

Creating compelling Branded Content: A 'how to' guide for health brands



Branded content. It's advertising, but not as you know it. Used right, branded content can be a powerful marketing tool that you can use to subtly instill trust in your brand. If it's memorable for the right reasons, it's likely to get people talking, which will attach your brand name to positive connotations.

The aim of branded content is to evoke an emotional reaction in your audience, usually by means of storytelling. A successful branded campaign will offer immersive content that your audience will enjoy or appreciate. It could make them feel happy, inspired, reassured, or even sad.

You might aim to impress readers with your sentimental ethics or sustainability commitments, share expert healthcare advice, or tickle potential customers with your hysterical [competitor banter](#) (good one Aldi).

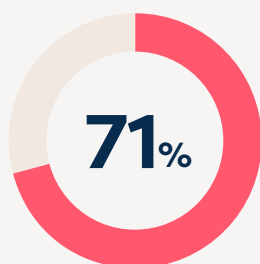
From our experience, branded content can be a pretty powerful marketing strategy for health and wellness brands – if done well.

Once you've got to grips with what branded content is and the role that it can play within your marketing strategy, you need to weigh up what it can do for your brand. But before we do this, you need to establish what branded content *isn't*.

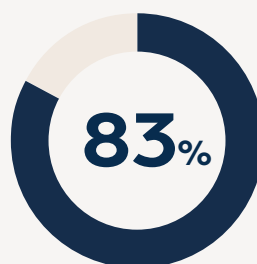
You see, despite what many assume, branded content is not the place to spotlight your clinically proven product, health claim, or showcase your latest self-care gadget. That's not to say you can't feature your brand or product at all, but the aim is to keep the approach non-invasive.

Read on to find out how.

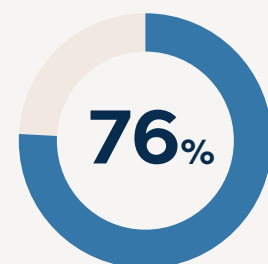
A 2020 report from PR agency 5Wpr found:



of consumers prefer buying from brands that share their values



of millennials think that it's important that the companies they buy from align with their beliefs



of 18-34-year-olds like it when CEOs of companies they buy from speak out on issues.¹



Branded Content... is it advertising or not?

Let us explain... Things like climate change, sustainability, equality and the gender health gap are topics at the height of discussion in 2022. This can lead brands to fall into the trap of thinking they can use these topics to greenwash their way into a place of trust, or herald the gender health gap flag with no real plans to address the real and pressing needs of women.

Things can get sticky if you over exaggerate what your company is doing to help the cause. This can actually lead to a loss of trust.

However, we've learnt that if your audience can relate to your content, and if they truly feel you are genuine in your cause and claims, you're bound to reap the success in performance metrics.

So why not just stick to a regular advertising campaign? One word... spam.

In today's society, the word 'spam' has become a blanket term to cover almost anything which directly advertises a product. As a consumer, it's hard to avoid the constant stream of invasive advertising like pop-ups, banners, direct mail, TV ads and radio jingles. Not to mention the ever-growing intrusive nature of ad targeting and smart devices that can track each and every swipe.

However, ad blockers, TV forward buttons, and the new UK GDPR rules are making it easier for consumers to take more control over what they see and receive. And even if they're not controlling it, chances are they've developed a blindness to the regular ads they do see.

In his 2022 article 'The attention crisis', Ben Graham highlights the stark reality of today's online banner advertising:

“In 1994 the first-ever banner ad appeared on Wired magazine's then website, hotwired.com, and 44% of people who saw the ad clicked on it. Today display ads average out at **0.35%** across industries.”

“**60%** of people who click on mobile ads say they do so accidentally.”²

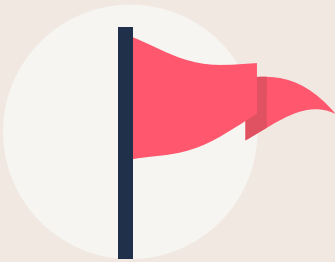
There are many rule variations when it comes to the type of ad you're creating, what the content is, and how you should mark it, but the bottom line is, branded content is classed as advertising, so you should always check [the rules](#) before you make the content live.

The ASA and CAP code state that “all advertising needs to be ‘obviously identifiable’. This means that when a consumer sees an ad, it should be obvious to them that they're looking at an ad.”⁴

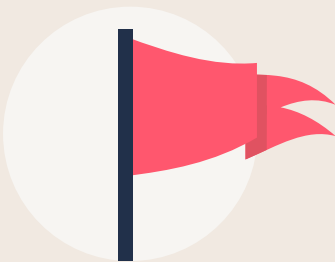


The **three red flags** of **Branded Content**

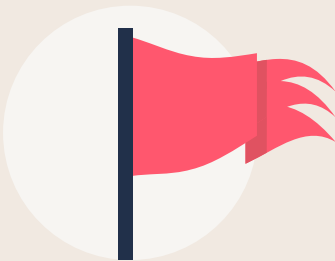
Let's talk through the three big branded content no no's so that you can avoid them like the plague. Over the years, we've learnt that this kind of strategy won't do a lot for your health brand unless done correctly – and it's easier to get it wrong than you'd think. The three flags below are mistakes which can make your content cross the line from branded content, into advertising.



