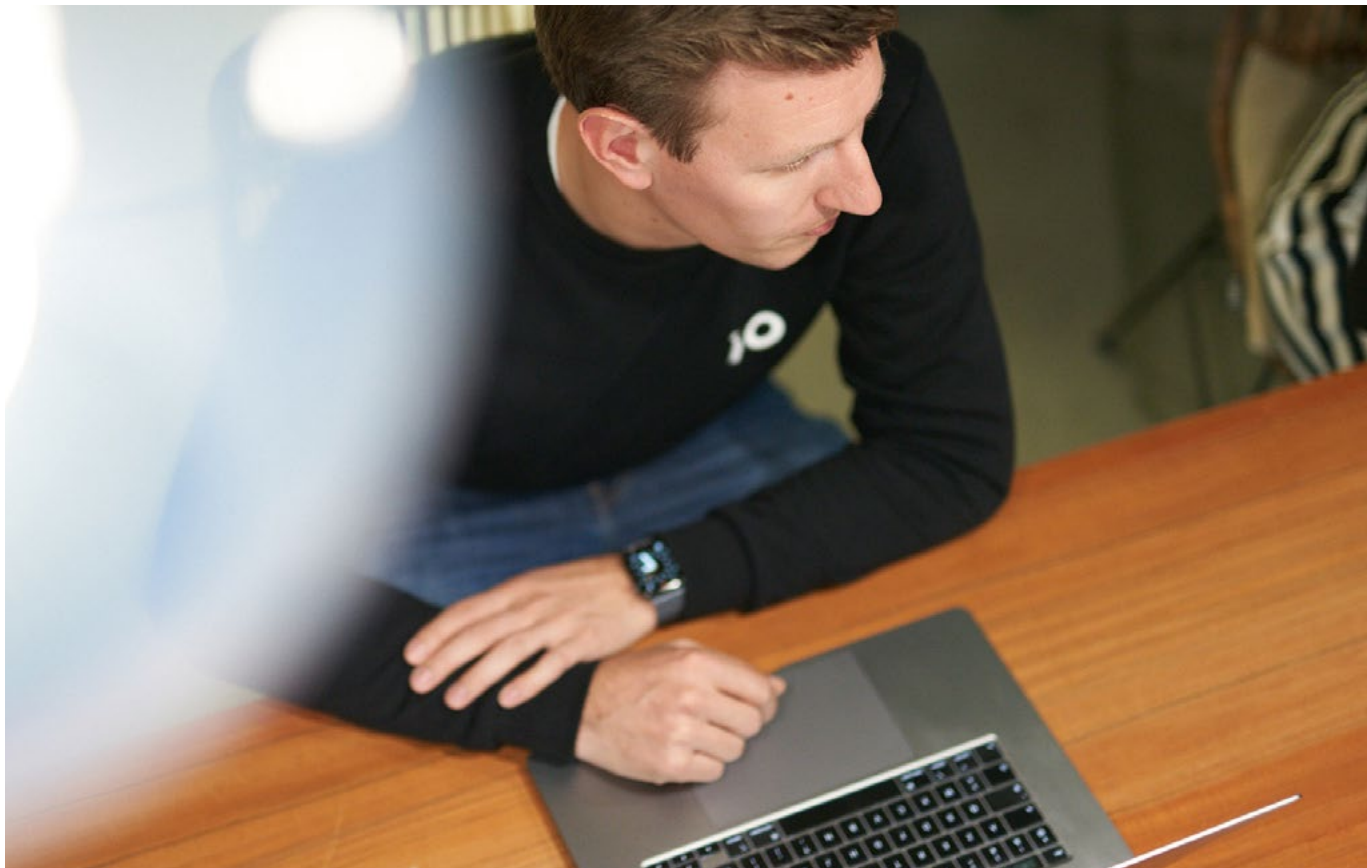
It's about the platform's **unwritten rules and boundaries**: the way content is consumed, what gets users engaged, its inside jokes, the types of visuals that perform good, what works well and what's not done.

The subtle cues that distinguish genuine, platform-native content from misplaced attempts.

