

The logo for 'content fusion' is centered within a light blue circle. The word 'content' is in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font. The word 'fusion' is in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font, with the letter 'o' containing a small graphic of three overlapping circles in red, yellow, and green. The background of the slide features a dark blue top section, a white middle section, and a grey bottom section, all separated by curved lines. Several large, overlapping circles in yellow, green, red, and blue are scattered across the page, some containing thin white outlines of other circles.

content fusion

In today's highly social and information-driven world, it is incumbent on companies and other organizations to match the social style of communication that employees, customers and other audiences have grown accustomed to in their daily lives. That means providing access to volumes of engrossing information and the ability to engage socially with nearly everyone.

Google provides immediate answers to our questions while illuminating things we never thought to ask; YouTube shows us how to play guitar, change a tire or plant a tulip; Facebook connects us with people we know and those we thought we'd never hear from again; and Twitter ties us to people we may well never meet but can gain value from "knowing." All the while, smart phones and tablets make this possible virtually anywhere at any time, and do so while taking full advantage of videos, images and photography.



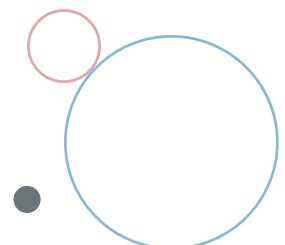
This easy access to highly visual information and social connectivity has contributed to the expectation – however unrealistic at times – that companies develop a similarly social and informative relationship with the public.

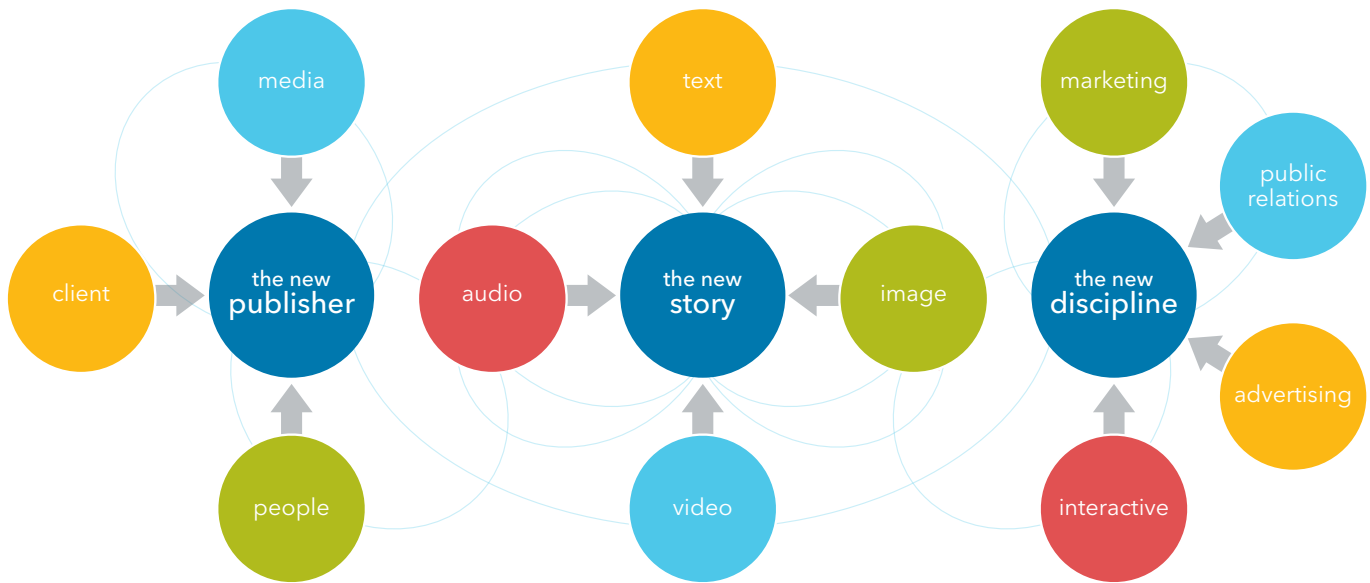
The majority of traditional news media understand this expectation already. They now present their stories in multiple formats, understanding that consumers expect a variety of options, both in **where** they get their news and **how** they absorb it. For example, any given CNN story is produced in several different mediums: a text-based story, a video, graphic images, photographs and anchor and reporter blogs and tweets.

