

"*Content Nation* is a must-read if you want to understand what it means to live online today and how you will be interacting in years to come."

—David Meerman Scott, bestselling author of *The New Rules of Marketing & PR*



[[CONTENT NATION]]

Surviving and Thriving as Social Media Changes
Our Work, Our Lives, and Our Future

JOHN BLOSSOM

Content Nation

Surviving and
Thriving as Social
Media Changes Our
Work, Our Lives, and
Our Future

John Blossom



Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Content Nation

Published by
Wiley Publishing, Inc.
10475 Crosspoint Boulevard
Indianapolis, IN 46256
www.wiley.com

Copyright © 2009 by Wiley Publishing, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana
ISBN: 978-0-470-37921-9

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the publisher.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 646-8600. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Legal Department, Wiley Publishing, Inc., 10475 Crosspoint Blvd., Indianapolis, IN 46256, (317) 572-3447, fax (317) 572-4355, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: The publisher and the author make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this work and specifically disclaim all warranties, including without limitation warranties of fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales or promotional materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for every situation. This work is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services. If professional assistance is required, the services of a competent professional person should be sought. Neither the publisher nor the author shall be liable for damages arising herefrom. The fact that an organization or Web site is referred to in this work as a citation and/or a potential source of further information does not mean that the author or the publisher endorses the information the organization or Web site may provide or recommendations it may make. Further, readers should be aware that Internet Web sites listed in this work may have changed or disappeared between when this work was written and when it is read.

For general information on our other products and services please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762-2974, outside the United States at (317) 572-3993 or fax (317) 572-4002.

Trademarks: Wiley and the Wiley logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and/or its affiliates, in the United States and other countries, and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Wiley Publishing, Inc. is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Praise for *Content Nation*

“Today, most everybody lives in content nation. If you’re under 25 or so, you’re a native—born into the digital world. The rest of us who have immigrated are lucky to have John Blossom to dissect and explain the wide-reaching ramifications that citizenship entails—how business, education, relationships, information dissemination, and much more are affected. *Content Nation* is a must-read if you want to understand what it means to live online today and how you will be interacting in years to come.”

—David Meerman Scott, bestselling author of *The New Rules of Marketing & PR* and *World Wide Rave*

“If you are into new media, publishing and the Internet this is a book you simply must read. *Content Nation* is not only a great map to the new emerging online publishing territory but also a high-precision scanning electron microscope into the different dimensions that the new global media conversation is bringing about. Internet publishing and social media are changing forever they way we interact, exchange, work together and communicate. John Blossom, reveals the key patterns, strategies, and trends that normal people like you are using to make leap from a spectator seat right into the director’s chair. And this is the enthusiastic message John Blossom spreads so pervasively inside *Content Nation*: Become your own media, engage, share, participate, make your voice be heard!”

—Robin Good, social media pioneer and editor of *Robin Good’s MasterNewMedia*

“It’s hard to imagine a book that makes a broader and deeper examination of social media than *Content Nation*—or that gives more useful advice.”

—David “Doc” Searles, co-author of *The Cluetrain Manifesto*

This book is dedicated to you, the citizens of Content Nation, who are creating a better world through your courageous publishing.

I also dedicate this book to David Rivers, former editorial director at Risk Waters Group, who passed away with so many others at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. David was a great husband, a great father, a great colleague, and a great friend. We still miss you, David.

About the Author

John Blossom is one of the most widely recognized content-industry analysts, providing thought leadership to executives in search of new approaches to rapidly changing markets for publishing and technology products and services. Mr. Blossom founded Shore Communications, Inc. in 1997, specializing in research and advisory services and strategic marketing consulting for publishers and content service providers in enterprise and media markets. Mr. Blossom's engagements as president of Shore have included strategic marketing consulting for major corporations and startups as well as speaking engagements at major conferences and advisory services for senior industry executives.

