outbrain

The Guide to **Creating High-Conversion Content** for Your Outbrain Campaigns

What's Inside?

Introduction

In 2014, reeling from two deadly disasters, Malaysia Airlines went ahead with a content marketing campaign: "Send us your bucket list of travel destinations!"

Bucket list? That list of places you want to see before you die?

Not surprisingly, the public was outraged, the company apologized, and the campaign name was changed.[1]

> **These kinds of content fails are exactly what you – as a brand marketer or business owner – want to avoid.**

[1] https://mashable.com/2014/09/03/malaysia-airlines-bucket-list/

How NOT to Do Content Marketing

If you work in marketing, you don't need us to tell you that getting your audience's attention is hard.

As long as they have an internet connection (and who doesn't these days?), consumers are faced with endless choices.

Bombarded with images and information, no wonder it takes an average of 5 to 7 impressions for people to even remember your brand.

There's something just as bad as not getting noticed, however, and that's creating embarrassingly bad content. Like the airline example above.

There's another way you don't want to stand out. And that's with bad placement.

Unfortunate ad placements happen online and offline – and your brand should avoid them.

Image source:
https://www.boredpanda.com/advertising-placement-fails/

In this guide, we'll show you how to write great content that works for your brand, and how to promote it in the right places.

Native Advertising to the Rescue

Today's consumers don't want "ads". They want valuable, relevant information that improves their lives and solves their problems. Get this: 47% of millennials say that they would trust a financial services company more if it produced useful content.[2]

You may be wondering how to create that content and how to get it out there in front of your audiences. The answer? Native advertising.
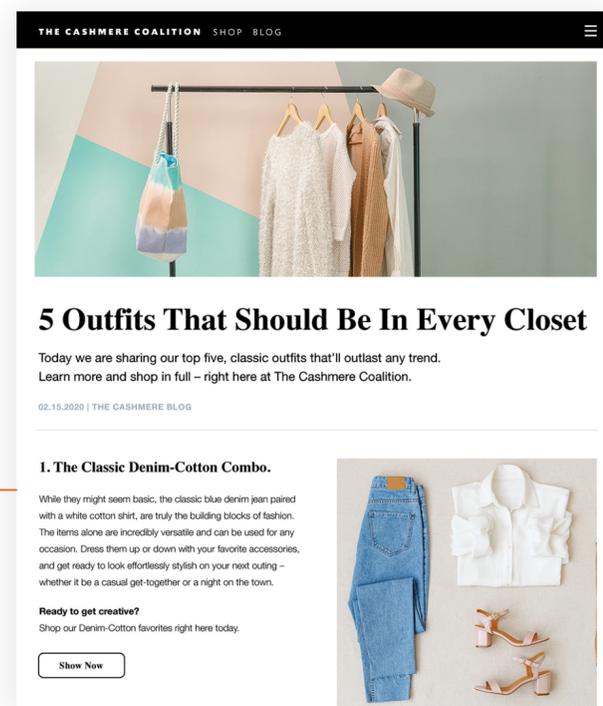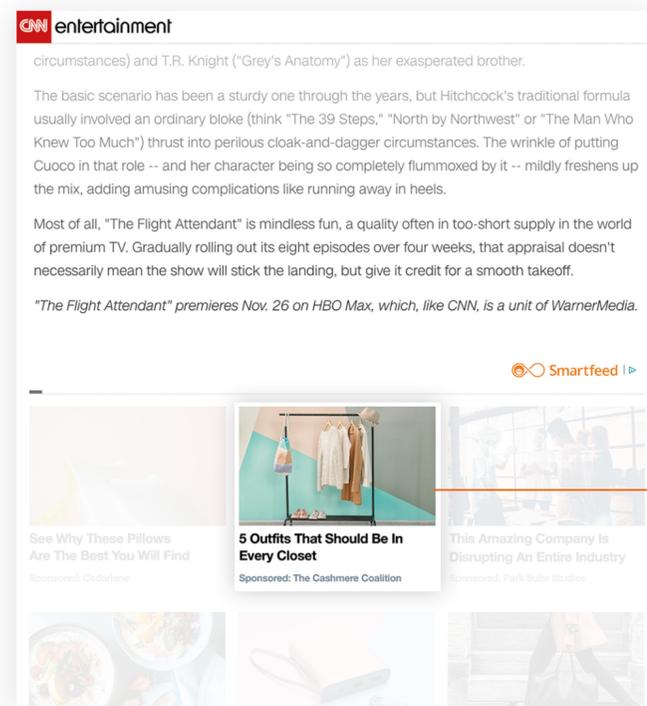
Here's how native advertising works:

Produce original, high-quality content that provides relevance and value to your target audience.

Host the content on your website, blog, landing page, or other URL.

Run a native advertising campaign on Outbrain, targeted to your best audience. Your Outbrain ad links to the content URL.

People browse the web and click on your Outbrain ad. They land on the URL featuring your great content.

People read your content and engage with your brand. They even become customers. YAY!

As you can see, the first step in the process is creating great content. And not just any content – but content specifically designed to engage audiences in native placements.

Let's get started!

Get Started With Native   **Create Campaign**

Chapter 1: **Why Native Content Works**

Before diving into how to create content for native campaigns, it's important to understand **why native content works**. This will help you choose the best content type and craft it most effectively.

The first step is understanding that there's "content", like SEO keyword content or non-marketing content, and then there's "content that leads to conversions".

