



Transitioning to Experiences

Guest was Robert Rose

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## ***Transcription of Interview***

**Joe:** *Welcome everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of the Business901 Podcast. With me today is Robert Rose. Robert serves as the Chief Strategy Officer for the Content Marketing Institute and is also a Senior Contributing Analyst for the Digital Clarity Group. For more than 20 years, Robert has been helping marketers to tell their story more effectively, author of several books, with the latest being 'Experiences: The 7th Era of Marketing.' He is a successful podcaster with the podcast 'This Old Marketing' and just was recognized by Inc. I think you said, Robert. What did they recognize your podcast for?*

**Robert:** *Well, I think they recognized maybe the title of it or something like that, that it has 'marketing' in it. No. First of all, it's great to be here Joe. Thank you very much for having me. You know, I think Joe and I have been lucky enough. We've been doing this for 129 weeks in a row. I think after a while you just start to win because of pure persistence, rather than anything else. It was very kind of them to notice us as their number 1 podcast that entrepreneurs should be listening to, so we were really tickled by the whole thing.*

**Joe:** *That is very exciting. Now, is your podcast just Joe and you talking or do you have guests? How does that work?*

**Robert:** No, it's just Joe, and I sort of squawking at each other. What we do, it's a news show. We cover the news, and pretty much everything that has to do with what's going on in content marketing, native advertising, branded content, and sometimes just digital marketing and social media more broadly. But really, how does it play into how content is being used more effectively as a business strategy. Sort of under that broad umbrella, we cover the news, and then we have a rants and raves section, and we talk a little bit about what's going on in culture and all that stuff as well.

**Joe:** *That's very cool. Well, you might just want to introduce Joe for a moment here before we get started, so the listeners know who Joe is.*

**Robert:** Oh sure, yeah. Joe Pulizzi, he's the founder and CEO of the company that I do work with, and I serve as the Chief Strategy Officer of the Content Marketing Institute. The Content Marketing Institute is an organization that's really out there to evangelize the process and strategic approach to content marketing and how it can be used to really effect a smart business goal.

However, you're trying to use content more intelligently and more effectively in your business; that's what we're out to evangelize. We got a little bit of a blog going. We've got about 500,000 audience members who come every month, and we got our print magazine and then, of course, we have our big event which is the Content Marketing World, which happens in September in Cleveland every year. This year, we'll have about 5000 people show up to that. Then there's the business I run, which is of course advisory and education. I do all the curriculum for the education stuff that we do.

**Joe:** *Well, you're a busy man. Your first book was about content marketing and now 'Experiences,' is that the next evolution? Kind of a deeper dive into content marketing?*

**Robert:** Well, it's a little bit. It is a deeper dive, for sure. Almost twice the size and length, that it's definitely more detailed. 'Managing Content Marketing' which was my first book and this is 3 to almost 4 years old now, so it itself is a little dated but ideally, what it's supposed to do is really get everybody educated in a level set about how to operationalize content in the business.

What 'Experience' talks to us about is really this next evolution of marketing because the history of marketing which many people don't understand because of the number of areas that people come to these days to marketing, either as digital natives or as sales or as journalists increasingly and so many different walks of life are coming into the marketing crack just to try and affect a smart strategy but quite frankly, they don't know the history of it. What it does is it walks through the first really 150 years of how we've used content as a marketing practice and then secondarily, how do we actually take that into a deeper dive of really a methodology of how we use content, create content as a strategic scale or process in the organization.

**Joe:** *I have to clarify a little bit of your title here. What do you mean by the 7<sup>th</sup> Era? I mean did I miss the other 6 maybe?*

**Robert:** You might have. So in university, when you go to university, you usually hear about the 5 eras of marketing and it starts off in the 1800's that talk about the 'trade era' where we made, grew or crafted stuff, and we made, grew, or crafted more than we could use and quite frankly, we sold the surplus of it. That moves us into the 'production era' when we introduced mass production and the idea that we could actually move product from not just our local storefront or our marketplace, but actually all over the country or in some cases, all over the world and that's where the place of the 4 P's really starts to

emerge in the 1920's and going into the 1930's. In the 1930's we had what's called the 'sales era' which is when sales, largely driven by the worldwide great depression really drove the idea of making salesmen and the sales process an official part of the business itself, which moves us into what's called the 'marketing department era' which starts in the 40's and goes up through the mid-60's and that was really about the Don Draper emergence of Madison Avenue advertising product as our focus, really focusing on the product as aspirational and positioning of that product is aspirational, which moves us into the 80's and 90's which gets us to what's called the marketing, 'the brand era' where we move into brand as offering.

