

WATCH: Investec's Ingrid Booth and Ann Muthuma on the value of content marketing

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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I recently hosted a conversation between Investec's lead digital content producer, Ingrid Booth and head of Marketing, Corporate & Institutional Banking, Ann Muthuma to find out their thinking around the value of content marketing and the evolving role of content or media in the marketing function within Investec, as a case in point, and the greater industry.

To provide some context, Investec's content marketing or publishing platform, [Focus](#) launched about three years ago and is run by a team of in-house journalists, and incorporates various thought leaders across the organisation to produce content that is engaging, relevant and adds value to its clients and prospects.

Booth said that over the last few months, they've really ramped up their content offering and particularly their efforts in helping their clients navigate the crisis and now they're looking at 'beyond Covid', such as the future of work and the economic impact on various industries.

Looking back to when we went under lockdown at the end of March, she says April was a record month in terms of traffic and the number of articles that were going out. "We really went into overdrive producing content... We were seeing massive engagement rates on the platform. People were spending up to 20 minutes looking at our webcast, we had an average time of 9 minutes on the site, and so there was this real hunger for content." They also noticed an upsurge in interest when it came to longer-form content and listening to podcasts, she added.

Investec has been steering some content initiatives to assist economically active citizens to make sense of recent events, such as their Road to Economic Recovery webcast series and [Women Behind the Mask initiative](#). Muthuma tells us how these conversations came about and how the bank is using content to





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With regard to their Road to Economic Recovery webcast, Muthuma said they thought to engage various stakeholders to discuss South Africa's scenarios for the future to help map out a road to economic recovery. And they applied their learnings to their Women Behind the Mask initiative, which they launched in August to showcase women in business making a difference and discussions on how women can help each other build back better.

For Muthuma, it's about having real, day-to-day conversations, talking about what really matters to their clients or prospects and in a relatable and accessible way. "I think what's different now with content is that people are keen to hear what others are saying, especially if they're trustworthy, if they're being real, if they're not just giving you a company line, if they're really having an engaged conversation and, more importantly, if they're seen to be seeking answers to today's problems."

"We haven't necessarily worn a marketing lens.

We've worn a human lens, and I think that's what's worked."



Ann Muthuma, head of Marketing, Corporate & Institutional Banking at Investec

Booth added that during the crisis would have been the worst time to do a hard product push because you'd come across completely insensitive and out of touch.

Muthuma agreed, saying that they've hardly talked about their products or services. While clients have approached them, looking for solutions to their businesses, they've also been looking for guidance as to what next steps to take. "Today they need some clarity, some assurance that you'll walk this road with them. That's what they need right now."

Booth went on to say how Covid has accelerated digital and that brands cannot afford to not be online. "I think it's been coming for a long time, but the amplification that digital can give your content is huge... We used to have these amazing events at Investec, we'd have 200 people come into the building, and have a really cool panel or a speaker, but then they go away and it's just those 200 people that are reached. Now we can target 100s of 1000s of people really carefully, and select who we're sending our messaging to, but we can then put that on social media, newsletters, display... there are so many avenues for us to get that content out, so I really think digital content is just going to get bigger and bigger."

Then commenting on the blurring of the lines between brand and media platforms, whereby brands are now becoming publishers and content creators in their own right, Booth tells us why she thinks this is the case. She said this is gaining a lot of traction in South Africa, especially with the rise of purpose-driven brands. As she said previously:

"It would have been the worst time to do a hard product push, but content marketing in itself is much more of a long-term game, where you're building trust and loyalty with your clients and prospects. And when they're ready to make that

decision about who they want to bank with, then we've already built up that relationship with our content. ”

It's also important to note that brands that publish their own content, such as Investec in this case, are not necessarily competing with the media houses. Booth believes there's room for collaboration. "We've got quite a niche audience and there's definitely room for collaboration, especially with progressive media outlets who are already looking at ways that we can place sponsored content on their sites, ways we can participate with them on their podcasts.

"I think we're going to see more brands becoming publishers, and for us, it's a really cost-effective way of marketing. It's not as expensive as traditional advertising and it also really enhances our SEO, so by having this really rich content and videos and podcasts on our site, we see our search rankings are really improving, and that helps all of our product pages as well. And we tightly integrate our editorial content on our product pages, so if you've got an investment page that talks about the products we offer, then we bring in our content there too, so it adds another layer of interest. So, if someone's interested in investing, they can find out about the latest trends or find out from our experts, so it really enriches our marketing offering," she went on to explain.

"Speaking of media houses and all the recent closures, if any corporates are looking to start a content initiative, there are some incredible journalists out there," stressed Booth. "We've seen so many amazing titles close down that there's a really rich base of really talented people out there that are looking for opportunities."

When I asked Muthuma whether she thinks brands should tactically shift to relevant and topical narratives or rather stick to their true north, she said it's a bit of both.

She said today organisations have to think about their purpose broader than just pure profits and how they can have a positive impact on society.

"When we talk about purpose, I think companies that just exist today purely to make profits... if they're not dead they're dying, and the reason is we don't live *on* society, we live *in* it, and that's a lovely expression that is well said within the halls at Investec... The reality is all of the stuff that we do has an impact. It has an impact on society, it has an impact on the environment, we've got to think of those things in the way that we conduct our business because if we don't, it's a very short-term view of the world and somewhere along the way it will manifest itself in a negative way, so you've got to look broader than just pure profits."

Then explaining how they plan, produce and monetise content to stay relevant and engaging to their audiences, Booth said that all of their articles are aligned to their PR and overarching thought leadership strategy. "When we're looking at a piece of content, we look at it through three lenses. The first is do we have the authority to speak about that topic? So, obviously, as a bank we can talk about markets and the economy, but we also have authority to speak about a lot of issues around sustainability, for example.

"The second thing is, is it unique? Investec prides itself on being 'out of the ordinary'. Is it a unique perspective or angle or are we offering clients unique access to this amazing person that they might not get elsewhere?

"And then the third one is, is it impactful? Is it really making a difference to our audiences' lives?"

Investec has a strong community across the group, which has allowed for collaboration around various projects. "We really try and work together on a lot of things and we really are working closely with our PR teams so that we no longer put out a boring press release. We're now able to give the media a really meaty editorial piece or access to a really interesting individual," continued Booth.

In terms of monetisation, content marketing is a much longer-term game than traditional advertising, she said. Their aim is to boost traffic to the site, and eventually convert that into quality leads. "One of the stats that we're quite proud of is that of people who visit *Focus* and engage with *Focus* content, those people are 53% more likely to fill out a lead form on one of our product pages, so it really is building that relationship and that audience."

Muthuma noted that the two most important things for them have been **engagement and relevance** and that this drives what they do and the kind of content they generate, and Booth added that content adds **dynamism and depth** to their digital properties. “Content marketing enhances all of our communications, because it gives us stuff to talk about in PR, and it really helps us in our internal communications because now we’re sharing these kinds of insightful pieces with our staff. It helps with SEO, PR, PPC. It’s fueling all those different channels.

“So, we really are seeing the value in it, and it gives you a starting point to have a conversation with a client. If you’ve got a piece of content that’s really relevant to their business, great conversation starter to send that to them.

“It’s taken about three years to get up and running but we’re now seeing the benefits.”

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