

Shane Snow is a freelance science and business journalist turned entrepreneur. In this interview with EuroScientist, he tells the story of how he co-founded Contently, a company initially created to help companies and brands to produce editorial and multimedia content telling their story. He also explains how the its business subsequently evolved into a technology company by incorporating the latest web tracking and analytics technologies to effectively distribute its content over the internet. Snow discusses the challenges of creating suitable content to help raise the profile of science, making a distinction between content that is promotional in nature and more critical journalistic content.



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Contently's Shane Snow: the key to using virtual soap boxes



Communicating science requires greater caution than other fields to guarantee accuracy and accountability

[Shane Snow](#) is Contently's chief creative officer. He is also one of the company's co-founders together with [Joe Coleman](#), "the business guy", and [Dave Goldberg](#), the "tech wizard." Six years ago, they set up a the company to help organisations raise their profile online. The content creation market they are tapping into is estimated to be worth "a few billion" dollars, according to Snow. Such content is used for online promotion using a strategy known as [content marketing](#).

As a former freelance science and business journalist, Snow explains how thanks to technology organisations can now be heard more effectively. They can stand on a virtual soap box, using the latest advances in online tracking and smart robotic recommendations as well as topic, tone and audience analysis to understand how their content has been received online. So should scientists and innovators take advantage of such methods? Find out in the podcast below recorded earlier this month, during the WebSummit 2016 in Lisbon.

Content is king

How did Contently come about? "It came from my own experience and the convergence of a few trends," Snow says. Back when it all started when the recession hit, he saw that freelance journalists had a hard time finding jobs. Due to the state of the economy, "journalists were treated as a variable cost." Meanwhile, one of Contently's co-founder was working for a company, which experienced difficulties in tracking down good writers. The two then had the idea to make these two groups work together.

Over time, Snow and his co-founders turned the business into a technology company. Not only do they still broker work for writers, but they have also developed a system matching writers with potential clients. They also developed a project management system for publishers and tools to analyse how effectively content is distributed over the internet.

As chief creative officer, Snow sees the need to [distinguish between content and journalism](#). "I define content as education, entertainment, information and journalism as a public service that's about informing people...protecting them and keeping the government in check and letting people know what's going on around them," he adds. Journalism falls under a sub-category in the content creation world. "So journalism is under the umbrella of content, but content is not journalism," remarks Snow.

Science communication

So where does science journalism fit in? Snow sees the role of science journalists as translating the findings of scientists for the public to understand. Among others, their role is also to flag up organisations linked to science that are being deceptive.

How can researchers and innovators benefit from creating content to tell their story? "I think they need help, both research science groups and commercial businesses that are in science category," Snow says. However, compared to creating content for commercial organisations, Snow recognises that "it gets a little bit tricky with science." What Snow likes the best are categories like entertainment or consumer education.

Indeed, "it is trickier when you are talking about things like science because the public doesn't inherently understand or is not seeing all the details going into the research," he points out. Covering commercial applications of science is less straightforward than, say Coca Cola, "making videos about polar bears, which people can't really argue, has any controversy."

Time will tell whether researchers or technology-based organisations choose to adopt approaches inspired by content marketing strategies and adapted to their specific needs to raise their profile through science communication. This does not preclude science journalists from adopting a critical stance towards them.

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