Mr. Blossom's career spans more than 20 years of marketing, research, product management, and development in advanced information and media venues, including the researching, marketing, and development of financial information services at global financial publishers and financial services companies (Citicorp; Quotron; Reuters Group PLC, now a division of Thomson Reuters; and Waters Information Services), serving as a vice president and publishing-industry analyst at Outsell, Inc. and with earlier experience in broadcast media, human factors engineering, corporate training, and teaching. Mr. Blossom's ContentBlogger weblog won the Software and Information Industry Association 2007 CODiE award for Best Media Blog.

Mr. Blossom has been interviewed frequently by the business press and has been quoted in many major news and trade publications and media outlets, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, Marketplace radio, ABC Radio National, *CEO Magazine*, Information Today, *EContent Magazine*, *Upgrade Magazine*, BusinessNow television, *Wall Street & Technology*, *Waters Magazine*, and *Securities Industry News*. He speaks regularly at major industry conferences, including BookExpo, the SLA Annual Conference, SIIA Information Industry Summit, Buying and Selling eContent, InfoCommerce Annual Conference, the OCLC Symposium, and other venues.

Mr. Blossom has resided in Westport, Connecticut for more than 17 years.

Credits

Executive Editor

Carol Long

Development Editor

Christopher J. Rivera

Production Editor

Liz Britten

Copy Editor

Kim Cofer

Editorial Manager

Mary Beth Wakefield

Production Manager

Tim Tate

**Vice President and Executive
Group Publisher**

Richard Swadley

Project Coordinator, Cover

Lynsey Stanford

Compositor

Maureen Forsys,
Happenstance Type-O-Rama

Proofreader

Heather Dweller

Indexer

Jack Lewis

Acknowledgments

First and foremost I want to thank my wife, Dr. June-Ann Greeley, PhD., an accomplished medieval scholar and an associate professor of religious studies at Sacred Heart University who has shown so much loving patience with her 21st-century husband's interests. I am very proud of her abilities and, through her insights, have come to appreciate deeply how much human values are a constant through the centuries. This book would not have been possible without our many years of sharing our views of the world with one another. In relation to Content Nation, I also want to thank June-Ann for introducing me to a pile of books many Christmas holidays ago that included *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, a book by Chris Locke, Doc Searls, and David Weinberger whose insights were life-changing for me in 2000 and which are still altogether profound today. When I said as much to David Weinberger many years later, I don't think that he got the life-changing part of that equation, but I am sure that he has heard it many times from other people of a more youthful bent. My thanks also go to our wonderful son Christopher, who has shown patience with his father's pursuits and who is now learning to blog himself.

I offer special thanks to my parents, Jill and John K. Blossom, who have demonstrated their own loving patience with their still-growing son through the years and who enabled me in my early years to explore the world and to allow me to explore my sometimes eclectic interests with remarkable patience. My father's knowledge of the English language always challenged me to excel that one step further in my own writing efforts. My father's father, John E. Blossom, was a contributing author to textbooks whose royalties helped put me through college and upon whose typewriter I wrote my college and post-graduate papers. His memory and his inspiration will be special to me always as an author and as a grandson. Thanks also to my wife June-Ann's parents, Fred and Mary Greeley, who have encouraged June-Ann and me as a couple and as parents through the years.

I must also thank the people who have been a part of my company Shore Communications Inc., which has provided consulting and research services to publishers and content-technology companies for many years. To the many people who have served as team members at Shore and for all of our customers

who we have helped through the years, my deep thanks for being the springboard for this effort at creating new forms of valuable communication.

David Meerman Scott has been a friend of mine for many years and his guidance and mentorship have been a key component in my professional success. Thanks very much, David, and thanks for convincing me that I should have the courage to take on this project and for offering me such valuable insights and encouragement along the way.

My thanks also to the people at the Software and Information Industry Association and American Business Media, as well as Information Today, Inc., organizations that have introduced me to so many fine colleagues who have contributed to my insights into the content industry and who have helped to foster my career.