Understanding platform cultures

The key for a successful presence lies in developing a sense of **'fingerspitzengefühl'** — an intuitive understanding of the culture of the platform.

For example, on Reddit, direct self-promotion is often frowned upon, while on Instagram, it's more accepted and expected. And on Twitter, it's quite common to engage in conversations with strangers, whereas on LinkedIn, it's less typical, and on Snapchat, it's even more unusual.



How to ‘get’ a platform?

If you want your brand to be present on a specific platform, you and your team members should be active there as well.

Consume content daily, experiment with personal content creation, stay attuned to trending topics, hashtags and challenges, follow and analyse successful influencers on the platform, learn the unwritten rules of engagement (when to join or stay out of certain conversations), and be an early adopter of new features.

This way, you develop an intuitive flair-fingerspitzengefühl – that enables you to create compelling, platform-native content.

Connect your brand with a culture

Once you have gained a solid understanding of the platform’s culture, the next step is to identify the (sub)cultures that resonate with your brand and which content creators have a voice within that culture. Collaborate with those content creators. Approach a respected journalist for a branded podcast series, support an influencer with a shout-out, a barter agreement, or the well-known sponsored content.

This helps create a sense of legitimacy, which works particularly well in industries such as tech, fashion, and gaming.



Where does your target audience spend their time? This could be social media, but it could also be specific streaming services, podcast networks, or even particular television channels or print publications. Does that (sub)culture align with the values of your brand? Make a clear decision and be there, loud and proud.

De Kindertelefoon resonates with the right audience on TikTok

*How do you reach your target audience aged 8 to 18?
With your own TikTok account, of course.*

For 45 years, De Kindertelefoon has been the confidential helpline for children. De Kindertelefoon asked iO to expand online reach among their target audience organically. And if you want to reach Dutch youth, you have to be on TikTok.

#overallespraten / #talkaboutanything

We created “De Kletsoker” (The Chatterbox), a content format aligned with De Kindertelefoon’s #talkaboutanything message (#overallespraten in Dutch).

In this TikTok format, influencers engage with young people in conversations about anything using cards from De Kletsoker. Covering topics from love to neglect and everything in between.

This content format truly embraced the platform’s essence: user-generated content that feels genuine and relatable.

From the studio to the street

Initially studio-based, we evolved the concept to match TikTok’s dynamic nature. For the second season, we entrusted content creation to diverse young TikTok creators who have an affinity for the platform and resonate with the values of De Kindertelefoon.



RESULTS

Since the start of the channel, we have organically generated over 367,824 views on De Kindertelefoon’s channel, and we have grown from 0 to 5800 followers.

[Learn more about the case](#)



“Are you willing to contribute authentically to each platform’s culture, or will you remain an outsider, shouting your message into the void?”

NAOMI TEUNIS

Content & Creation Director

4. Crafting better content with AI

Don't produce more content but craft better – with AI

Adapting to the nuances of each platform and audience segment doesn't mean we're talking about just adapting content formats. Rather than simply reformatting content, brands need to have a more **targeted and specified approach** to content creation and distribution.

Ideally, you have **messages crafted for every specific niche audience** you want to address. This requires a high level of hyper-personalisation: contextualised content that adapts to users' real-time situations, interests, and behaviours.