Conversion-oriented content works best for Outbrain native campaigns and it's what you should be aiming for.

What does "conversion-oriented content" even mean?

Conversion-oriented content is crafted in a way that tempts the reader to take an action that "converts" them from viewer to potential customer.
It's content with a marketing goal.
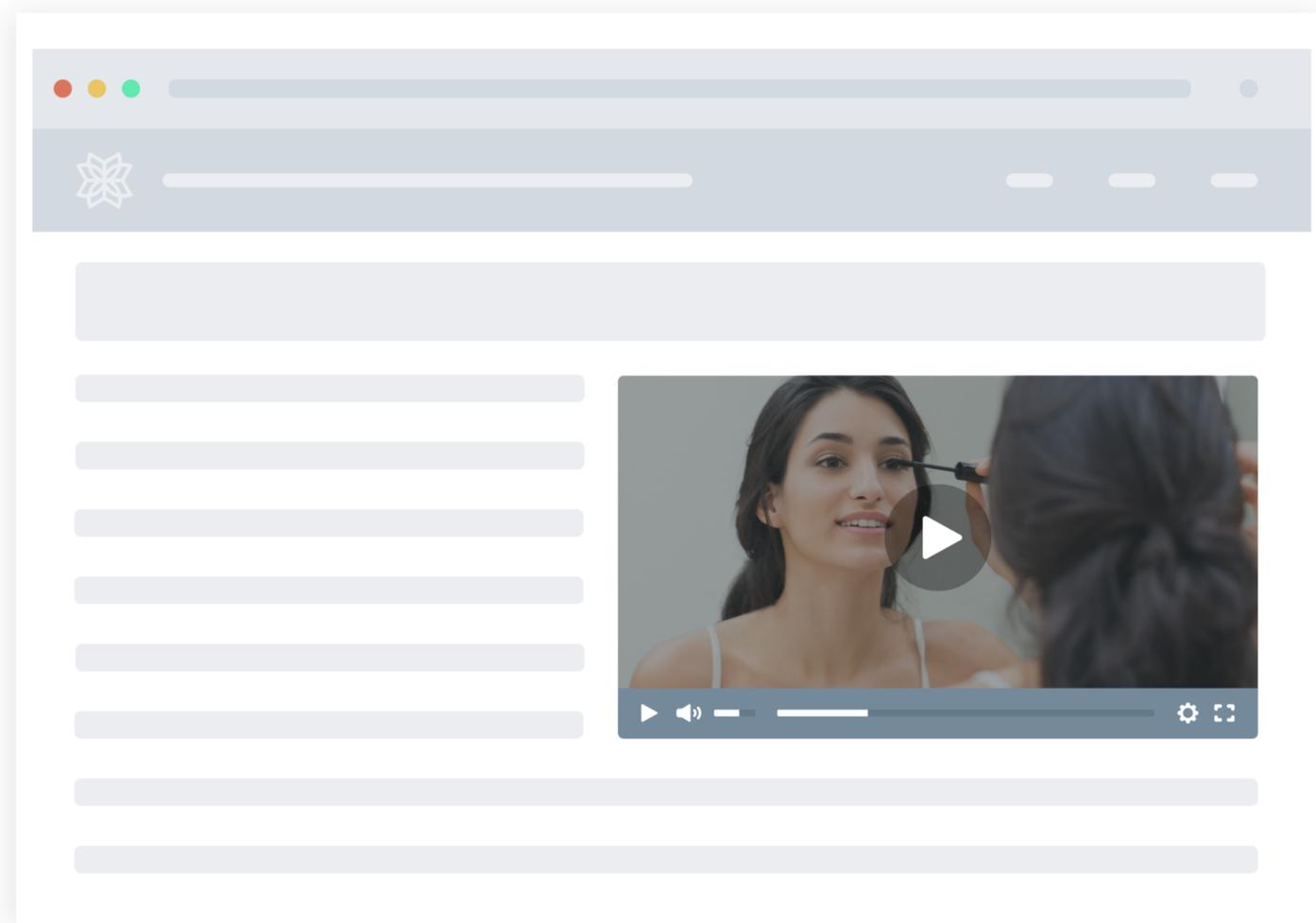
For example, let's imagine a vlog about how to apply mascara, published on the website of a cosmetics company.

The aim of the video is to teach the viewer how to apply mascara, right?

Yes, but there is another goal as well – getting the viewer to consider buying the mascara.

Unlike a regular ad, which focuses on the product (in this case, mascara), conversion-oriented content focuses on the reader's pain point (how do I apply mascara?!?), while only hinting at the benefits of the promoted product.

It's a much more subtle way to get the audience focused on your brand or product.

And that's why it is so powerful.

Why do Outbrain campaigns need this kind of content?

Consumers everywhere are suffering from "ad fatigue". That's not surprising, considering that people are exposed to approximately 5000 online ads a day!

Native ads combat ad fatigue in a critical way: they are designed to fit in "natively" with the layout and design of the web page, so they don't seem like ads.

Because they don't look like ads, Outbrain native ads are much less intrusive to readers. They complement, rather than disrupt, the audience's web browsing experience. When viewing native ads, customers **feel open to discover products and brands**, rather than annoyed and averse.

Plus, Outbrain native ads are targeted to audiences by their location, interests, previous browsing habits, and much more. This means that your native ads are being shown to customers who are more likely to be interested in your brand or business to start with.

