

#IPA
Social
Works

Vodafone UK

Creating social content to attract business decision makers

Agency: Geometry Global

The first cross-industry collaboration between



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Market context

At the start of 2013, there were 4.9 million private sector businesses in the UK, employing approximately 24.3 million people and generating an estimated combined annual turnover of £3,300 billion. (Source: National Statistics, 'Business population estimates for the UK and regions,' October 2013.)

When the public sector is added in to the picture, it is clear there is a huge market to which Vodafone can provide business to business services. But it's also a diverse and fragmented audience that can be difficult and inefficient to reach using traditional communications channels.

For 30 years, Vodafone has been synonymous with mobile phones, popular with businesses as well as consumers.

However, the company's enterprise offering is a lot broader - covering fixed lines, converged communications, M2M (machine to machine communications sent between smart devices), consulting on ways of working, cloud, security solutions, and more.

Despite offering this range of services, Vodafone is still often seen by businesspeople as a traditional mobile player, rather than a true communications technology provider.

What's more, the enterprise communications market is a battleground for competitors from several industries. In this space, Vodafone faces competition from other telco brands such as BT and O2, global technology heavyweights such as IBM and Microsoft, and network specialists such as Cisco.

Vodafone needed to demonstrate that it understood business, and that it could become a strategic partner to organisations of all sizes. A major issue to overcome was having a 'right to speak' to audiences across a broader subject level.

Business/marketing objectives

We agreed two principal objectives:

1. To build the Vodafone brand in the enterprise space. Specifically, brand tracking identified a need to improve Vodafone's awareness levels beyond mobile solutions, and enhance the brand's perception as an innovator and a thought leader within this target audience in order to improve consideration levels.
2. To play a part in driving potential leads through the purchasing funnel by providing data/intelligence to sales teams for three segments: SMEs, large businesses, and the public sector.

Channel choice/strategy

Insights about the business audience informed our decision to pursue a content-led social media solution. Some persuasive data points include:

- A large percentage of the audience was active in the social space. Over 80 per cent of business decision makers had a social presence. At least once every month, 85 per cent of this group visited communities or forums and 81 per cent were on LinkedIn. Also, according to Forrester, business decision makers use social for work purposes. (Source: Forrester, '2013 North America And Europe B2B Social And Community Marketing Online Survey')
- 'Interesting content' was cited as one of the top three reasons people followed brands on social media. (Source: Inboundwriter, 'The anatomy of content marketing')
- Two thirds said the information provided by content marketing helped them make better purchase decisions. More than half said they were more willing to buy from a company that provided them with content marketing. (Source: The content council, 'Roper Finds Majority of Consumers Value Custom Media' 2011)

The challenge therefore became clear. We needed to engage the enterprise audience with a cohesive, tailored content and social platform that sparked user-generated conversations, added value to their business lives, and positioned Vodafone as a thought leader in enterprise communications solutions.

'Your Better Business' was born, as a platform supported by Vodafone to provide an open exchange of ideas and opinions that can help shape the future of business.

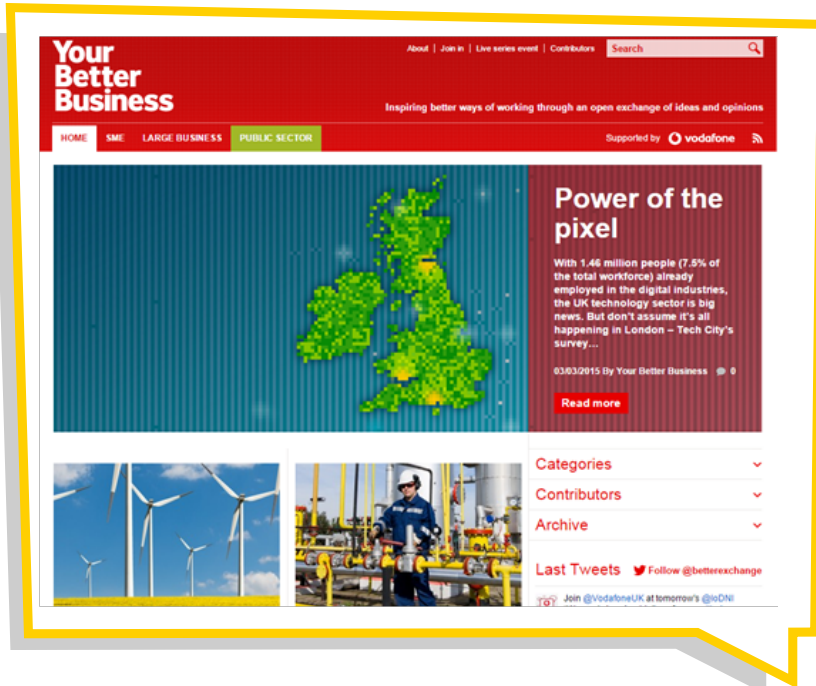


Fig 1: The 'Your Better Business' platform was developed to position Vodafone as a thought leader and innovator.