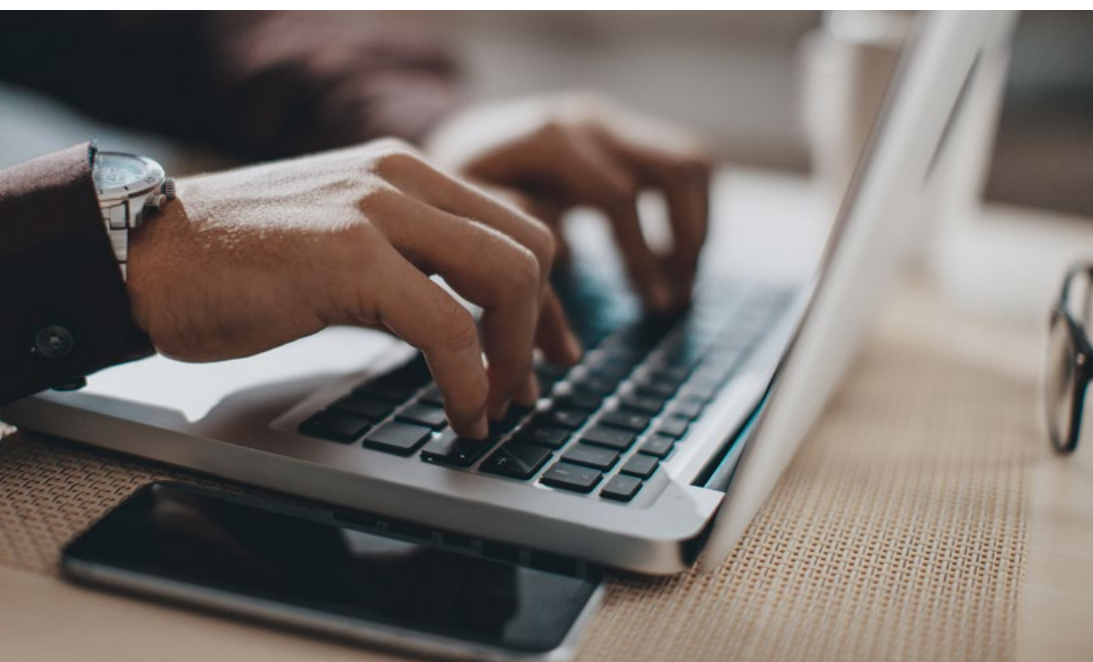
Hyper-personalisation

Yes, we have been talking about hyper-personalisation for years, but its full potential remained largely untapped.

Why?

Because the costs and benefits of creating content for a specific niche were often not enticing enough. It was resource intensive. How can you possibly create content for every niche audience, on every platform, without burning out your creative team or budgets? No content creator wants to spend their time manually creating 50 different banners. That doesn't make anyone happy. But you do need those 50 - or 100 - different assets. To fit within the context of a platform, to target different (sub)audiences, and to test which variations work best.

This is where content creation meets AI.



Personalised content at scale with AI

One of the most important developments in content creation is the rise of AI-generated content. Thanks to GenerativeAI (GenAI), content teams can dramatically increase and scale their output. AI makes it finally feasible to create **highly personalised content at scale**.

At iO, we believe that this is exciting because it brings more diversity to the field. It's no longer just about creating the best advertising campaign on Google and calling it a day. Diversification becomes important again, requiring brands to engage in more active strategic thinking than they did 10 or 15 years ago.

Picture this

Your content team has access to a vast library of pre-generated content, ranging from social media posts to blog articles and even video scripts. By simply inputting a few key parameters, such as target audience, desired tone, brand voice, and product features, they can create high-quality, on-brand content in a matter of seconds.

How to get started with AI in your content strategy?

1. Determine scalable content types (ex. videos, ads copy, email copy)
2. Choose the right GenAI tools (ex. OpenAI's GPT models for text generation, DALL-E or Midjourney for image creation, Runway for video editing)
3. Empower your team (Training session about the possibilities of AI, learning to develop good prompts, how to infuse creativity)
4. Start small and iterate (Start by implementing AI in smaller, manageable projects)
5. Stay informed on latest developments

Keep up with the latest developments around AI

[Our AI dossier is a great place to start.](#)



We help you optimise your content supply chain

With content at scale comes greater challenges.

Generative AI and automation not only increase the speed of content creation but also help to deliver a personalised message efficiently and consistently across multiple channels.

However, these benefits only become evident when all content production processes are streamlined.

It's not solely about the ability to produce more content, but about the capability to manage it strategically and efficiently throughout its entire lifecycle: planning, creating, organising, delivering, measuring and evaluating your content from start to finish.

At iO, we can help you streamline your content supply chain, from planning to analytics. With our holistic approach, we bridge the gap between technology, processes, and strategy to create an effective content ecosystem for your brand.