Now that you've got the basics down, let's take a look at the different content types that work with native advertising.

Did you know?

64% of people say that display ads are annoying or intrusive. Native ads are viewed 52% more than display ads.[3]

Brainy Tip:

Native content should support and enhance your audience's online experience. Therefore it must be relevant, entertaining, engaging and informative. And it should be targeted to the audience with the highest potential of actually converting.

[3] https://www.outbrain.com/blog/native-ads-vs-display-ads/

Chapter 2: **11 Types of Content for Your Outbrain Campaigns**

Remember, in native campaigns, you want to get customers to click on your ad, but that's just the first step.

The deeper goal is what happens when they land on your content. Here are some common examples of actions you might want your readers to take:

- Buy a product
- Submit their contact information
- Download a coupon
- Browse a catalog

- Watch a video
- Install an app
- Sign up to a newsletter
- And more

Brainy Tip:

Native content is geared towards driving the customer to action. There are many other ways to do that than with simple blog posts or articles.
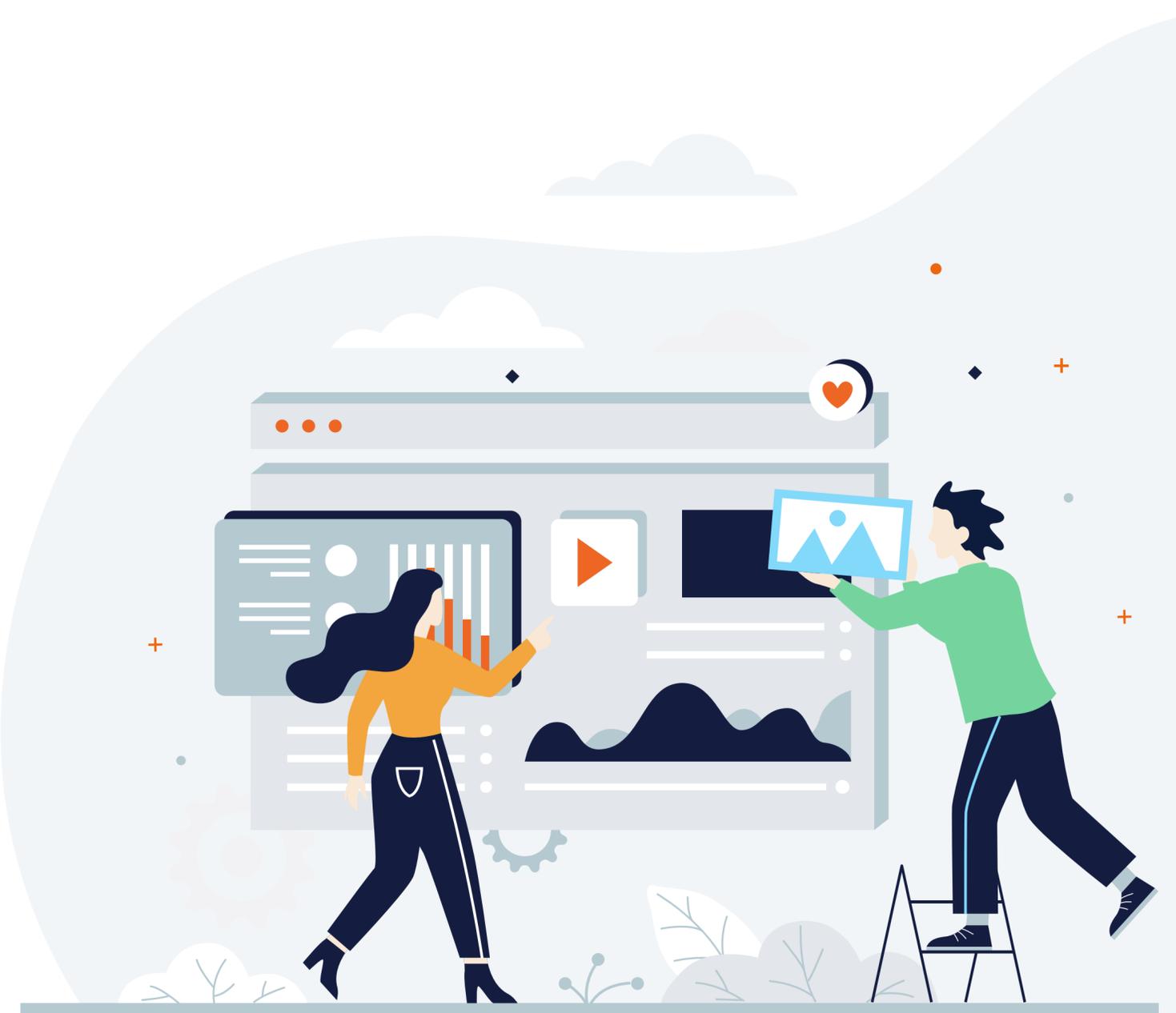
Let's take a look at the different kinds of content you can use in native campaigns (and there are loads!).

1

Blogs

Blogs and articles are a staple content type in native advertising. It is so easy to link to a blog post or article already featured on your website. Make sure to use blogs that are fairly recent (within the past 6 weeks tops!), so your content is fresh and current.

2

Ebooks

With ebooks, you can delve much deeper into the topic than with a blog post. An ebook can combine visual content with text-based content to make it more interesting and engaging. An example? An e-guide by a fashion brand about how to choose the best clothing styles for different body shapes.