Traditional media also understand that not everyone will visit their homepage or pick up their front page. So they distribute their stories across as many platforms as possible to maximize viewership. Links to articles are likewise tweeted, or shared on Facebook. Media blogs and other aggregators post or link to stories and write about them on their own “main” news sites. Stories are reconstituted for YouTube. In short, traditional media outlets understand the need for multiple platforms and formats when it comes to getting their news absorbed. They also know they must provide a means for their audiences to talk right back, both to them and to others in the crowd.

Apple summed all this up in a recent TV advertisement: “Now, we can watch a newspaper, listen to a magazine ...” In five seconds they captured the transcendence of information over format. It’s beyond text, more than a website or print publication. It’s mobile, it’s in our hands wherever we go. We can watch it, hear it, touch it, respond to it and – most critically, perhaps – **share** it. Never has the word **multi-media** taken on more meaning in our society.

This change plays out as the merging of once-discrete parts of the communications industry – i.e., **fusions** – where the reactions change how we work with the media, our clients, our colleagues and the public.





Publisher Fusion
 media +
 client + people


Where everyone with a smart phone is a reporter and anyone with Internet access is a publisher, it is clear that **we** are the media. While traditional media still drives much of the news and helps distill thousands of points of view into concrete stories, the fusion between audience and author exists in virtually every story from *The New York Times* to Twitter. “Pitching” the media means, in part, talking to everyone.

Story Fusion
 text + image +
 audio + video

Organizations can no longer produce content in one medium. Graphics, photography and video are as strategic and essential as the written word in our profession today and must accompany our outreach to media, both traditional and social.

Discipline Fusion
 marketing + public relations +
 advertising + interactive

Is a company’s Facebook page marketing, advertising, interactive or public relations? All four, of course. Even TV ads are not just “advertising” anymore; they live online, sparking comments by fans and foes alike, creating opportunities and obstacles for all four disciplines. We are written, digital and visual communicators needing to put forth messages in multiple formats. Most importantly, **communications today means dialogue**: We must respond with value to questions and comments about the messages we deliver.



Are we telling stories “inline” with the new ways media produce and people absorb information?

Are we meeting the “social” expectations of our audiences?

This raises two important questions:

1. Are we supplementing the text we have always provided to media with video, images and graphics to tell stories – “inline” with the new ways media produce and people absorb information?
2. Are we producing a variety of stories, formats and destinations to become more “social” – inline with the expectations of our audiences?

The answer is a partial yes to both questions. But PR professionals need to make two key changes to reach a full yes. The first is relatively simple: begin providing traditional media with assets beyond the written word. Accepting that stories are no longer solely a string of sentences, organizations need to present their news in multiple formats for delivery to the media. There are a relatively few formats, of course: text, image, photograph, audio, video. Not all stories need use all five formats, but all news can take advantage of more than one. Each news release distributed should be recalibrated to tell the same news via video, graphics and imagery – **because that’s how the media will retell the story, ultimately reaching a larger and more engaged audience as a result.**

The second question is more challenging. For many organizations it requires an internal operational change, restructuring how stories are told and who is doing the telling within the organization. This change requires that an organization become its own media outlet, publishing a wider array of content than what was traditionally considered to be “news” and doing so via its own channels. This does not mean creating a story for its own sake. It means producing real stories, strategically chosen, produced in multiple formats and widely distributed. And once that content is published, it needs to be open for discussion between the public and the organization that distributed it.

Weber Shandwick has defined a communications framework that helps an organization address both of these questions: ***Content Fusion***.

Content Fusion defines an organization’s own unique ***storytelling ecosystem*** by identifying stories that can best be told in each respective format and driving the stories accordingly. Publishing and promoting the stories online through all available means ignites public conversations, connecting a company with its constituents, and realizing the promise of heightened information-sharing and socialization.

Content Fusion should not be regarded as social media-centric. It's broader than that, a comprehensive storytelling or news-sharing framework that identifies where to develop news, how to produce it, where to put it and describes what to do once the news is out. While it uses social media tools and channels, it also uses every traditional media channel as well.

Nor is *Content Fusion* merely a consumer proposition. Industries and advocates across the spectrum – high-tech, healthcare, government, agriculture, financial services – that benefit from being perceived as thought leaders stand to benefit from socializing their content and communicating it visually. *Content Fusion*, properly executed, can amplify the impact and extend the reach of symposia and seminars, conferences, white papers and reports, the pillars of business-to-business communication.