Thanks also to Robin Good (also known as Luigi Canali DeRossi), the founder and editor of Robin Good, whose personal and professional support have been an essential part of my outlook and whose global outlook on social media is truly inspiring.

Finally, on a personal and collegial level, my thanks to Reid Conrad of Near-Time, Inc., whose technology, insights, and support inspired me to move forward with this project. My hat's off to all of you, and to everyone else in Content Nation who is working to make the world an exciting place to live in through the fostering of social media.

There are some people who responded to my call for Content Nation contributions, and I wanted to thank them here for their willingness to be a citizen of Content Nation as it has come to life:

- Peter Bihr, online media strategist
- Barry Graubart, vice president, product strategy & business development for Alacra, Inc.
- Michael Levy, a product marketing manager for onesource
- Rand Schulman, chief marketing officer, insideview, inc.

Preamble:

Chasing the Mammoth

It is 11,000 years ago in central France. At the edge of a grassland stands a small band of humans, clad in skins and holding spears and equipment for camping and cooking. The glaciers of the last great ice age have retreated far to the north, leaving behind a new landscape of plants and animals. Our hardy band of human ancestors are on the hunt, but the abundance of large game such as mammoths, which their own ancestors had been chasing through the ice age for their meals, has given way to a mix of bison, elks, and plants with grains that are becoming the diet of these nomads. They are beginning to favor new techniques and tools for hunting and gathering to adapt to this environment—including the creation of more permanent camps to take advantage of more reliable food sources. If we were to check back with the great-great grandchildren of this tribe, we'd probably see that their nomadic ways had started to give way to small village-like settlements with some permanent structures to store grains and a new concept that was evolving along with those structures—ownership of places and things.

Most anthropologists date the origins of modern human history from such small village encampments that gave rise to ownership societies, societies that gave rise to another new concept—economies. With ownership came the growth of trading goods created through specialized skills, skills that would have been less able to create a sustainable lifestyle in nomadic societies. Construction, woven clothing, jewelry, decorations, and crafts began to become the focus of human activities as agriculture and more convenient sources of meat simplified the basics of survival. Recently, in Syria, a dwelling from 10,000 years ago was unearthed that had walls decorated with colorful and remarkably modern-looking patterns. It didn't take long for people to begin to think creatively about how to add value to their personal living environments once food on the table was more assured.

The concepts of a trade-oriented ownership economy and of adding value to one's personal environment eventually formed the cornerstone of the media industry. Ownership of hand-crafted, inscribed monuments, scrolls, and eventually books became a mark of distinction for the rich and powerful, spawning new industries of craftsmanship and distribution. From the days of the Roman Empire, rich people would have their slaves record events happening in the Forum in Rome to be delivered to their villas in the neighboring hillsides. The first news services, then, were privately owned. With the rise of a merchant middle class and printing-press technologies, ownership of publishing and publications began to benefit great numbers of people, along with other mass-produced goods. Electronic communications via the media of radio, television, and eventually today's Internet also have had growth predicated on a collaboration between high technology owned by content producers, and mass-produced goods owned by content consumers. Media has thrived on ownership, and ownership in turn has used media to promote its growth.

Now, new trends are emerging that are threatening the fundamental premises that underpin society's ability to deliver on previous expectations for ownership. One of the strangest and most fundamental things that's changing is as basic as what is happening outside my home office window every day. It's now November in a Connecticut town outside of New York City, and it's been a downright balmy autumn. Again. Birds that are still in our backyard this time of year used to be native mostly to states hundreds of miles to the south only a couple of decades ago. Elsewhere, record droughts and fires are straining the resources of the western United States while record floods are challenging European cities. Polar ice caps are receding to the point of endangering both animals and native tribes that have relied on their presence for thousands of years. The earth is in a period of major climate change, as major as the changes faced by our roaming band of nomads in a French field 11,000 years ago. Like our ancient friends in that scene, we're just trying to do the best that we can to get from one day to another.