3

Whitepapers

Popular in the B2B world, whitepapers are long-form guides or reports that explore a topic comprehensively. They are based on professional research and references, and can go into quite a lot of specific detail. Whitepapers are a great way for B2B companies to show leadership and authority in their field.

4

Infographics

Infographics are a blend of images and text to explore a topic or illustrate a process. It's a fun way to present statistics or other dry information. So fun, in fact, that infographics are the 4th most popular content type![4]

5

Videos

There's no competing with videos for pure content success. If you're in marketing, you are either using video already, or are one of the 92% of marketers who say that video is important for their content strategy.[5]

6

Podcasts

Podcasts are a seriously up-and-coming success story in marketing. 70% of listeners say that the products and services they hear about on podcasts are relevant to them.[6] And that probably explains why the number of podcasts is growing all the time.

[4]Hubspot, Not Another State of Marketing Report 2020, https://www.hubspot.com/state-of-marketing
[5]https://www.smartinsights.com/digital-marketing-platforms/video-marketing/video-marketing-statistics-to-know/
[6]https://www.marketing-podcasts.com/blog/podcasting-101/

Stories

7

Stories connect people and communities, from ancient myths, to fairytales, Harry Potter, and now brand storytelling. You can build stories through articles, videos, image galleries, customer profiles, behind-the-scenes at the factory or office, or dozens of other ways. This will require some creativity on your part but if you've got it, stories are a content winner.

Testimonials & reviews

8

Customer reviews or testimonials of your products or services are a powerful way to show the audience what you have to offer, but from the perspective of people just like them. You can do this with video interviews, written reviews, or by linking to third-party testimonials or earned media, such as influencers who have reviewed your product (with their permission of course).

Interactive content

9

If you want to create a bit of WOW around your content, interactive is the way to go. Interactive content is engaging because it requires the audience to play an active part, whether through a quiz, calculator, live map, poll, or more. There are lots of free or low-cost interactive content creation tools available online, so it is getting easier to do – and the payoff in customer engagement makes it worthwhile.

App downloads

10

For marketers of mobile apps, a landing page for app downloads is a great way to boost install rates. The page can feature all kinds of content about the app, in the form of video, stories, demos, and more, to convince the reader to click the "Download" button.

Product pages & catalogs

11

Calling all e-commerce business owners! Linking native ads to product pages or catalogs is a great way to expose customers to your offerings. Add a product story or interactive feature to the page – even better!
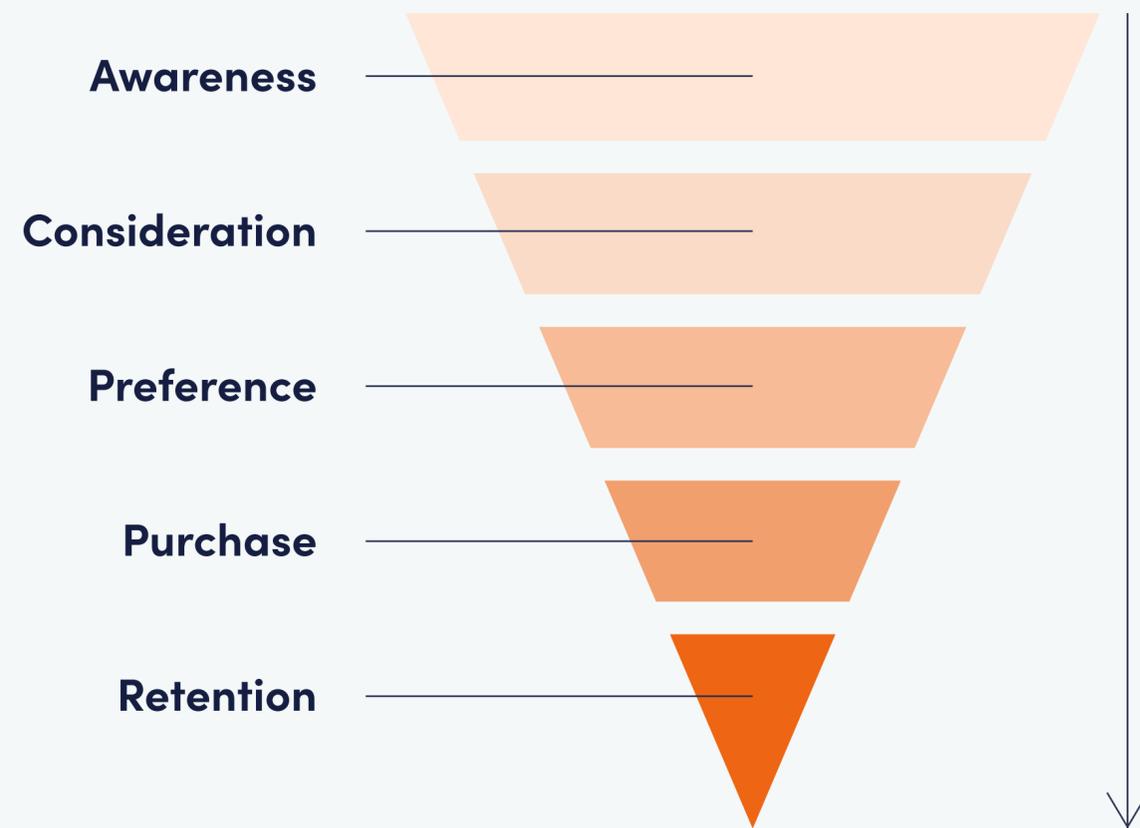
The Customer Funnel – It's the journey people take to becoming your customers

Awareness

Consideration

Preference

Purchase

Retention

Deep dive:
How to Choose The Right Content Type

The kind of content that works best depends on how well the customer knows your business. That's why it is so important to define your target audiences before diving into content creation.

