

# Content, Thought Leadership, and the Narrative Advantage

*Pragmatic Remix: Thought Leadership • Content Creation • Customer Stories • Collateral*

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In early 2026, we did something slightly masochistic: we read every article about AI and product marketing that appeared in a Daily Digest feed for an entire month. Thirty-five editions. A hundred and eighty articles. LinkedIn posts, analyst reports, vendor blogs, trade press, Substack newsletters, conference recaps. We read them all, and then wrote about what we found on [futureofpmm.com](https://futureofpmm.com). The piece was called "I Read Every AI + PMM Story for a Month. Here's What's Actually Coming."

The experience was clarifying in a way we didn't expect. Not because the articles were bad—some were excellent—but because the pattern was so stark. About 80% of the content fell into a category we'd describe as *competent and interchangeable*. Solid writing, reasonable arguments, accurate information, and absolutely nothing that would stick in your memory twenty minutes after reading it. These were articles that could have been written by any of a hundred different people—or, increasingly, by no person at all. They hit all the standard beats: AI is transforming marketing, PMMs need to adapt, here are five things to think about, here's a framework. The frameworks were always reasonable. The advice was always sensible. And the total information content, after you'd read the third or fourth article making the same argument with different metaphors, was approximately zero.

The other 20% was different. These were pieces where the author had a specific experience, a contrarian take, a story nobody else had told, or a level of technical depth that couldn't be faked. A PMM at AppDirect describing how her team built eleven SaaS applications and twenty AI agents in a year—not because she was told to but because she made a ridiculous promise to her team and then figured out how to keep it. An analyst at Gartner threading together three different market trends into a prediction that contradicted the consensus. A founder writing about why their company was deliberately not building an AI feature that every competitor was rushing to ship.

The ratio—80/20—is about to get worse. Much worse. Because the 80% that's competent and interchangeable is exactly the content that AI produces most easily. And the marginal cost of producing it is dropping toward zero.

## *The Content Collapse*

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Let us put some numbers around this, because the scale of what's happening is hard to grasp intuitively.

In 2023, a competent PMM might produce two to three substantive blog posts per month, a handful of social posts per week, and a quarterly thought leadership piece. That's maybe 15,000 words of original content per month, and it represented a significant chunk of their working time. In 2026, that same PMM—armed with Claude or ChatGPT and a decent prompting workflow—can produce that volume in a day. Not at the same quality, maybe. But at a quality level that's good enough for most distribution channels and indistinguishable from human-written content to most readers.

Now multiply that by every PMM at every company in your competitive landscape. The supply of competent marketing content is exploding while the demand—the finite attention of your buyers—stays the same. That's the *content collapse*: the moment when the sheer volume of AI-generated, competent-but-generic content overwhelms every distribution channel and makes it dramatically harder for any individual piece to break through.

We've heard people describe this as "thought leadership is dead," and the phrase has been popping up in the kind of LinkedIn posts that are themselves examples of the problem. But the diagnosis is only half right. What's dying is *performative* thought leadership—content that performs the appearance of insight without delivering any. The listicles, the framework-of-the-week posts, the "5 Things Every CMO Needs to Know About AI" articles that all contain the same five things. That genre is dying because AI can produce it at scale and because readers are developing antibodies to it.

What's not dying—what's becoming scarcer and therefore more valuable—is *genuine* thought leadership. Content where the author has done something, seen something, learned something, or thought something that readers can't get anywhere else. Content with a specific point of view, grounded in specific experience, delivered with a voice that is recognizably human. That kind of content was always rare. Now it's the only kind that matters.

## *The Narrative Advantage*

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We've written three books about data-driven marketing, and every one of them was ultimately about the same problem: how do you take something that sounds boring on paper—data management platforms, identity resolution, customer data architectures—and make people care about it? The answer was always stories. Not stories as decoration, pasted onto a technical argument to make it go down easier. Stories as the argument itself.

