

Academics should express an “editorial mission” in order to create consistent media content

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There is now substantial space and appetite for academic content on the web, but maintaining momentum on these platforms can be an uphill struggle with other pressing teaching and research priorities. [Kevin Anselmo](#) looks at what researchers can learn from media companies and argues it is important to think about the driving forces that will enable you to execute your content goals.



The radical changes in the digital communications infrastructure have made it possible for any organization or individual to be a media company. To a certain extent, individual academics' YouTube channels, blogs and podcasts compete for individuals' attention just as TV stations, newspapers or radio stations do. The problem is that many academics' content hubs are inconsistent and sporadic (for example, a blog updated every six months).

Surely, your primary role as an academic is teaching and research. But if you want to be serious about your content creation and reap the related benefits, you need to model some of the traditional media's approaches.

Editorial mission

It starts by defining an editorial mission. Most every media outlet has an editorial mission that answers three questions:

- Who is the core audience?
- What will you deliver to them?
- What is the desired outcome?

As an example of an individual editorial mission statement, consider what Duke University Professor [Dan Ariely](#) states on his [blog](#):

Hi, I'm Dan Ariely. I do research in behavioral economics and try to describe it in plain language. These findings have enriched my life, and my hope is that they will do the same for you.

These friendly few sentences essentially are his editorial mission. I encourage you to answer and apply these editorial mission questions for yourself. It will help you be strategic and focused.

Editorial beats

Most media outlets have editorial beats. For instance, a newspaper will have someone covering the police beat, the education beat, the sports beat, etc. As an academic creating content, you should think about editorial beats in the same way. Once you have your broad categories, you can narrow it down to come up with specific titles that need to be delivered within that beat.



Image credit: Marjory Collins Wikimedia (Public Domain)

Let's role-play this and say you are looking to create content to position your book on refugees' adaptation to a new culture. (This same model could be applied regardless of your discipline and the topic you wish to focus on). Let's say we define three editorial beats: 1) best practice; 2) research; and 3) community perspectives.

Ideas for titles and subjects for the best practice beat would be:

- How refugees can best learn a new language
- How refugees can secure meaningful employment
- How religious organizations can integrate refugees into their congregations
- Other how-to best practice

For the research beat, titles and subjects could be:

- Resources overview
- How to teach students to be responsible policy-makers as it relates to refugee adaptation
- Case studies
- Analysis of research on refugee adaptation

For the community perspectives ideas, this could be an opportune time to make your audiences the story. This could involve:

- Interviews with refugees
- Interviews with policy makers
- Interviews with NGO leaders working in this space
- Guest contributions from your community

From each category, you could easily flesh out additional topics.

From there, just as a media outlet does, it might make sense to come up with an editorial calendar. Maybe the goal is that each month, you will create one new piece of content in each editorial beat category, ensuring three new features. The editorial calendar can outline the subject, description and deadlines for a particular piece of content. The deliverables may vary, but consistency is key.

Inspiration vs. perspiration

It is important to think about the driving forces that will enable you to execute your content goals. There is a big difference between creating content based on inspiration vs. an obligation to achieve a goal. Inspiration will only take you so far. If you feel like creating a piece of content, you will do so at your convenience. If you have a responsibility to create a piece of content, then you will do so regardless of circumstances.

Surely there are times that your favorite columnist doesn't feel like writing his / her weekly piece or your favorite news anchor isn't keen to report the evening news. Fortunately, they are not creating content based on how they feel. If you as an academic want to be serious about creating content that helps achieve some of your personal goals, you need to have a similar mindset.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

About the Author

Kevin Anselmo is the creator of [Media Training for Academics](#), a program that helps professors, researchers and PhD students communicate their research and ideas both through traditional and digital media. The program is available as online course or can be tailored for live in-person workshops. Kevin previously led PR initiatives for IMD, a business school in Switzerland, and Duke University's Fuqua School of Business. You can subscribe to his free [Communications Tips for Academics newsletter](#). You can subscribe to his free [Communications Tips for Academics newsletter](#) and follow him on Twitter [@kevinanselmo](#).

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