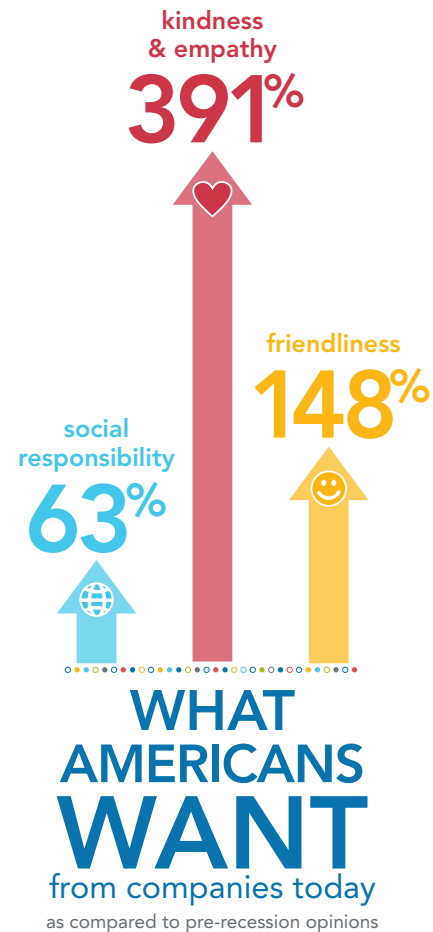
Additionally, the humanization inherent in online social networks enhances employee retention/recruitment. Some 96 percent of millennials, the developing workforce, have joined a social network. Graduates today expect a company both to be genuine and to be *present* in their lives.

Lastly, successful issues/crisis management hinges on an organization's ability to respond quickly and with transparency. Crises today play out as dialogues, not a sequence of dictated statements from the organization under the microscope over the duration of the crisis. Without establishing its presence as a social organization, a company is unable to make itself heard as well or as credibly as it could in an authentic two-way exchange.

In *The Power of the Post-Recession Consumer*, Booz + Co includes an insight that on first blush may appear to be unrelated to social media. In analyzing the change in consumer behavior resulting from the recent recession, the report notes that Americans developed a dramatically different set of expectations from companies. Desire for qualities of "kindness and empathy" rose 391 percent over pre-recession levels, "friendly" was up 148 percent and "socially responsible" up 63 percent.

"Between 2005 and 2009, U.S. consumers expressed a nearly fourfold increase in their preference for companies, brands, and products that show kindness in both their operations and their encounters with customers," the report said. **"This desire for companies to be more empathetic toward consumers is the biggest shift in any attitude that we have ever seen during the BAV survey's two-decade history."**

Future sociology professors will probably have a better answer than we have today on what precisely makes people in our time seek a more intimate relationship with organizations. Is it driven by new technologies, human social instinct, the recession ... or some other unknown factor? Meanwhile, we must help our clients respond effectively to these new demands in the marketplace.



The Power of the Post-Recession Consumer,
Booz + Co

How Content Fusion Works

Content Fusion uses six key drivers to help an organization achieve its business objectives in this new environment: **listening**, **stories**, **formats**, **vehicles**, **destinations** and **conversations**. These drivers work toward establishing an organization as a publisher of its own “news” in a wide array of mediums and destinations, the end result being an increasing level of trust amongst its key audiences and the public.

listening

Any successful social media campaign begins with listening to the current conversations that surround your organization and its industry. Knowing what matters to your constituents and what kind of knowledge they are seeking is key to the *Content Fusion* framework. Listening informs an organization about which stories will best resonate and in which destination they will ring most true. A story told in the wrong place to the wrong audience is a waste of resources and may lead to other negative consequences.

stories

Every organization has **unique** stories. These stories come from within the heart of the organization: its **people**, **events**, **knowledge**, **data**, **research**, **science**, etc. Identifying these stories helps a company move toward becoming its own news outlet, producing content beyond what was once considered “news.” We’re not talking about corporate “fluff” or content for content’s sake. Nor are we talking about a high volume of stories, but rather a few, strategically distributed. We’re talking about real, meaningful, informative stories only that organization could create. Sometimes they are entertaining. Sometimes they are analytical, or insightful, or research-driven ... hopefully it’s some combination of all of these and more.