For example, a potential customer who has never heard of your company is at the "awareness" stage of the marketing funnel. Content should introduce them to your niche or trigger their interest by focusing on one of their pain points.

On the other hand, a customer who has bought from you before doesn't need an introduction. They are at the "retention" stage, so you might want to focus your content on advanced uses of your product, or any other subject that will reignite their interest.

Chapter 3: **How to Write Content for Outbrain Campaigns**

Once you have chosen the type of content that will work best for your goals, it's time to start developing it.

If you are creating a blog post, ebook, or other text-based content, you will need to draft an outline first, and then get down to the writing. Some marketers write their own content; others hire freelance writers to do the job.

Good quality content is never free. If your budget is tight, find out whether there are any aspiring writers or hidden talent in your staff pool.
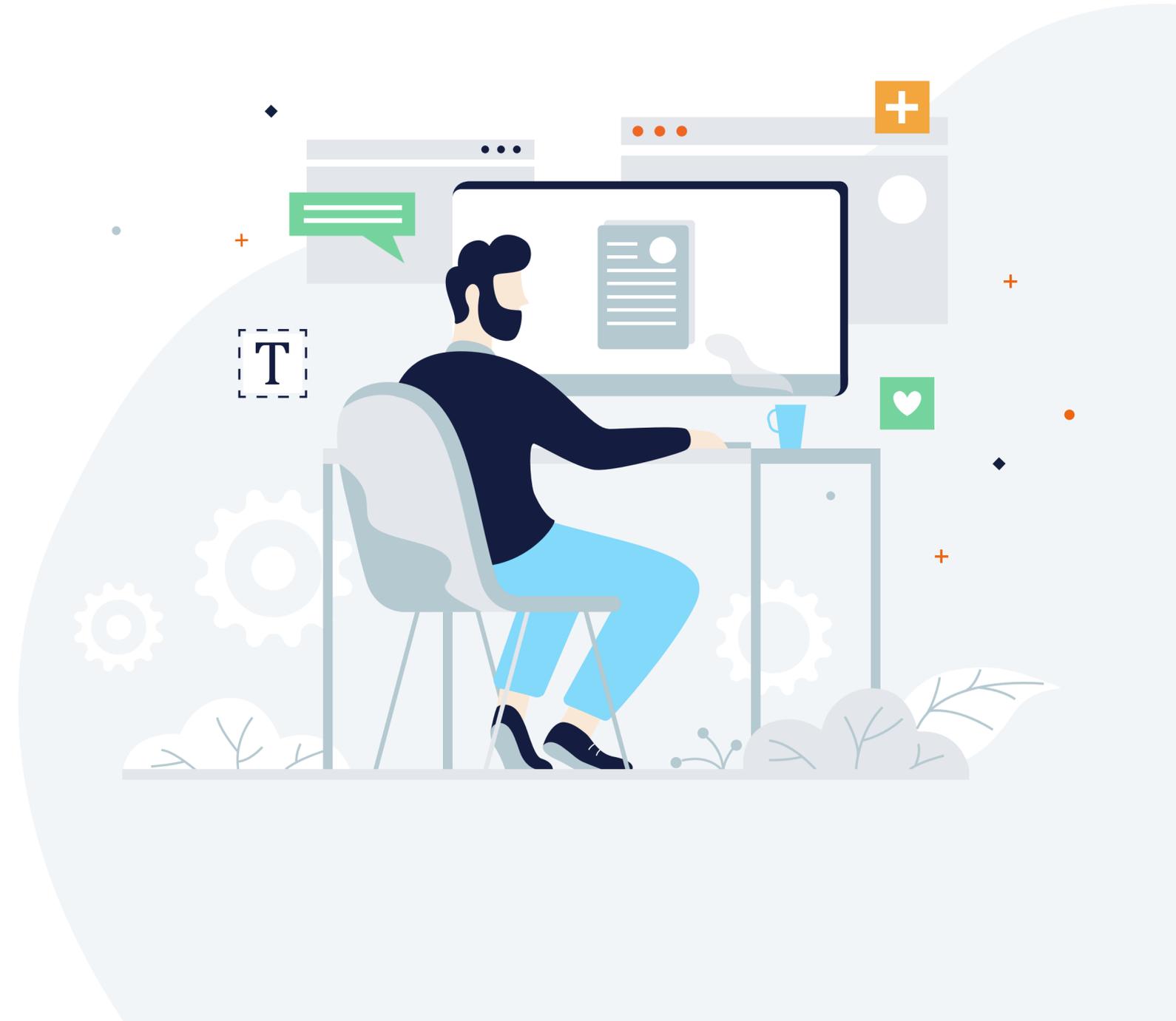
Brainy Tip:

Feeling short of inspiration? Check out these hacks to get your creative juices flowing.

Now let's get down to the nuts and bolts of writing content for native campaigns.

Try Native Now

Start Campaign

The content writing process: Where to start

Writing content is a creative act, so there is no other way to do it besides sitting down and doing it!