[Learn more](#)

Enexis leverages AI for a hyper-personalised campaign about energy transition.

The energy transition can feel like a distant concept. But that changes when your street is being dug up or when your solar panels fail. That's when the practical consequences of the energy transition and the role of the grid operator in it become truly tangible.

Recognising that different groups have varying attitudes towards this energy transition, we developed a **sophisticated, data-driven campaign** for Enexis, a Dutch energy network operator. We leveraged **AI-driven content creation** to communicate the energy transition to diverse audience segments.

AI for scaling campaign assets

We **leveraged AI to create hundreds of campaign assets**, each with their own design, message, and tailored to three distinct audience profiles: conservatives, progressives, and early adopters.

The campaign delivered the **highly contextualised content** at relevant moments and locations based on combined weather data, energy network data, work schedules, and attitude models. If the sun is shining, you'll see a billboard ad in neighbourhoods where there's a chance your solar inverter might fail. If it's raining and there's heavy mist in the air, it won't be shown.

AI for fast video content

To rapidly create explanatory videos without diverting technical experts from their crucial roles in the energy transition, we also **digitised a real Enexis-employee as an AI model for video content**. Our AI experts have trained the algorithm to understand how this person moves and sounds. We can now input text and generate a corresponding video that aligns with their specific mannerisms and voice.



RESULTS

The campaign is still running, it had 3.2 million impressions in the first week alone, and Praise from the Board of Directors of Enexis and other players in the energy market.

[Read more about the case](#)



“AI transforms A/B testing into A-Z testing, giving us unlimited insights into what truly resonates with an audience.”

WIM DE LAET

Service Line Director Content & Creation at iO

5. Long-form, short-form? Polished, unpolished? Gated, ungated?

5.1 Long-form or short-form content?

At iO, we see a seemingly contrasting trend in the field of content. There is an increase in short-form, snackable content but also a growing popularity in more and more longer, richer content formats.

Due to declining attention spans, the demand for **easily consumable, short-form content** is increasing. This includes carousel posts, TikTok, IG Reels, and YouTube Shorts, as well as repurposing long-form content like podcasts and audio into short video clips

At the same time, we see that people are increasingly willing to engage with **longer formats** such as podcasts, livestreams, and videos. Platform features are also being developed to support this: verified X accounts can now share long texts, while LinkedIn company pages can send their own newsletters via LinkedIn. This type of extended content provides more space for providing real value or storytelling, such as giving a behind-the-scenes look, and is more accessible than a podcast or article behind a paywall like Medium.

As a brand, do you have to choose? Not really.

Both formats have their place in a comprehensive content strategy.

The optimal strategy may be to use short-form content to grab people's attention and then drive audiences to your long-form content to deliver significant value to your audience.

3 pieces of advice:

1. Develop short-form video making skills that grab attention quickly across TikTok, Reels, Shorts etc. **But use them as teasers/trailers.**
2. Use long-form content formats such as white papers, tutorials, and demos where you want to fully display **expertise** and **thought leadership**.
3. See short-form as an entry point that drives viewers to explore your long-form destinations.

5.2 Polished or unpolished content?

Videos with cinematic quality, or a perfect and stylised grid on Instagram were signs of a carefully curated brand only a little while ago. Content with high production quality conveyed authority.

Audiences now often prefer unpolished, user-generated style content that feels less overproduced. Preferences have shifted towards more **authentic content** that feels relatable - from real creators, not 'brands'.

What about perfect polished AI-generated content?

This development is particularly intriguing because while the demand for imperfection is growing, the technology to perfect content – AI – is advancing. GenerativeAI tools make it possible for content teams to create highly polished, professional-looking videos, images, and other content at scale.

Is this something you should want?

Even though AI can create visually appealing and technically flawless content, it cannot capture the nuances and subtleties that make content truly relatable and engaging. As a result, the content may appear less authentic and less engaging, which is essential for building a strong connection with the audience.