Branded content is not about your product – it's about gaining or increasing the trust of your consumer. So, **the first red flag** to avoid is **heavy product feature**. A subtle mention isn't out of the question if it's contextual, but the overriding focus should be your story, your cause or the essential advice you're sharing, and very little else.



Our **second red flag** is **the use of claims and marketing spiel**. Branded content becomes much less effective as a strategy when sales and marketing language creeps in. As experts in language, we've seen first-hand how unsubtle claims and intrusive ad talk can dramatically affect the performance of your campaign. No one likes an obvious sales pitch, so if your hidden advertising is unsubtle, your audience will switch off.



Our **third and final red flag** is producing content which seems **forced or disingenuous**. Your viewers can smell desperation and stuffy stereotypes from a mile off, and if your cause or advice isn't plausible or relatable, it'll give off a stench. You should always be genuine.



What can Branded Content do for your health brand?

We know that forging a connection with your audience can translate to brand trust, and even loyalty. People don't always remember the words you say, but they remember how you made them feel. So, consider this question - what feeling do you want people to associate your brand with?

Is the emotion that you're hoping to convey in line with your brand values, and the products which you sell? Are you making a new mother feel less alone? Are you inspiring a teen to take control of their mental health? Are you reassuring a person who just received an unexpected diagnosis and doesn't know where to turn?

Then ask yourself, what can we offer our target audience? The goal of the campaign should aim to

✓	inform,
✓	educate,
✓	entertain.

If you're not ticking any of these boxes, you need to re-evaluate your campaign.

In our experience as health content experts, we have found that the best performing campaigns are ones which offer some sort of take away for the consumer. Well thought out branded content, whether it's a 'how to' guide, helpful tips, handy hacks, or expert advice, will gain you invaluable brand brownie points.

In fact, consumers are often keen to hear more from brands. In a recent study we conducted, over three quarters of women we surveyed said they wanted brands to support them with health information.

To really capture what branded content can do for your health brand, let's take a look at a real-life example.

A glance at branded content in action

Social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram are ideal for targeted campaigns, which has made them branded content hotspots.

In February 2021, women's intimate health brand, Canesten, launched an education platform in Brazil, Italy and Australia, known as Vagina Academy. Using TikTok, Canesten created a digital school on vaginal health designed to break the societal taboos and misconceptions around female genitalia.

To draw in a teen audience, the school offered interactive lessons with famous TikTokers as teachers. Since launching, the channel has racked up a massive 44 million total video views, and the Brazilian launch boasted 210,000 enrollments.

From this initiative, Canesten partnered with digital creative agency, [AnalogFolk London](#) to create [The truth, undressed](#) for a UK audience. The website includes lesson plans and resources developed with the PSHE (personal, social, health and economic) Association, designed to slot in next to the compulsory relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum.

By creating an innovative programme for one of their key demographics, Canesten have not only shown that they understand their audience, they've shown that they genuinely care about their best interest, positioning them as a brand that the up and coming generation can trust.

Feeling inspired? Let's start to consider some of the elements which could map out a plan for your strategy.

Planning, creating and delivering a successful Branded Content campaign

It takes a lot to co-ordinate a branded content campaign, but from concept to delivery, you can usually execute each stage using the following checklist:

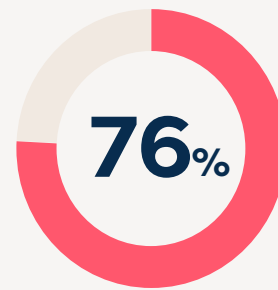
- 1 Identify your audience to determine the best format for delivery
- 2 Get creative with your concept and planning – concrete your theme/topic
- 3 Decide who will write, edit and proofread your copy/media
- 4 Determine how you'll distribute the content
- 5 Plan out a sustainable schedule and execute it
- 6 Launch and monitor your campaign
- 7 Report on campaign success

Throughout this planning process, checking your content against a list of dos and don'ts will help you stay on track.

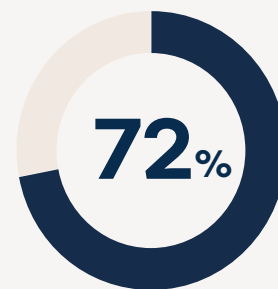
DO	✓	DON'T	✗
Use storytelling methods		Use salesy marketing language	
Strike an emotional nerve		Heavily feature your product	
Use current trends		Patronise your audience	
Aim to inspire and change perception		Make ingenuine statements	
Offer valuable, educational content		Break ASA/CAP guidelines	
Include tips, tricks and hacks		Create content without value or purpose	

Using influencers and social content creators as part of your campaign

A 2022 study by user-generated content platform, [TINT](#), revealed that:



of consumers have purchased a product because someone has recommended it.



of consumers think that reviews and testimonials directly from a customer are more trusted than what brands say about their own product.³

Statistics like these reaffirm that it can pay to use content creators, influencers, or even everyday customers as an integral part of your branded campaign. After all... **Who could be better to tell the story than the people living it?**

The great thing about sourcing social media creators is that there are plenty to choose from. Particularly in the health, wellness and lifestyle space.