Also, like those nomads who had been chasing the mammoth and having to try something new to get by, getting life to work on a day-to-day basis today, in an environment being shaped by rapid changes, means recognizing that the changes that we're experiencing don't relate in scale very effectively to things that our grandparents or even their grandparents ever experienced. Strangely, though, today's human society seems to be pushing in the opposite direction from that prehistoric society's evolution—away from a sedentary life and toward a much more mobile human society that needs to look at

opportunities on the run. Ironically, then, in an era of global climate change we seem to be pushing toward a society that in some ways may resemble those people who were chasing the mammoth at the end of the last great climate change—except that we’re more likely moving toward a nomadic existence rather than further away from it. This movement, in turn, challenges the key component of our sedentary society’s success—ownership.

The enormous scale of change in our increasingly mobile society is evident very noticeably in the publishing industry. As rapidly evolving electronic technologies such as search engines, mobile phones, weblogs, and wikis have entered the awareness of average people, we are witnessing a huge change in the climate for media production. Where ownership of publishing facilities and the technologies that delivered their output used to enable end-to-end ownership of both the medium and the message, now we are beginning to see that the value found in publishing content is moving away from these relatively fixed economies. Once-unassailable media conglomerates such as TimeWarner, NBC, and Pearson are giving way to publishers such as Google, Wikipedia, and Facebook that enable value from content to be assembled on the fly by both technology and highly collaborative peers. In the past the concept of publishing value could be measured in the “village storehouses” of office buildings in New York City’s Rockefeller Center or the thickness of a glossy magazine on a newsstand. Today’s content value is as ephemeral as the last edit on Wikipedia a few seconds ago, your last search on Google, or the last comment that you read on Digg or Newsvine. Its lasting value could be gone in about as much time as it takes an audience to consume it.

Already in publishing, then, we are well along the road to a new kind of “chasing the mammoth” nomadic publishing culture—and already we are seeing the impact of those changes on human society in ways that are as fundamental as was the shift from stone-age culture to modern civilization. This concept became clearer to me after I read the book *Wikinomics* by Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams. Don and I had both delivered speeches on a program about the future of publishing at the BookExpo USA conference a year before *Wikinomics* came out (I’d like to think that my presentation influenced Don’s thinking as much as his book has influenced my current thinking!). *Wikinomics* chronicles how an increasingly collaborative global economy is creating value in business today.

At its furthest extension, though, I saw that the *Wikinomics* concept is really about returning human society to the pre-historic era of nomadic hunting tribes, which could shift their location and resources as needed to

respond to rapidly changing environments without the need to have external hierarchies protecting land and other owned property through wars. Given the issues of our physical environment that are unfolding before our eyes, the timing of the development of Internet-based collaborative and peer-based publishing may turn out to be quite fortuitous. These social media tools now at our disposal may turn out to be as important to our future as the bow and arrow turned out to be to early humans shifting from mammoths to elks as prey. In our new world of social media we are surely chasing value in elusive contexts as our ancestors were chasing the mammoth through the frozen landscapes of the ice ages. This insight led to an important presentation that I delivered at the Buying and Selling eContent conference, entitled “Chasing the Mammoth: Redefining Publishing in a Social Media Ecology,” in which I created the outline of how social media’s rules for success were not unlike those of our ice-age ancestors’ rules.

The world of today’s businesses, governments, and other major institutions is certainly not ready, for the most part, to accept the depth of this kind of change in their own structures that’s being fomented by social media. We’re still in the era of publishers trying to turn the wild animals of content that we chase in the nomadic social media culture into the domesticated animals of an agricultural culture. This is an important goal for the here and now, but it is going to take more imagination than that to keep up with the rapid changes that social media is enabling—much as our change in global climate is going to catch many vested interests by surprise, including political, business, and personal interests. Every one and every thing and every way that we do things is going to change more radically than most can ever imagine, but what does this really mean? What are the real things that need to be done in the rapidly emerging world of nomadic value, and what will it wind up looking like in the end? Most importantly, what do you and I need to do to change in order to make the best of these changes?