3 pieces of advice:

1. **Don't rely solely on AI-generated content - use it to enhance, not replace human creators.** Use AI for ideation or to create a foundation, but make sure you add a human touch: blend AI assistance with real voices, perspectives and personalities.
2. **Don't overly stick to your brand message.** Smaller brands often have more freedom to experiment. As brands become larger, they tend to become more risk averse. This can lead to overly polished, safe content. Dare to let go a little bit, loosen the control over brand messaging and dare to embrace unscripted content. Your modern target audiences will feel the spontaneity.
3. **In need of inspiration?** Other ideas for 'authentic, unpolished content' involve employee-generated content, making-offs, bloopers or behind-the-scenes. You can let people share personal experiences related to your brand or make content that responds quickly to current events or trends.

Speed is an important factor

Nowadays, content needs to be produced quickly to stay relevant and respond to current events. Moreover, spending too much time perfecting your content can make it seem like an advertisement or inauthentic.

Therefore, it's not really worth investing a lot of time and resources into creating videos, blog posts, designs, and graphics - whether using AI or not.



5.3 Gated or ungated content?

Ungated content is freely accessible to everyone. To access **gated content**, users need to provide personal information, such as their email address.

The debate over gated versus ungated content is one that is been going on for years already. However, current developments add **more urgency to the topic**. There is an abundance of content available, capturing the audience's attention has become increasingly challenging and people are more careful to share personal information because of privacy concerns.

Both types have their own value for marketers

Gating high-value content helps qualify leads, build email lists and allows strong nurturing strategies. But ungated content has a wider reach, attributes to brand awareness and can improve SEO performance.

How do you balance the need for lead generation with the audience's expectation for unrestricted access to content?

Both gated and ungated content play a crucial role in a comprehensive content strategy and serve different purposes at various stages in the customer journey. At iO, we advise a balanced approach: cast a wide net with ungated content, and then capture leads with high-value gated content. This might provide you with a smaller database, but with higher quality leads.

If you gate content...

1. Ensure the content provides exceptional value
2. Use it for truly premium, exclusive content or experiences
3. Keep forms short and consider progressive profiling
4. Do it later in the customer journey when you've already built trust
5. Make sure you have a solid follow-up strategy

If you ungate content...

1. Ensure its easily discoverable through SEO
2. Make sure it's easily shareable to maximise its reach
3. Use it to direct users to related, high-value gated content
4. Consider incorporating interactive elements to increase engagement as a way to gather user data

7 questions to determine whether your content strategy is ready for 2025

1. Does your marcom team regularly consume and interact with content on the platforms you are targeting?
2. Are you using AI tools to create personalised content on a large scale?
3. Do you frequently re-evaluate your audience targeting and segmentation?
4. Do you dare to loosen some control over your brand guidelines in favour of unscripted, authentic content?
5. Does both long-form and short-form content have a place in your content strategy?
6. Have you recently reviewed your content strategy with regards to data privacy?
7. Do you regularly test and optimise your content formats, messaging, and distribution channels?

The more boxes you've checked, the stronger your foundation for creating impactful, audience-centric content in 2025 and beyond.



At iO, we create content that attracts people and shapes your brand experience. Our experts advise, plan and create photo, audio, text and video content.

Interactive by design, effective in return

We embrace ideas with a digital core or a technological twist. We believe that interactive experiences, especially when shared, have the power to leave a lasting impression.

Creativity beyond advertising

At iO, creativity runs through the entire value stream, from strategy to delivery.

A diverse, blended team

From service and UX designers to strategists, digital designers, and art directors, we create the perfect blend of skills that aligns seamlessly with your brand's needs.

[Get to know us](#)





About iO

iO is a *blended agency*. We blend marketing, technology and creativity because we believe that creating the ultimate customer experience requires a blend of these different skills to make an impact on our clients' brand and business.

With our solutions, we aim for experiences that matter:

Digital platforms →

Brand, Business & Experience Design →

Marketing Programs & Campaigns →

Creation & Content Production →

Cloud, Data & Integration →

Transformation & Consulting →

Experience is
everything

Neem gerust contact met ons op!

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