But we can't all be JK Rowling, so here are the golden content writing rules for Outbrain you must follow. Stick to these and the process will unfold much easier:

Focus on the customer, not on your business

This is the most important part of writing native content that converts. Content should focus on the customer's perspective, and that means getting inside their heads before you start writing.

How to do it: Talk to your customers about their pain points. If you have direct contact with customers, request a quick phone call. You can also run surveys and polls if you have an active online community. If not, join groups and forums on social media and other websites and follow the discussions closely. This will help you tap in to the mood of your target audience.

Rock your headlines

Headlines are the first opportunity to catch the attention of your audience, so it is essential that they be intriguing, catchy, and clickable (but not clickbait-y!).
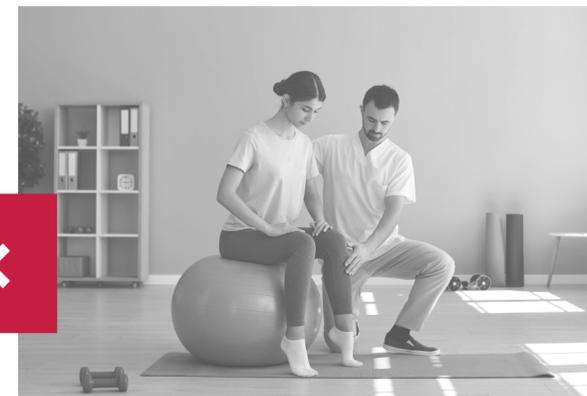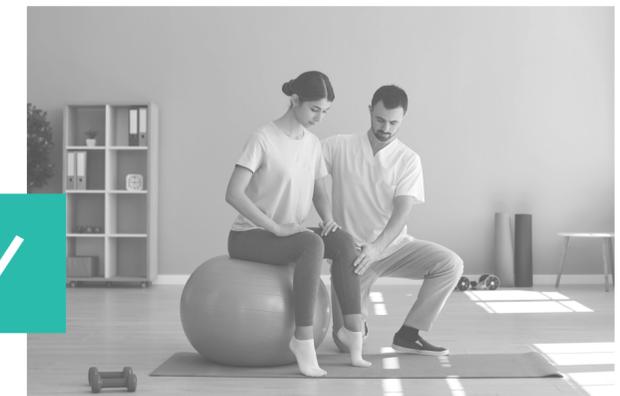
How to do it: Emotion is a huge driver of action. Try to communicate an authentic feeling in the headline. Question style headlines work great because they generate curiosity – experiment with different ones. Also, numbers in headlines drive conversions (odd numbers more so than even numbers!). Try to incorporate numbers in your headlines where feasible.

Incredible Tricks to Melt Away Back Pain Takes NYC by Storm

3 Ways to Relieve Back Pain That Everybody in NYC is Talking About

Make your content easy on the eye

Content should look enticing at first glance to encourage the audience to delve in and read it. Design and layout are key!

How to do it: Avoid cluttered content and dense blocks of text. Keep paragraphs short and easily skimmable. If your content is a video, make sure the preview screenshot looks good. Use images where possible and appropriate. Share the content with colleagues or friends to get their opinion before publishing, or even better – run it by a few customers and get their take on it.

Expand to diverse content types

Back in Chapter 2, you'll find a long list of content types that work great in native advertising, like videos, podcasts, and infographics. Think out of the box, and don't be afraid to go beyond blog posts or product pages. This helps keep customers interested and engaged.

How to do it: When you understand your audience's pain points and interests, you can start defining the types of content that will be effective. For example, if your audience is business professionals, a long-form ebook could be the way to go. Or, if you are a sporting goods company with a young customer base, then a short, snappy video is a good choice.

Sprinkle your content with CTAs

Conversion-oriented content always includes "calls to action" or CTAs. These are buttons or links that prompt the reader what to do next. Remember the vlog example, "How to apply mascara"? Include a CTA at the end of the video or in the video description text: "Bee Mascara makes lashes lusher. Try it now!", with a link to the mascara product page.

How to do it: Consider the aim of your content – what do you want the reader to do? Click on a link? Download a form? Submit their contact details? Once you decide on the goal, craft a CTA and position it where the reader can easily see it. Make buttons stand out with a bold color. You can add several CTAs throughout the content, as long as they are not overbearing. That way, if a reader doesn't make it to the end, they still have the opportunity to click.

Here's how we did it at the Outbrain blog. In this article, the bold orange buttons are CTAs inviting the reader to sign up to a webinar.

Save The Date
Live Webinar & FAQ:
How to Prep Your Cyber Weekend Ads Amid COVID-19

SEPT 16

There's no doubt about it. 2020 has been a strange and trying year. For marketers, many of the fallback strategies for advertising and promotion have had to be reconsidered – or even revamped completely! So much change and uncertainty, in such a short period of time.

Now, as the summer (or winter, for our southern readers!) comes to a close, Cyber Weekend is not far away. In any regular year, there would be the usual challenges and decisions ahead.

But this is no regular year. And the usual insights and tips are not what you need.

That's why our brightest customer success and marketing heads have come together to give you the latest, data-driven information you need to put up your best Cyber Weekend performance ever.

And it's all happening in our free online workshop, **How to Prep Your Cyber Weekend Ads Amid COVID-19**, on September 16!