That's your 5 eras of marketing that take us up to about the mid-90's. Now most scholars will tell you we're in a 6<sup>th</sup> currently which is called the 'relationship era' which started really in the early 90's with the beginnings of CRM, customer relationship management and really the idea of managing data to really effect a deeper relationship with customers, and you can argue that that's really where we've involved into with social media and trying to become more and more intimate with our customers to be friends, etcetera, etcetera. As that starts to really mature and become quite frankly more complex, this is what the book contends is that we're actually now moving into the 7<sup>th</sup> era of marketing which we call 'Experience,' which is really the creation of delightful, anticipatory experiences at all parts of the buyer's journey to effect a smarter business result.

**Joe:** *So that's standing now but I mean we're in this era that I'm hearing customer experience, innovations, storytelling. I mean they're all kind of blending to me a little bit. What do I need to understand as a marketer from these words? I mean can you put some depth to a couple of them things as a marketer on how I should be looking at them?*

**Robert:** Sure. Well, certainly innovation now has become used and abused as a word.

But, if you even went back to Peter Drucker 60 years ago, he's famously quoted to saying 'there are only two functions in the business – innovation and marketing and everything else is a cost.' And so marketing and innovation become the unique distinguishing functions of the business, and that's his quote, not mine. Innovation as a focus on something new, in other words developing something new that continually disrupts your business is a smart strategy no matter what era of marketing you find yourself in.

What that usually starts to merge into is and to your point is this idea of, okay, what is the story? Why are we talking about storytelling? The idea of storytelling is again a word that has become used and very much abused these days, and this is my background, you know. I come from Hollywood, and I wrote screenplays, and I wrote plays, and I have an English literature degree from University and what I was taught was at the end of the day, the story is nothing other than an argument. It's really trying to get your point across and proven in an entertaining, informative, educational way. In other words, I want to engage you. I want to make sure that you are engaged during my tale and ultimately prove a point to you.

When I think of a B to B company or an engineering company or really anybody, the story is really how can I have a distinct point of view on a market or how can I have a distinct point of view about solving a customer's problems and then tell you that in a really interesting way that delivers value to you. That's at the heart of storytelling, and that then moves into, great, what are we actually creating to tell these stories?

What we would argue and contend in the book is that you're creating experiences, customer experiences and your audience certainly in service design will absolutely recognize this. This is something that's been around for hundreds of years, really. It's this idea that what we're doing here is we're creating optimal interfaces into our approach to

solving a customer's problem. If you look at it from a marketing perspective just for a second, this is where Theodore Levitt in the 60's would tell you that people don't buy a hammer or nail they buy a hole in the wall. What we're trying to do is give you a better, more effective job, the jobs to be done and be able to create that in a service-design way to actually help the customer perform that job. Content is at the heart of all of that, and that's really what we're contending in the book, 'Experiences.'

**Joe:** *I really enjoyed the book because it hit right into what I talk about and what I do. One of the parts that really grabbed me was that the buyer's journey is no longer guided. All these people out there are building personas, creating a journey, building a marketing collateral accordingly and sometimes, there's not even a customer within a hundred miles of them. Tell me a little bit about what you meant there.*

**Robert:** Sure. Well, the first thing is that we have gotten wrapped around the axle of the buyer's journey. I mean I had a company send me their buyer's journey, literally in an email. It was a 10-page PDF document, and it was one of those things where you had to like paste it up on the wall because it was like a poster size thing and it was beautiful, right? It mapped the emotional state, and it had every stage of the decision, and every decision was mapped and all this. It was 72 steps in this person's buyer's journey and their question to me was how are we going to map content to every step? I said you won't. Stop trying to do that. You are not going to guide your customer through some mythical path that is going to ultimately enable a decision in your favor. What you have to do is be strategic at a few pieces of that buyer's journey.