In other words, in a world where everyone is a publisher, what does it take to be a productive and effective world citizen?

This question tied into an article on my Web site that I had written six months before *Wikinomics* came out, entitled “Content Nation: A World of Personal Publishers Declares Their Influential Citizenship.” In this article I laid out the premise that the number of people who were really serious about publishing via social media had grown so quickly that if you added them up they would be one of the world’s more sizable nations. Taken in the context of today’s social media environment little more than a year later it’s fair to say that this

Content Nation is well on its way to becoming a superpower. Its economic and political influence is becoming enormous and growing so rapidly that even the most starry-eyed entrepreneurs in California's Silicon Valley have a hard time wrapping their minds around the global scale of these changes. I could see that it would take more than just one clever fellow in Connecticut, or even a few smart people, to chronicle the importance of Content Nation and its implications for business, governments, and other key societal functions.

This realization led to the Web site ContentNation.com, on which this book has been developed—and will continue to be developed over time. I realized that the only way to develop a book on the topic of Content Nation properly would be to invite Content Nation to be a key contributor from “day one.” The courage to do this came from another fellow who was on that trend-setting program at BookExpo—Chris Anderson, then the editor in chief of *Wired* magazine. Chris was in the process of introducing his book on the Long Tail, a concept that Chris had introduced in an article in *Wired* more than a year before that fateful presentation. Stacked before Chris were massive piles of the pre-release version of his business book, all part of the typical book-publishing publicizing event.

Good stuff, I thought, and it was a good book, but this process was ironic, to say the least: here was the author of the seminal book on how the Web is enabling producers to reach smaller audiences of targeted consumers more effectively, and more profitably, than those who focus on mass goods and experiences for mass audiences, and yet the crowning output was a book that was being rushed to market to take advantage of the latest trend while the publisher could afford to print it in volume. What if, instead, a book didn't start as a one-time volume publishing event but was something that became a publishing event of varying volume over time? What if books could adapt to the “chasing the mammoth” model and reap different kinds of rewards for different people at different times in the concept's lifecycle?

So ContentNation.com was established to start building a community for the Content Nation concept that can be used to create value for different people in different ways at different times. For those who visit ContentNation.com for the first time, it's for now an ad-supported Web site. For those who collaborate on the Web site, it's a social media community. For those who want to know the latest on these trends, it can be a news service. For those who want to keep abreast of how it all fits together, it's a subscription eBook with periodic updates that can be delivered either electronically or via print-on-demand services. For those who want to gather and discuss these concepts, it's an events

community. For those who want to share with others the Content Nation insight and experience on a commemorative basis or to build relationships via gift-giving, it will be a traditional book offered by traditional publishers in their traditional editorial and production cycles.

In whatever of these forms and modes you're reading this, welcome to Content Nation. It's a privilege to be a part of a movement that is literally changing human existence beyond all imagining—and a privilege to be developing and sharing that experience with you, fellow citizens of Content Nation.

And now, on to the book!

Contents

Preamble:
Chasing the Mammoth xv

1 Content Nation:
A World of Influential Publishers Declares its Citizenship 1

2 What Makes Social Media Tick:
Seven Secrets of Social Media..... 29

3 Social Structure in Content Nation:
Changing Tribes, New Leaders 57

4 The New Media:
Content Nation Challenges the Fundamentals of Marketing..... 95

5 The New Work:
Content Nation Transforms the Future of Today's Enterprises 131

6 The New Politics:
Content Nation Redefines How Citizens Influence Governments... 163

7 The New Society:
Content Nation Redefines How People Live Their Lives 201

8 The New Survival:
Content Nation Redefines the Future of Humanity 241

9 The New Success:
How to Survive and Thrive in Content Nation..... 271

10	The New Epoch: <i>Life in a Future Built on Content Nation</i>	305
11	Conclusion: <i>The Evolving Conversation of Content Nation</i>	329
	Photo Credits	333
	Index	335