

**Quiet Content:  
Digital Publishing Through the Lens of a  
Startup**

**by  
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## **Abstract**

This report examines Quietly, a technology startup company that provides tools for digital publishers. The report discusses what Quietly is, what advantages it provides, and why it started, while touching on the landscape of digital publishing. Exploring this landscape, the report examines how digital publishing has changed and will continue to based on content creation and consumption changing. How digital publishing began and how new technology continues to shape the diverse landscape of publishing, especially through the prevalence of different formats like list-based content or listicles will also be examined. Culminating in two case studies showcasing Quietly's tools and the challenges they've allowed two publishers to overcome, digital publishing will be discussed with focus on opportunities. Lastly, the report considers how publishing can take cues from technological advancement and early adoption to help transform the industry in a proactive way. All figures and statistics are accurate as of January 2015.

**Keywords:** digital publishing, online publishing, list, technology, content, sponsored content

*I dedicate this report to my family who's always  
encouraged me to be curious.*

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## Introduction

Publishing isn't a one-size fits all industry—different tools are needed for different publishers to succeed. The rise of the internet and new media caused a need not only for these new tools, but also for innovative strategies and new ideas to engage readers. Advances since then, including the prevalence of mobile devices, are continuing to keep the industry on its toes; innovating. Though the internet created challenges, it also fostered a space in the market for online publishing tools, resources, and generally, an environment for new ideas. In the words of Dan Franklin, digital publisher at Penguin Random House UK, “What do we do when digital publishing starts reaching maturity? The answer must be, more of it: more experimenting, more risk-taking, and doing what we know works well again and again” (Flood, par. 5).

This report explores the experimentation with digital publishing through the lens of a Vancouver-based startup called Quietly that places publishers and brands at its centre. Digital publishers and the rise of list-based content will be discussed by drawing on real world examples to illustrate the effectiveness of the services and tools Quietly provides. Along with this, insight will be shed on the list as an editorial format as well as the nature of the startup industry and the diversity seen within online publishers.

The focus of this report is on digital publishing, and more specifically on online-first magazine style or blog publications. That said, the trends noted and examples seen throughout, can provide insight to other digital publishers too, or maybe even indicate where the industry may progress to in the future, based on the trends outlined in the case studies of this report.

Chapter 1 will introduce the list, or listicle, as an editorial trend, but more notably an editorial format that has roots deeper than its current online iteration. Exploring the list through various applications and contexts, the effectiveness of the list will be explored in

terms of engaging readers, allowing publishers to adapt to consumption trends, especially with the rise of the internet, as well as, how Quietly uses a unique take on the list format.

In Chapter 2, Quietly will be explained in terms of its beginnings, focus, and clients. This chapter will also outline various revenue models startups use, and which ones Quietly is currently experimenting with to sustain a scalable and profitable company.

Chapter 3 delves into what Quietly offers to its partners, as well as the features of its tools and services. By exploring the value propositions, Quietly will be explained in greater detail. Chapter 4 showcases these features in use with two case studies, tracing the relationship Quietly has with *Vancity Buzz* and *The Stoner's Cookbook*. Exploring their uses of the tool, examples of their Quietly content, and the business relationship with Quietly, these case studies demonstrate the use of Quietly in the real world.

Although the information in this report applies to the digital publishing industry as it pertains to the experiences of a technology startup, it is hoped that the examples and conclusions drawn from it will allow the reader to think about publishing in a different way envisioning opportunity for the future. The goal is that this report will be of value to those interested in upcoming publishing technologies and the opportunity for innovation in this ever-changing industry.

Though different publishers require different tools, Quietly's take on digital publishing may be applicable to the way publishing is changing and will continue to transform. This report serves as a window into the world of publishing through the eyes of a startup. Acting as a snapshot in time, the following chapters will showcase not only trends in digital publishing today, but will also provide insight into what the future of publishing could look like.