[I want a spot]

Following hot on the heels of the release of our Cyber Weekend Guide (go on, download now – it's also free!), we're going live with a Cyber Weekend-themed workshop hosted by me, Emmy, Director of Customer Success, and Lauren Pica, Head of Marketing at Outbrain North America.

Join us at the latest Outbrain webinar workshop:

How to Prep Your Cyber Weekend Ads Amid COVID-19
on September 16 at 10am EST

And you'll learn:

- Insights for Black Friday and Cyber Weekend to help you understand shifts in consumer behavior
- Tactics to adapt your ads accordingly to get results
- Technical strategies to drive customer actions that bring in the $$$
- Live Q&A where you can get your questions answered – up close and personal

[Yeah! Sign me up]

COVID-19 has affected just about everything we do, and shopping behavior is at the top of the list. In fact, more than 60% of consumers have shifted the way they shop and spend.

Chapter 4: **Outbrain Content Guidelines Explained**

Native advertising on Outbrain comes with certain rules and guidelines. Content or ads that don't meet our requirements won't be accepted.

This is good news for you as an advertiser. Why? It keeps the Outbrain network clean and high quality, which means that your business or brand won't be tainted by association with offensive, untrustworthy or inappropriate content.
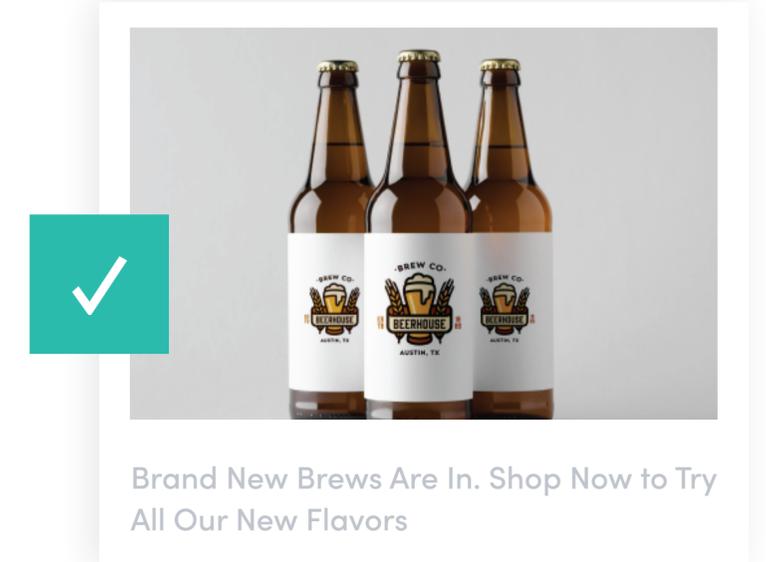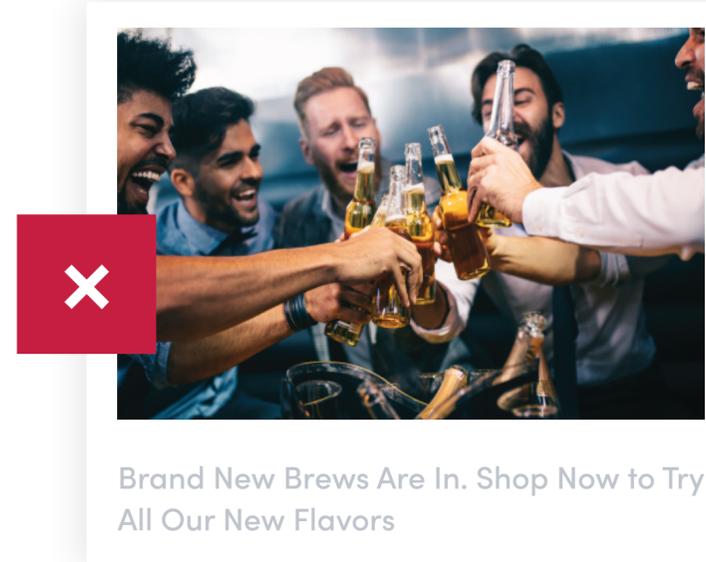
For a full overview of the Outbrain content guidelines, click here.

Meanwhile, check out a few examples of Outbrain guidelines for native ads and content:

- **Acceptable page types:** You can only link to certain types of web pages, but don't worry – the list is long and includes all the content types mentioned earlier.

- **Prohibited categories:** There are certain content categories we don't allow on our network, including illegal substances, malware, hate speech or fake news, among others.

- **Restricted categories:** Several categories are permitted on the Outbrain network, but in a restricted fashion. For example, content about alcohol is allowed, however there are rules about how to present the content, such as no images of minors.

Read more about Outbrain's guidelines in this article.

Brand New Brews Are In. Shop Now to Try All Our New Flavors

Brand New Brews Are In. Shop Now to Try All Our New Flavors

Brainy Tip:

We recommend becoming familiar with Outbrain guidelines before starting to create your content. All ads and content submitted for publication on the Outbrain network are checked by our content review team first. If guidelines are not met, you will be required to change or edit your content. Save time and effort by adhering to the guidelines from the outset.

Chapter 5: **Creating Ads for Your Outbrain Campaigns**

So your content is finalized and ready to be promoted. Congrats!

Now it's time to create the bait that will draw your target audience: **Outbrain Smartads**.