Consider the example of a hypothetical corporate scientist in Argentina researching plants in search of an enzyme to develop a more eco-friendly plastic. Her knowledge and experience are unique to herself and her company, and can be shared as a story – widely. Her story has potential relevance to people interested in science, biology, travel, engineering and green initiatives. The ecosystem for this one story is vast.

formats

Our scientist’s story can also be told in a variety of formats to achieve the greatest level of interest and sharing – **text**, **photo**, **image**, **video**, **audio**. (Remember: we now **watch** our newspapers.) Our scientist can take photos and videos from the field, through which she can **show**, not just tell, her developing story. Graphic artists can take her data and produce infographics to be shared across the Internet. To be absorbed and shared, the story must live beyond the written word alone.



vehicles

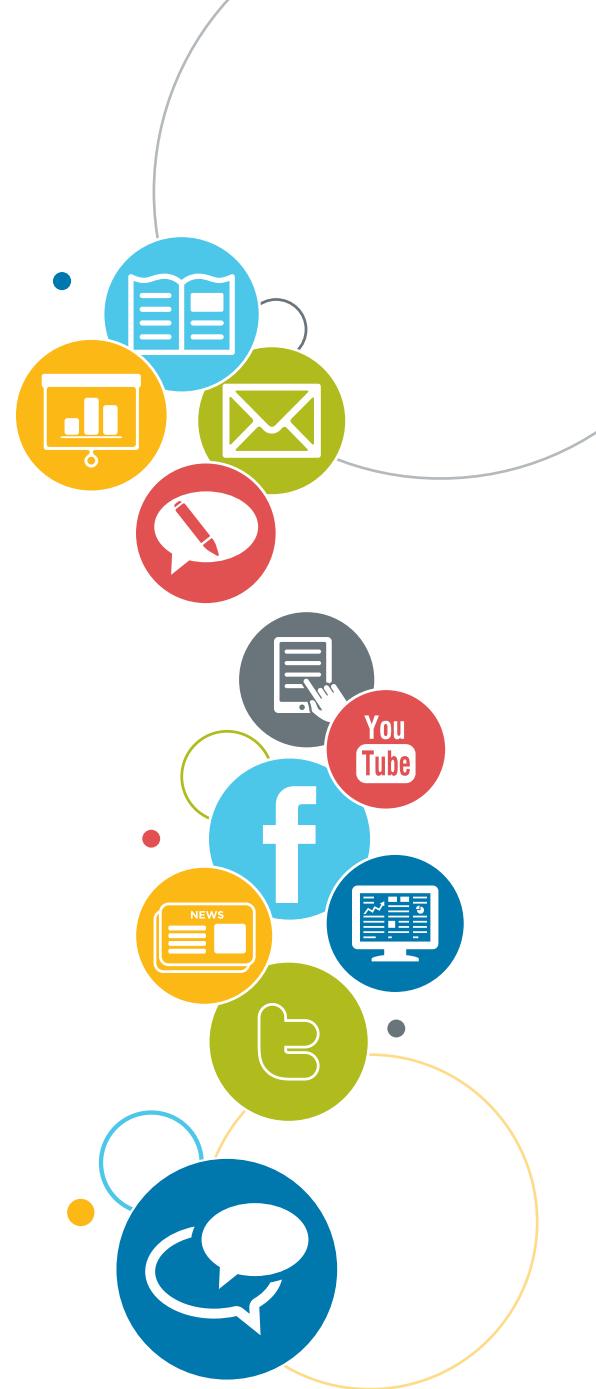
But, what does our scientist **do** with these videos and pictures and words once she has them? How do the infographics and mp3 files get shared? Every format listed above can be placed into multiple content vehicles – e.g., [news releases](#), [slideshows](#), [white papers](#), [Facebook and LinkedIn posts](#), [podcasts](#), [comments](#), [tweets](#) and [emails](#), to name a few. The more relevant the vehicles used, the deeper the content will be driven across the company's storytelling ecosystem.

destinations

A vehicle without a destination is at best a Sunday drive. These vehicles can be driven to multiple destinations to reach desired audiences – [websites](#), [blogs](#), [events](#), [apps](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Scribd](#), [Slideshare](#), [YouTube](#), [Flickr](#), [newspapers](#), [TV](#), [radio](#) and [magazines](#). Importantly, as one format can use many different vehicles, one vehicle can drive to many different destinations. A video shot by our scientist lives on the company's website, its blog and YouTube channel, or on a related video on someone else's YouTube channel. The infographics are shared on Facebook, Flickr, Twitter and scores of other destinations.