In other words, if I can look at a buyer's journey, and you know that means understanding it, it means creating it, and building it, and understanding your customer's path through their buying process to the extent you can, but instead of trying to map every single step

along the way with some piece of content or a blog post or something, it's rather how can I create an experience at a few strategic points within that buyer's journey so that quite frankly, they become lighthouses, and when I go into one experience as a customer, the only thing I want to do after I come out of that experience has another with you. And if I can have another with you, then I can see that lighthouse on the next path, and however I get there is fine. If I take this path, it's fine. If I take that path, it's fine. If I stop and take a rest and don't come to it for another month or so, that's fine. That's the non-linear experience that we have now with customers.

Creating strategic points along that path just to help sort of not guide them but actually be resources for them as they discover their own paths, that's the strategy these days, and it's quite frankly the only way we'll be able to ever scale to the needs that we have against all these channels and platforms and technologies. Quite frankly, I don't care how big the company is, you can't scale that way. You just have to be the guiding light for a customer on their own path.

**Joe:** *You really need to facilitate the conversation somewhat. Maybe not be the conversation, right?*

**Robert:** Yeah, well, or as I like to say, you can't lead the customer, but you can certainly orchestrate the events that inspire the customer to take their own path. The word I like is orchestrate, because if you think of a conductor in an orchestra, they're not playing all the instruments. They're not actually telling the musicians how to play; they're actually leading and orchestrating the entire orchestra to play together in a harmonic way, and that's what we're really trying to do. We can't lead. We can't dictate. We don't even control, but we can orchestrate the best experiences that we can create at every step. Whether it's an awareness or lead nurturing or a loyalty experience, we can create value at every step that



we feel is strategic and then create that strategic value so that the next thing that they want is to have the next one with us.

**Joe:** *Are customers getting smarter, though? I mean are they feeling that they are being orchestrated? I mean they run from that if they do, don't they?*

**Robert:** They can certainly. Yes. This is one of those things where I say personalization, for example, personalization is like plumbing. It really works best when you don't notice it and if when personalization calls attention to itself, that's when people start to feel creeped out. They start to feel a little icky. They start to feel like why are you doing this. And usually, when it calls attention to itself is quite frankly when it's wrong when it's an error. You go to a website, and you see this all the time, it's like Amazon makes this mistake. I don't know why they continue to do it, but you're on Facebook, and you'll see an Ad on Facebook for the very thing that you just purchased yesterday. It's like, why are you showing me an Ad for the things that I purchased yesterday? That's when you start calling attention to itself, and that's when to your point, the customers just start running away because quite frankly they're like, this is not valuable to me.

**Joe:** *How do you optimize it, though? I mean because does it really rely on your people being trained that well and offering that personal experience? It seems that like everybody wants the personal experience but can you really be that one on one in supplying it?*

**Robert:** Well, you don't have to be I guess would be my argument. There's a difference between personal and personalized. When I read a magazine that really delivers me value, it's rarely personalized, but it's usually quite personal; it hits me at a personal level and quite frankly, that's the content I want to share. Nobody shares their personalized content. Everybody shares personal content because guess what, it inspires, educates, informs,

entertains, whatever it is, and it's personal to you. It resonates with you personally, but it's not necessarily, hi Joe, this is exactly what... Etcetera, etcetera.

So to your question how do you actually start to look at the skills that's needed to do that, it's really at the end of the day, what we find is that getting to the customer's core value. Again, your audience will be very familiar; this is something that's in the book, and your audience will be familiar with this – the 5 Why's, going all the way back to Deming and the Toyota process, we start looking at the 5 Why's as a great way to get to that core value of what the customer really needs and we start asking ourselves, why is this important to them? Why is this important to them? Why is this important to them? And if we start there, if we start with what's important to them, and we align that with our capability to be able to deliver that experience and we do so in quite frankly a service design way, we can create something valuable.