In *Data Driven*, the story that made people care about DMP economics was Mike Cunningham at Keurig wanting to put a \$5 chip in every coffee maker to understand household-level consumption patterns. Dad drinks dark roast Sumatra at 6 AM, Mom prefers French Hazelnut at 7:30, and the twelve-year-old sneaks Donut Shop K-Cups on weekends. You remember that image. You might not remember the TAM analysis from the same chapter, but you remember the family and the coffee and the chip. In *Customer Data Platforms*, the story that made identity resolution concrete was the Porsche sitting on the tarmac at the Atlanta airport—a Delta SkyMiles loyalty program data play where they knew exactly which high-value customers to target with a once-in-a-lifetime upgrade experience. The technical explanation of deterministic versus probabilistic matching would have put you to sleep. The Porsche on the runway woke you up.

AI can't do this. Not yet, and maybe not ever—or at least not in the way that matters. An LLM can generate a competent analogy. It can produce a hypothetical scenario that illustrates a point. But it can't tell you about Douwe Bergsma interrupting a deck to ask why a toilet paper company needs a DMP, because it wasn't in the room. It can't tell you how Mike Cunningham's eyes lit up when he talked about the Keurig chip, because it didn't see it happen. The specificity of lived experience—the named person, the exact question, the energy in the room—is the thing that makes a story stick, and it's the thing that AI-generated content systematically lacks.

This is what we call the *narrative advantage*, and we believe it's going to be one of the most important differentiators for PMMs in the agentic era. The PMM who has stories—real stories, from real customer conversations, real deal cycles, real product failures and recoveries—and who can tell those stories in a way that makes abstract capabilities feel concrete and human, has something that no AI agent can replicate. Not because the technology isn't good enough. Because the stories require having been somewhere and paid attention to what happened there.

## *GEO and the Agent as Reader*

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There's another dimension to the content transformation that most PMMs aren't thinking about yet, and it's going to matter as much as the thought leadership question. It's called *generative engine optimization*—GEO—and it's the discipline of optimizing your content to be surfaced and cited by AI systems rather than (or in addition to) traditional search engines.

We profiled a company called Evertune on [futureofpmm.com](http://futureofpmm.com)—they're building what we described as the Bloomberg Terminal for AI search. The founders came from The Trade Desk, which means they understand how platforms get built and how measurement changes behavior. Their thesis is that GEO will become one of the most important channels for product marketing, and that most companies are completely blind to how they're showing up—or not showing up—in AI-generated answers.

Think about what this means for your content strategy. When a buyer asks ChatGPT or Claude or Perplexity to recommend data platform vendors for a specific use case, the AI synthesizes its response from the content it can access—web pages, documentation, analyst reports, review sites, blog posts. If your content is specific, structured, and authoritative on the topics that matter to that buyer, you get cited. If your content is generic or vague or buried behind a registration wall, you don't. In a world where a growing percentage of vendor discovery happens through AI-mediated search rather than traditional Google search, your content isn't just competing for human attention—it's competing for inclusion in the AI's synthesis.

This connects directly to the positioning argument from Chapter 4. The same principles that make your positioning agent-readable—specificity, structured claims, verifiable evidence—also make your content more likely to be surfaced by AI systems. The PMM who writes a blog post titled "Unlocking the Power of Data-Driven Insights" is invisible to GEO because the content says nothing specific enough to be cited in response to a concrete buyer question. The PMM who writes "How We Reduced Supply Chain Forecasting Errors by 34% Using Real-Time ERP Data" is exactly what an AI system surfaces when a buyer asks about supply chain analytics capabilities.

### *The Content Operating Model*

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So what does a content strategy actually look like in this environment? We think it has three layers, and the time allocation between them is roughly the inverse of what most PMM teams practice today.

*The first layer is commodity content*—the blog posts, social updates, email sequences, slide decks, and one-pagers that keep the marketing engine running. This layer should be almost entirely agent-produced. Not because it doesn't matter, but because the marginal return on human effort here is approaching zero. An agent can produce a LinkedIn post about your product launch that's 90% as good as what a human would write, in 2% of the time. The human's job is to review it, ensure it's accurate, and add a line of personality if the occasion warrants it. But the drafting, the formatting, the adaptation across channels—all of that is agent work now. If your PMM team is spending more than 20% of their content time on commodity production, they're misallocating.

