Branded Content

Branded content has come into its own in the last few years, a far cry from the advertorial days of yore. Work that was directly funded by an advertiser was once seen as inauthentic. The quality of advertiser content, though, has become much higher. For instance, A recent Volvo commercial that featured Jean-Claude Van Damme earned over 73 million views on You Tube. Chipotle's eerie yet beautiful cartoon, "The Scarecrow" earned over 13 million views and lots of press attention, all without ever actually mentioning the name, "Chipotle."

For publishers, branded work can bring both engagement and revenue, and it should be considered a viable programming source.

AOL On has an arm devoted to creating and distributing innovative branded content, called Be On. Its Senior Director of Video Solutions, Rick Rutter, has a few insights as to how and why the publisher/branded content relationship really is a symbiotic one.

1. Branded content often has the same quality production as other content. Branded content is no longer stigmatized by content creators, editors and publishers. A 2013 article in the New York *Observer* explored how writers who once worked in other fields, namely journalism, are embracing opportunities in branded content, which on a day to day level doesn't differ all that much from being a staff writer or editor.

At AOL, the same team that produces our slate of originals shows (Candidly Nicole, Park Bench, etc.) produces its branded content. In 2013, AOL Studios produced 14 Originals and over 15 branded content series. In June of 2014, AOL Studios is already in production on 21 branded content series.

2. It will earn you money: The bottom line with branded content is that it helps your bottom line. Promoting a branded series on your site will generate revenue.

For instance, an online media company with several lifestyle properties recently introduced AOL On branded content to their sites. They were previously earning $5,000 per month in video ad revenue via preroll delivered through the AOL On Network. They are now earning an average of $41,000. 37% of the video watched has a 50% completion rate and 20% had 100% completion rate.

3. Media budgets are stretched. In a perfect world publishers would create video on their own and sell advertising against it. The majority of the time this is how it still works, but it can get expensive.

In a world of shrinking budgets and staff layoffs, always being creatively autonomous isn't a reality for a lot of media outlets. Digital properties need fresh content to keep people coming back, and it is well-documented that there's a dearth of premium video available. Branded content offers publications a needed stream of revenue for otherwise flat budgets.

4. All the cool kids are doing it: AOL, for example, has 40,000 network publisher sites in 90 countries using their branded content. And we're only one network. Branded Content is becoming a staple of marketing plans across the industry.

According to a 2013 study by eMarketer, 67% of brands partnered with content providers to create content of some form and then purchased a placement of that content as a form of advertising.

Data from the Content Marketing Institute also reports that 60% of B2C marketers and 58% of business-to-business marketers will increase branded content spending this year. A separate study from Curata found that 71% of marketers planned to increase their content marketing investments in 2014. That said, it makes sense to keep an open mind about it, and the benefits it could have for your site.