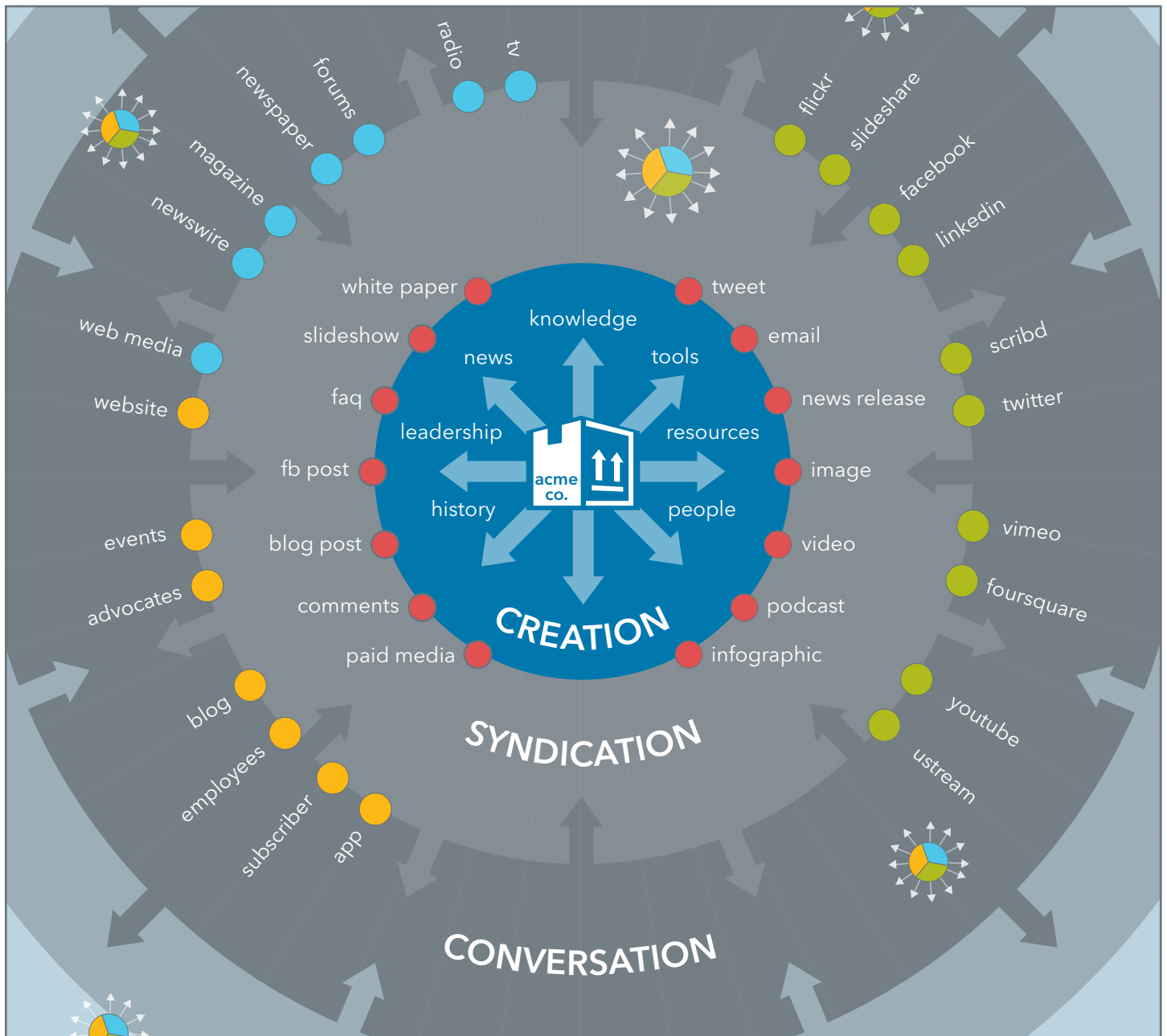
conversations

Many destinations have the potential to stimulate conversations. For example, our scientist's video might drive comments, tweets and posts from its presence on YouTube and/or the corporate website or blog and most destinations that host the video. These conversations create socialization and build trust for the brand and company. Not to be overlooked, these very conversations can in turn spawn more stories and begin the cycle again.



Conclusion

Organizations can capitalize on the emerging potential of social media by establishing their own voice – in effect, by functioning like peers and publishers in their own right, augmenting whatever they do with intermediaries such as the news media. To build their voice, they must create opportunities to share meaningful stories that use many formats, vehicles and destinations. *Content Fusion* brings order to what could otherwise be a chaotic mingling of messages and media, helping an organization achieve the level of corporate humanization necessary to function effectively in today's mobile, social and information-driven society.



Storytelling Ecosystem

WEBER SHANDWICK

- company stories
- content vehicles
- brand ground
- common ground
- conversations
- user ground

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