This innovative content approach is driven by contributions from independent experts and business owners from a wide range of sectors and experiences. They take part in discussions of business models and the role of technology.

Contributors have included well-known individuals such as Peter Ward (WAYN) and Will King (King of Shaves), and brands like Green & Black's, Penguin Books, Sage, Crowdcube and GE Healthcare.

Vodafone's role in this context is to serve as an enabler, as a supporter of great business thinking and as a driver for change.

The overall content themes of the platform are determined by an editorial board comprising the agency team and clients from across product segments.

The programme was originally called Your Better Business, but changed name in May 2015 to Your Ready Business to align with the repositioning of the Vodafone brand. Your Ready Business is also since June 2015 closely aligned with the partnership between Vodafone UK and The Times & The Sunday Times "Ready Business Britain", and there is synergy and cross-pollination between the two content hubs www.yourreadybusiness.co.uk and www.readybusinessbritain.co.uk (The Times & Vodafone UK's partnership site) .

Central plan driving publication

The content calendar is organised to deliver two weekly bursts, topped up by occasional campaigns linked to the release of significant pieces of thought leadership, such as the 'Perspective series' of reports (see below).

'Your Better Business' offers a range of original content, appropriate to the needs of businesspeople at different stages of their decision making journey.

These range from snackable infographics and video content, to expert articles, top tips and customer stories, to in-depth 'Perspective series' white papers combining proprietary research and opinion.

The content is all shareable, segmented and tagged by subject and business size, allowing users to find and digest easily content that's truly relevant to their business.



Fig2: Types of content served up by 'Your Better Business.'

As the platform's success has been recognised throughout the organisation, and backed up by interviews with business decision makers who confirmed the importance of relevant content to their views, the 'Your Better Business' platform and content has become a central cog for Vodafone's enterprise communications activity.

The content plays a pivotal role in the Vodafone online journey, with an API built to automate content integration with the main website, Vodafone.co.uk.

Content is also leveraged in emails and CRM programmes with existing clients and prospects, and specific content is developed for social campaigns supporting key enterprise solutions.

To spread the conversation, we gave 'Your Better Business' a voice across social media – Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube, with a daily publishing calendar and supported this with both organic and paid media strategies.