I think, the people that are really into this methodology can really become the new marketers and new content leaders in the organization because quite frankly, this looks much more like a product development methodology than it does a campaign development methodology. If we're building something of value – a blog, a digital magazine, a community, a TV network or whatever it is that we're delivering value through, it looks much more like a media product that we're developing than an Ad campaign or anything that sort of only lasts just for a temporary period of time.

**Joe:** *I always go back to marketing is really nothing more than starting a conversation.*

**Robert:** That's exactly right and being valuable in that conversation. Nobody wants to have a conversation with someone who talks about themselves all the time. Great marketing basically starts a great conversation and makes you want to stay in it, and the

only way you want to stay in it is quite frankly through delivering value in it.

**Joe:** *Well, how do you measure that? How do you measure experiences? I mean is there more to it than let's say the net promoter score? How do you measure that?*

**Robert:** Well, net promoter score is a great one, by the way. I like net promoter score very much because what that immediately gives you ideas to do is to create experiences that look to loyalty. Content marketing often gets lumped in at the very top of the funnel for brand awareness or for SEO or those kinds of things and quite frankly, where I think it really earns its keep is at that loyalty cross-sell, upsell, and nurturing sort of mid-funnel to low funnel process.

The ways to measure that, there's one simple measurement that you can create because ultimately if you think about it, the asset we're really building here as a company is the audience itself, the subscribed audience. The content, the experience – that's a means to get there. In other words, if I'm acting like a media company, if I'm performing like a media company and building media products that are themselves experiences, ultimately what I'm trying to do is get an audience to subscribe to my approach, or subscribe to my story, or subscribe to my experience. What we find is that depending on your business goal, look at what subscribers do versus non-subscribers do. There're a few ways to look at that. If for example you're creating an experience at the top of the funnel for lead generation, great! Now, we've got this database of people. Do they buy more? Do they stay longer? Do they go through the sales process faster? Do more of them go into the sales process? There's a number of ways to measure the value of what as subscriber does versus somebody who comes from a direct advertisement.

Again, if we do this at the lower end of the funnel, like a customer level, we look at okay,

we created this customer community or this digital magazine only for customers or this media property only for customers, what do they do? Do they end up staying longer? Do they give us a higher net promoter score? Do they end up buying more stuff? We can start looking at what do those subscribers do versus what they don't do.

For example, the net promoter score is John Deere. John Deere creates their Furrow magazine and have done it for 130 years. They produced the Furrow Magazine, which quite frankly is only about teaching farmers how to be better farmers and at the end of that, they've seen their net promoter score go way up based on their ability to deliver this wonderful content consistently for 130 years to their customers. We actually asked them by the way; we said how many times in the 130 years you've been producing this magazine have you ever mentioned John Deere products? They said 3 I think is the number in 130 years in the number of magazines they produced. Just delivering value to customers through content can be an extraordinarily productive way to move the business forward.

**Joe:** *Tell me if I'm reading it right but the actual data that we have is customer related. It's not necessarily all this data we need and try to gather from external sources and everything that we have a lot of gold sitting there to be able to mine, let's say.*

**Robert:** Yes, for most companies quite frankly, it's the opportunity to mean something rather than the sort of previous mining capability. In other words, when I go into many organization, and I'll say great, tell me about your marketing database. They'll go, well oh yes, we have a great one. We've got 20,000 people in our marketing database. And I'll say that's wonderful, what's in it? Oh well, we've got their email addresses. So you've got 20,000 email addresses; that doesn't tell you anything. That doesn't really give you a lot of insight. I said what if you are able to transform that? Those 20, 000 email addresses by the way, what they came from was simply gating white papers or putting behind a firewall

some sort of valuable content asset that you were able to extract an email address in order for them to get.

Again, that's told you nothing. You don't have 20,000 subscribers; what you have is 20,000 people who were "willing" to give you an email address in order to get an asset. I said, what if on the other hand you created a 20,000 people who not only were willing to give you their email address but their name, their title, where they work, what they do for a living – a rich data set. Now, how interesting has that become because now, all of a sudden, to your point, you've got an asset worth mining.

