

Justine Drake's recipe for award-winning content

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Fresh from New York City with a Pearl Award under her arm (The Content Council's Content Director of the Year award, no less), John Brown Media South Africa's head of content and editor of Fresh Living magazine, Justine Drake, shares her five-ingredient recipe for creating successful content.



Before we get stuck in, let me just say that there's nothing new or ground-breaking about creating content that works. It's simple storytelling, really. Tell your audience a story about something they genuinely find interesting, and chances are they'll be back for more. I do it every night with my six-year-old son. There would be absolutely no point spinning yarns about princesses and fairies, when cars and trains are his first and (at this stage) only love.

Which, in fact, brings me to my first ingredient for this recipe...

1. Customer knowledge

This is the Holy Grail of content (well, any kind of effective communication, really) and can often make one rather unpopular with The Client, who does tend to get confused between brand KPIs and customer needs, wants and interests. Plus, The Client is holding the purse strings, but that does not mean they are necessarily right. Cue ingredient number two...

2. Bravery

It takes courage to push back when you feel The Client isn't doing what's best for the customer. Back in the day, this was only possible if you had a higher-than-normal EQ and a rather persuasive demeanour – both still help enormously, but these days we have data (cue the gasp-inducing molecular effect of dry ice swirling around a freshly shucked oyster).

Fascinating, fact-based, quantifiable insights into customers' lives on every level. What more could one need? May I suggest a large dose of ingredient number three...

3. Emotion

While data is most certainly vital in informing a relevant creative process, ensuring content is more impactful and delivers client ROI, emotion is the one thing that needs to come from within. It's an innate understanding, a sensitivity, dare I say it,

a knowing. Without emotion, data has no real-life context. Drumroll, please, for ingredient number four...

4. Creativity

This is what brings data to life, and it's a multi-faceted ingredient. It's design (colour, fonts, imagery, styling). It's words and tone of voice. It's excitement. It's novelty. It's also familiarity. It is an ability to resonate, to bring insight and empathy to life. To talk to, not at. To cry alongside, not beside. To laugh with, not at. To be relevant and authentic and above all, interesting. And to achieve this effectively, you need the client, a team of data experts, creatives, suits and the odd office rogue to work together as a team. In other words, you need ingredient number five...

5. Collaboration

The Client brings the cash and belief; the data delivers the insight and the creative team translates the emotion.

With a bit of luck and these five key ingredients, you might just have yourself a winning formula!

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