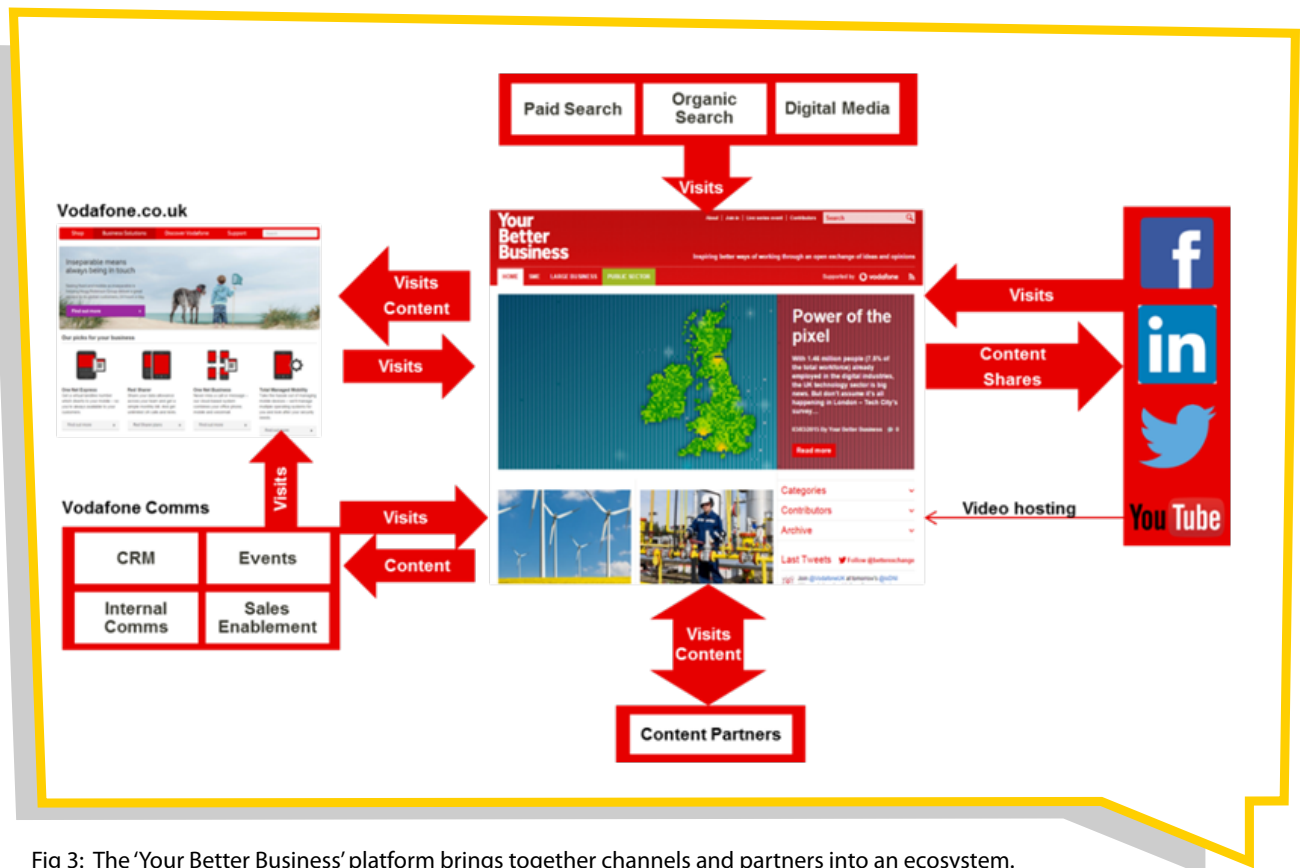


Fig 3: The 'Your Better Business' platform brings together channels and partners into an ecosystem.

APRIL	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
w/c March 30th BAU		PUBLIC SECTOR: Cheshire police - Strategic transformation of local government (BAU July)		LARGE/SME: Connected car/Cobra (BAU Aug)	
w/c March 30th CAMPAIGN	Perspective Series - Connected Britain PUBLIC SECTOR REPORT		Perspective Series - Connected Britain PRIVATE SECTOR Video Tinder Foundation		
w/c April 6th BAU		Penguin competition		SME: Making the leap - selling your business (BAU Oct) Jo Fairley Green & Black's	
w/c April 6th CAMPAIGN	Perspective Series - Connected Britain PRIVATE SECTOR Video Future Foundation		Perspective Series - Connected Britain PUBLIC SECTOR Video Tinder Foundation		
w/c April 13th BAU		SME: How to deal with failure - Coach (BAU Oct)		LARGE: How apps are transforming the retail experience AIMA- Scott Seabome (BAU Sept)	
w/c April 13th CAMPAIGN	Perspective Series - Connected Britain: PUBLIC SECTOR Connecting the Unconnected - Tinder Foundation		Perspective Series: Vodafone view by Mick, Head of Public Sector		
w/c April 20th BAU		LARGE: Protecting your business (BAU Nov)		PUBLIC SECTOR: Angle of article TBC - Notts County Council (BAU Nov)	
w/c April 20th CAMPAIGN	Perspective Series - Connected Britain: PRIVATE SECTOR infographic		Perspective Series - Connected Britain: PUBLIC SECTOR infographic		
w/c April 27th BAU		SME: Marketing on a shoestring - Opus Energy (BAU NOV)		SME/LARGE: The power of apps to transform entire industries (BAU Sept)	
w/c April 27th CAMPAIGN	Perspective Series - Connected Britain: PUBLIC SECTOR Local Government - Norfolk County Council		Perspective Series - Connected Britain: PRIVATE SECTOR The Connected Society - Future Foundation		

Fig 4: Sample content publishing plan.

To add a physical dimension to the platform, 'Live' series events were created to provide an opportunity for businesses to get together, network and listen. These have involved the likes of Innocent's Richard Reed, Michelle Mone (Ultimo) and designer Wayne Hemingway.

Measurement & Results

Social Reach & Engagement

We have continued to track and optimise the platform's reach and engagement with the audience – both on the 'Your Better Business' website, and across our social platforms.

From its launch in 2013 to Jan 2015, the 'Your Better Business' platform has received more than 240,000 unique visits with 19% of visitors returning.

Between April and December 2014, the average dwell time on the site was two minutes and 26 seconds. The most recent report in the 'Perspective series' had a dwell time of 11 minutes and 35 seconds. (Source: Google Analytics)

In 2014, there were 75,000+ fans/followers of 'Your Better Business' on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, and an overall reach of 50 million.