A great example of this is Kraft. Kraft Food and Family Magazine is a print magazine and a digital online database where you can go and get recipes, and they have 3 and a half million people who signed up for this thing with rich data profiles. Their brand managers quite frankly don't buy external consumer research anymore because quite frankly, they have better consumer research on the audience they're trying to reach with their sales than the research companies. They save hundreds of thousands of dollars by not buying retail research because they've got better research than anything that's out there on the market. So having that rich data on your target market is just a wonderful asset but in order to get that data and consistently increase it, you've got to deliver value. You've got to deliver wonderful experiences that drive people to not just want to throw over an email address when you say, hey, teased you with this asset. In other words, they want to give you this information because of all the stuff that they're going to get from you in a consistent fashion as part of a media property.

**Joe:** *That challenge of delivering experiences, that bar keeps getting raised, and raised, and raised.*

**Robert:** Of course and nobody said this was going to be easy. Nobody told me anyway.

**Joe:** *If there's one thought, though, what would you hope someone would take from your book?*

**Robert:** It's truly that this is a business strategy and not just a marketing strategy. You know one of the things that we spend a good amount of time in the book doing is talking about the evolution of marketing as a process. The funny thing is that we often talk about the idea of everything is changing about the customer, the way they buy, the way they use products, what they value most in sort of what they value as part of an experience with the brand, etcetera, etcetera, but we rarely talk about changing the process of marketing and the structure of marketing to fit these new needs. In many businesses, we find they still structure marketing teams based on the old, antiquated ideas, that we still speak in these war sort of metaphors, like tactics, and campaigns, and frontlines, and backlines and this sort of thing.

Marketing has evolved beyond that. We are no longer talking about campaigns that we control, or frontlines, or backlines and tactics. We should rather be talking about a 24/7 media operation that we use to deliver value to customers. Hopefully, in the book, we start talking a little bit about how to evolve marketing out of this antiquated idea and into something more modern. So changing marketing to fit content's purpose rather than changing content to fit an old idea of what marketing is.

**Joe:** *I think you hit a really good point there and I would even to the point of saying that possibly testing, prototyping are important, but customers don't want to be tested. They don't want to be prototyped. You have to do it with them versus to them.*

**Robert:** Right. Well, that's exactly right. I mean this gets to the whole idea of iterative and Agile and all the sorts of wonderful developments that have been made in product development rollout that are now just beginning to start to take hold in marketing. When we look at developing, the common mistake is that we look at a blog as a marketing campaign and so we look at developing content like it's campaign and we look at developing the on-going operation like it's a marketing campaign, and it's not. In much more it resembles a product where we're going to develop it, we're going to roll it out iteratively, we're going to get to minimum viable product, we're going to do all the things that we would do with a product and the only difference is that it's a supporting a marketing goal and not necessarily a revenue girl.

**Joe:** *I've stopped using the term campaigns, I use experiments.*

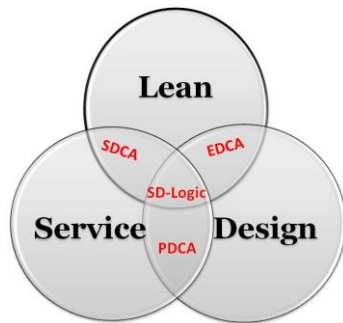
**Robert:** That's right. That's a great one.

**Joe:** *That's my terminology. What's the best way for someone to contact you and learn more about what you do?*

**Robert:** Sure. Well, for me personally, you can hit my personal website which is robertrose.net, which would feed you to everything including the book and if you're interested in my writing or at Content Marketing Institute or my social channels and all that kind of stuff. So I'd point people there, depending on what you may be interested in exploring.

**Joe:** *I'd have to ask you, your afterword in your book, you mentioned what do you really do. So, what does Robert Rose really do?*

**Robert:** Well, I would be remorse if I didn't answer it the same way I answered in the book which is I try and create remarkable experiences.



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Joe Dager is President of Business901, a firm specializing in bringing the continuous improvement process to the sales and marketing arena. He takes his process thinking of over thirty years in marketing within a wide variety of industries and applies it through Lean Marketing and Lean Service Design.

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