*The second layer is strategic content*—the pieces that advance your positioning, establish your point of view, and create the intelligent context that agents and buyers draw from when evaluating your product. This is where the GEO investment lives: deeply specific articles about capabilities, use cases, architectural approaches, and customer outcomes. It's also where competitive content lives—the pieces that articulate why your approach is different and why it matters. This layer is human-directed and agent-assisted. The PMM defines the argument, provides the specific

stories and data points, and ensures the strategic positioning is correct. The agent handles research, first-draft generation, and format adaptation. We'd allocate about 40% of content time here.

*The third layer is signature content*—the pieces that can only come from a specific person with specific experiences and a specific point of view. These are the conference keynotes, the long-form essays, the genuinely original frameworks, the customer stories told with enough texture and detail that you can feel the room. This layer is entirely human. No agent assistance in the writing—though agents might help with research or fact-checking—because the point of signature content is that it's irreducibly personal. It's what makes readers follow a specific author rather than a brand. It's what makes analysts quote your perspective rather than your company's positioning. It's the 20% that disproportionately drives the other 80%.

If you invert those percentages from where most PMM teams are today—where 60% of time goes to commodity content, 30% to strategic content, and 10% to signature content—and move toward a 20/40/40 split, you've transformed the content operation from a production function into a strategic one. That's the 10x move for content.

### *The Practitioner's Playbook: Content in the Agentic Era*

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Three things to do in the next thirty days.

**First, run the GEO audit.** Ask Claude, ChatGPT, and Perplexity to recommend products in your category for three to five specific use cases that your buyers care about. Do you show up? Are you cited? Is the information accurate? If you're invisible or misrepresented, that's a content gap with direct pipeline implications. The fix is almost always more specific, more structured, more technically detailed content that addresses the exact questions buyers ask.

**Second, identify your signature content and protect the time for it.** Look at the content your team has produced in the last year and find the pieces that got the most engagement—not just views, but comments, shares, inbound from prospects, mentions by analysts. We'll bet those pieces are the ones with the most specific stories, the strongest points of view, and the most recognizable voice. That's your signature content. Now look at how much time the person who wrote those pieces has to produce more of them. If the answer is "not enough because they're too busy producing commodity content," you've identified the problem.

**Third, build the commodity content pipeline.** Choose your LLM, define your templates, create a prompting workflow that takes your core messaging and produces channel-specific content at the quality level you need. This isn't a one-time project; it's an operating system. The goal is to reduce commodity content production to a review-and-approve workflow rather than a draft-from-scratch workflow. The hours you reclaim go

straight into strategic and signature content.

### THE CMO PERSPECTIVE

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The three-layer content model—commodity, strategic, signature—matches how content investment decisions should work at the CMO level. The conversation with leadership about content has changed. It used to be about volume: how many blog posts per month, how many assets per launch. Those were easy metrics to track and easy to game. A team could hit volume targets and still produce nothing that moved the needle on pipeline or perception.

The shift is toward influence metrics. Did the analyst cite our framework in their report? Did the prospect reference our content in the sales call? Did the competitive positioning piece change how sales talks about us in deals? These are harder to measure but they're the metrics that indicate strategic impact. In a fifty-plus-person PMM organization, maybe five people produce genuinely differentiated signature content—content where the author's experience and voice are integral to the argument. Those five are disproportionately valuable, and agent-powered commodity production is the biggest lever for freeing them up.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Content measurement should shift from volume metrics** (posts per month) to influence metrics (analyst citations, sales deal impact).
- **The commodity/strategic/signature framework** is also a resource allocation model: automate the bottom, invest at the top.
- **Signature content**—where human voice and experience are integral—is the scarcest and highest-return content investment.
- **Agent-powered commodity production** frees your best thinkers to do more of the strategic and signature work that moves markets.