Back in 2009, a teen called Zoe Sugg (AKA Zoella) created a blog and a YouTube Channel from which she shared beauty tutorials from her bedroom. As of today, [her channel](#) has 10.8 million subscribers, and through the popularity of her content, Zoe has since launched her own beauty range, a homeware range, and a series of books. 'Zoella' is also a thriving website which has branched from beauty and lifestyle to content which tackles some of the taboos around sex and women's health.

It's no surprise that so many everyday users are taking their shot at the 'get rich quick' scheme.

So, with a pool of content creators who are keen for paid work, it's just a matter of finding someone who suits your brand and will resonate with your leading demographic.

Managing creator and influencer admin

First, let's consider cost. Influencers and creators tend to base their rates on experience and following. For an established creator, following can range anywhere from 1K to a few million. Higher tier creators are likely to have standard set prices for regular requests, while many with a lower following will be guided by a fee suggested by you.

If you're hoping to approach a high tier influencer to create your content, it's common for their brand work to be managed via a talent agency who will take a cut of their fee.

Thrive tip

Remember that if you're hosting the content on your own site, the creator's following isn't always important. The focus should be quality and the creator's suitability for the campaign.

Let's say you're a cloth nappy brand looking for a parent creator to make a reel for your brand's Instagram as part of your 'go green' campaign. The influencer has around 2K followers, so depending on your budget, you could aim to offer them anywhere between £150 - £300. The fee will also differ depending on the platform. Any form of video is likely to be charged at more than a written article.

Fees can be very broad and negotiable, but if you're looking for a general guide, this may help:

Creator following	Video	Article
1-3K followers	£100 - £400	£75 - £150
5-10K followers	£200 - £600	£150 - £250
10K followers	£400 - £700	£300 - £400
10-30K+ followers	£500 - £800	£300 - £500
100K+ followers	£600 - £1000	£500 - £700

Thrive tip

Once you've initiated contact with your creator and made an agreement on theme, timescale and fee, it's a good idea to have a signed, written agreement in place.

No matter how basic the work, supplying the creator with a brief will help establish deadlines, word counts, video length and any of the specifics you're hoping for. **Without it, it's easy for these details to get lost in translation.**

Using industry experts

If the theme of your campaign deals with topics which are slightly more involved, you could commission an expert to create content. If there's one thing that we know at Thrive, it's the importance of offering informed and accessible expert content to those who need it.

Seek out and approach people who specialise in your focus topic on social media. You may even find that you have the perfect expert through your own business contacts.

Choosing an expert who will resonate with your audience, and who is able to inject personality into their content is essential for performance. If the delivery is inauthentic and cardboard, your audience will pick up on this and their trust in the content will start to diminish.

This extends to imagery too, as personal lifestyle photography resonates far more than static stock imagery.



Measuring the success of your branded content campaign

The end goal of a branded campaign is to raise brand awareness and trust, something that is almost impossible to measure in a report. One best practice to follow when initiating your campaign KPI's is to document which end goals you hope to achieve from the campaign.

Ask yourself this question: what does success look like to you? When you started the campaign, what were your overall goals?

Did you hope to educate your audience on an important topic which is close to your brand? Did you set out to change the perception of a current issue, or maybe even a lingering misconception about your brand?

Although metrics can't assess these end goals, monitoring comments, feedback surveys or even polls may help you get a good idea of how successful your campaign has been.

Some ways you can and should use to monitor the success of your campaign are metrics like:

- page views
- video views
- click-through rates
- engagement
- impression rates

Which you can access from various platforms.

Analytics reports are available on YouTube, Facebook and Google, but developing your own reporting system will help you compare and contrast the results for each campaign.

Get it right and branded content can be a powerful part of your marketing mix. Remember, an advert will sell a product, but the right content will sell your whole brand.



At **Thrive**, we've been creating branded health content for over twenty years, helping big brands create relationships with their customers.

As an award-winning behaviour change and health communications agency, we specialise in women's health. To hear more about how we could help you, **get in touch here**.

Or to see more of what we do, download **our latest report 'Changing the narrative'**, with key insights and opportunities for brands to leverage content and create empowering connections with women.

Find out more about our work at www.thriveagency.uk/work

Sign up to our newsletter at <https://www.thriveagency.uk/email-signup/>



Download our white paper
Digital opportunities for women's wellbeing



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