Brainy Tip:

Outbrain offers loads of native ad formats for you to choose from. Outbrain Smartads include everything from standard native ads, to video ads, carousel ads, native social ads, and more. Check out the full range, including all the relevant specs, on the Smartads Gallery page.

What's an Outbrain Smartad?

Outbrain Smartads are native ads that link to your conversion-boosting content. Here's a few examples of what Smartads look like:
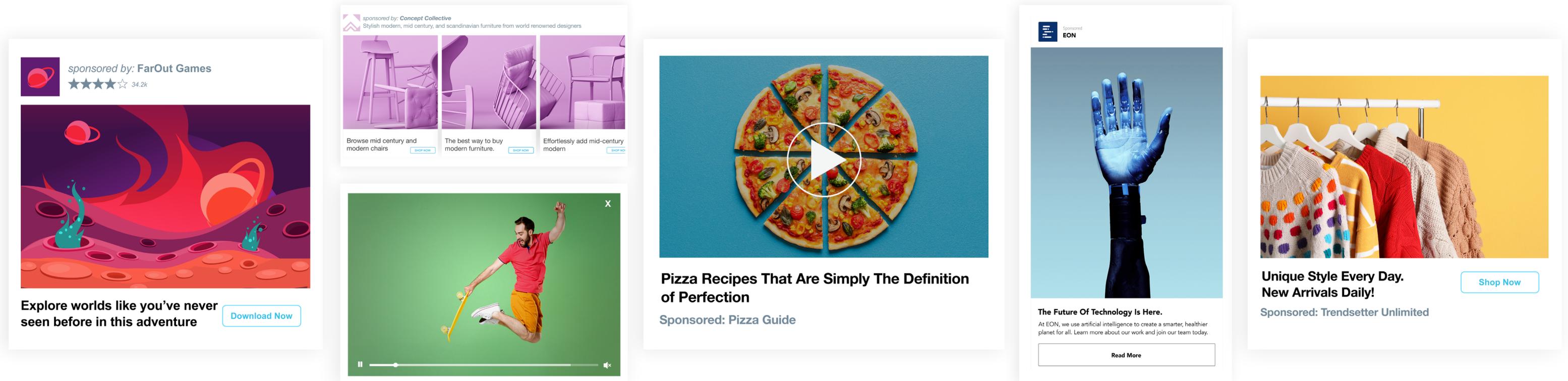
Ok, but where do Outbrain Smartads appear?

Your native ads will feature on publisher sites that are part of Outbrain's network, including world-leaders like CNN, BBC, MSN, and hundreds more. You will also choose audience targeting for your ads using Outbrain's advanced tools, like geo targeting, interest targeting and lookalikes. This means your ads will get high quality traffic, and be seen by audiences that are most likely to be interested.

Here are 3 most important recommendations for creating native ads on Outbrain that work:

1

Ads must match the content on the destination page.

This is such an important point, it is also one of Outbrain's content guidelines.

A reader clicks on an ad because it interests them in some way. If the content in the ad link is not congruent with the ad message, the reader will become frustrated and probably just leave the page straight away (that's called "bounce rate", and you want it to be as low as possible!).

Imagine that your ad headline states: "Top eco-friendly ways to remodel your home". The reader clicks on the ad, only to land on a product page from your online hardware catalog. Where are the eco-friendly tips? This is not a smooth, enjoyable content experience!

Remember! Don't confuse potential customers. Give them what you promise. Always create an ad that matches the topic and spirit of your content page.

2

Follow best practices for ad headlines and images.

Outbrain ads are made up of two components: the headline and image. For more advanced ad types, there are other components too. For example, native carousel ads include multiple images and headlines.

The Outbrain team continually tracks the keywords and image features that work best, based on vast amounts of network data. You can follow the latest trends by category, country, device, headline length, themes, and more at the BrainPower data insights website.

In addition, there are some evergreen best practices that you should know about. Check out this article about how to create ad headlines and images that work. It's one of our most popular blog posts year in, year out!

Test multiple ads to see what works best.

3

Over time, you can run different headlines and images in your Outbrain campaigns and learn which ones are most effective with your target audience. This is known as "campaign optimization". Through trial and error, you will gain knowledge about the kinds of ads that attract higher conversion rates, and you can create more powerful ads with each campaign.

Remember! Outbrain's algorithms continuously collect data about your campaigns and learn which ads perform best and why. As you become more confident and experienced, you can even use Outbrain's advanced features like Conversion Bid Strategy to help you get the maximum return on your ad spend (ROAS).

Conclusion

There's one question that every marketer asks themselves, and it lies at the heart of native advertising too:

"What do customers really want?"

Great content starts when you can answer this question.

Great content provides value to the reader. It informs, entertains, instructs, persuades, or contributes to the consumer's sense of wellbeing.

It can be funny, educational, edgy, technical, or heart-warming.

It doesn't matter, as long as the customer benefits from reading it.

With Outbrain's native advertising platform, you can amplify the power of your conversion-oriented content by reaching your best target audience, from among 1 billion monthly users worldwide. That's the key to content success.

Want to promote your great content with Outbrain?
Get started here.

outbrain

Promote Your Native Content   **Create Campaign**

Next Stop: **Native!**

Want to get even more familiar with native content campaigns?

Subscribe to our blog and receive regular tips and hacks direct to your inbox, like these:

How to Write Content that Converts

The Value of Video Content During Uncertain Times

Red Bull Strengthens its Storytelling with Outbrain Carousel