Engagement rates on social have also been very strong, with an average rate of 0.49% eclipsing the industry benchmark on LinkedIn, and 0.6% on Twitter performing better than key competitors, BT and O2. (Source: LinkedIn, Twitter & Facebook analytics, Social media research via Sysomos)

Brand Tracking Impact

According to brand tracking by Millward Brown, ongoing engagement with our content has helped drive an uplift in the target audience's brand perceptions since the launch of the 'Your Better Business' ecosystem.

- Perceptions of Vodafone as a thought leader have grown by 5% across all business and public sector areas during fiscal year 2013/14.

- Perceptions of Vodafone as an innovator have increased by 10% within SMEs during the same period.
- The public sector saw the biggest change, with an 11% rise in public sector respondents who considered Vodafone a thought leader and/or an innovator.

While other communications activities may also have had an influence, we believe that our content marketing programme has had a significant impact due to factors such as:

1. Investment shifted to this area from other sources, and content was also integrated into product campaigns.
2. There was a lack of other major communications initiatives that could have “shifted the needle” – for example, there was no Vodafone brand advertising for the enterprise sector.

Sales Impact

To improve lead development, Vodafone sales teams were trained in how and when to use the content or the platform as a critical part of the sales cycle.

To capture the results of this on lead generation, ‘Your Better Business’ was inputted as a code when entering data into the Salesforce.com platform to indicate a positive impact on a qualified lead.

A review of the data shows that since the programme was created, 47 UK sales opportunities have been created, with a total contract value of £37.8m. The company ended its 14/15 financial year with a closed figure of £2.4m of business won to date from this pipeline of opportunities.

In addition, our ‘Perspective series’ of thought leadership reports have played a key role in generating incremental sales for Vodafone’s ‘Better Ways of Working’(BWOW) consulting teams. These teams use the thought leadership content to demonstrate expertise to organisations that are provided with consultancy-style offerings in areas such as property management, technology or change transformation.

Data from the 2013/14 fiscal year shows that account managers from these teams doubled the value of sales they would otherwise have been expected to make – generating £14.25 million of incremental revenue.

Of course, there are a number of factors at play here, but undoubtedly the ‘Perspective series’ has made an important contribution to this growth – having been used to train BWOW account managers, and to provide insight to initiate discussions with prospects, giving data and points of view to enhance credibility when having these conversations.

The series has also generated incremental media value through press coverage.

Key learnings

- Use social listening tools, advice from the social networks you’re working with (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter etc.) and ongoing monitoring of results to understand the topics and types of content that members of your audience engage with across different stages of their journey.
- Be sure to develop a range of content – from ‘snackable’ posts, videos and infographics, to more detailed white papers – in order to make your content fit different consumer needs. If you budget efficiently, one report can provide stacks of rich content to roll out to your different channels.
- You’ll need to plan ahead to generate enough engaging content. So, embrace tools and processes like an editorial board, and calendars for content and conversations. Hold back some resource for more topical, short-lead time pieces to ensure your content also reflects recent marketing developments.
- Using business owners and experts as contributors is a great way to develop B2B content. Your audience attaches great value to it, as they’re gaining insight from their peers.

These contributors can also help enhance the reach of your platform, by sharing its content with their own networks. Developing ongoing content partnerships is also a great way to enhance your ecosystem and influence.

- Only develop content that you can afford to support – whether it's through social channels, search or other comms. If nobody knows it's there, you may as well not have gone to the effort of creating it.
- Ensure everyone knows how and when to access the content, especially frontline employees and teams from sales, PR, corporate communications, marketing and product.
- Check there is always a link between content and your brand/solutions – so that it can build credibility and consideration as well as engagement.
- Maximise the value/ROI of content by ensuring that it permeates as much of your brand's communications as possible.
- Specifically, train sales and account teams on the value of content in helping clients and prospects on their purchasing journey, and inputting correctly when content contributes to a lead, so that the value to the business can be tracked.
- Test and learn on an ongoing basis - work closely with your media agency to optimise posts.
- Keep abreast of innovations - as the social platforms evolve so will the format of the content you serve.

Next steps

- In 2015, Vodafone plans to build on our success further by:
- Increased facilitation of leads through additional data capture initiatives and use of tech solutions such as Openr (<http://openr.co/>) to link content to Vodafone products and solutions, completing (and tracking) the user journey.
- Develop the platform's presence via enhanced paid and organic search strategies.
- Employ more specific targeting of the three segments across our social platforms to optimise efficiency and effectiveness of media budgets.
- Trial ways of obtaining real-time insight about the content our audience is interested in, using tools such as Rallyverse (<http://www.rallyverse.com>), to post content that's most likely to attract users.

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