## Chapter 1. The Rise of Lists

As readers shift from desktop computers and print books to tablets and smartphones, it's obvious that publishing is changing form. With content consumption shifting, creation and distribution must also follow suit. As Campbell notes in her 2010 Master of Publishing Project Report, publishers needn't abandon their old models, but must build upon or restructure them to succeed within a new media landscape.

A list or listicle, "an article made up of a series of facts, tips, quotations, or examples organized around a particular theme" (Barakat 2014), is a genre, a format for content, and an editorial trend. With the prevalence of lists on the internet, it's tempting to think they're a new phenomenon, especially when looking at Facebook's feed or any soft news source. Though this may be the case, lists have existed in publishing for a long time. In fact, they were splashed across magazine covers, like women's magazines and business periodicals, well before the popularity of the internet. Essentially, lists have long been an effective way to grab attention and encourage readership, whether on or offline.

Even before these magazines, lists were used. Some historic examples include Moses's *The Ten Commandments* and Martin Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses*. These lists, like the listicles of today, are examples of how large concepts can be distilled into precise and neatly quantified ideas—short, easy to read, and understandable. In the words of Umberto Eco, Italian philosopher and novelist, "The list is the origin of culture. It's part of the history of art and literature. What does culture want? To make infinity comprehensible. It also wants to create order," (Beyer & Gorris 2009, par. 2). That's exactly what lists have always done and continue to do.

The list, from early religious applications to magazine fodder, is not only an age-old

format, but can also transcend topic and audience. In December of 1902, *The New York Times* began running stories that were simply groupings of esoteric facts on any topic. From notes about birds to facts about applause, these lightweight pieces of content sat alongside the journalistic essays the *Times* was known for (Bungey, par. 12). This showed that the form of the list, or listicle, could encompass a variety of topics, no matter how high or lowbrow. The *Times* illustrated that most topics can be delivered in this simple editorial format. This has transcended to other publications too, where everything from sex tips (i.e. *Cosmopolitan Magazine*) to advice (i.e. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*) can be found in a list format

It seems though, that magazines have held onto this idea most tightly. This can be noted while waiting in line at a grocery store, glancing at the magazine racks. Each magazine cover is a flurry of quantified headlines, brightly coloured, bold and crafted just so in order to catch the reader's eye. Rather than describing an article in a lengthy headline, simple and concise titles provide enough context to grab a grocery store patrons attention as their items to are being rung through. By capturing them as an audience in those fleeting moments and convincing them to delve into the list and other articles, inside, these headlines play into the idea of impulse buys at the checkout counter (Underhill 1999, p. 214).

Employed to convert browsers to buyers, these headlines use the idea of the list to present information with a narrative or concept that a passerby (or now, an internet browser) can easily grasp—5 facts about 'x', 10 things you didn't know about 'y'. Beyond the cover, the content within a magazine often uses list-oriented formats. Including short snippets of information or sidebars alongside long form content helps engage readers, breaking up their experience with visual interest and graphic elements. In spaces as chaotic as grocery stores or the internet, lists provide some sense of order; a moment of understanding. These techniques are employed in every genre of print magazine—from *Reader's Digest* to *The Economist*—hence, it's clear that the internet didn't create the listicle, but rather gave it new life and a further nuanced form.

As publishing evolves, so do the brains and habits of readers. The form and function of the internet has contributed to the change in how content is consumed. Traditional

reading patterns were typically F-shaped in nature, meaning a reader scanned in two horizontal lines, then one long vertical one, effectively skimming the article (Nielsen 2006, par. 2). Because of the effectiveness of this reading pattern in print, the internet arranged itself to cater to this style as well. But what wasn't anticipated was the distractions that came with the new medium. Readers are often drawn away from F-shaped reading by things like advertisements, images, and hyperlinks. Disrupting this pattern has led to online readers to consume content in a non-linear fashion, where they scan for keywords and photos in a zigzag, often missing information (Rosenwald 2014, par. 2). Skimming for a very short period of time before deciding what to devote a little more attention to, an online publication has about 2.6 seconds to capture a reader (Peacock 2013). Within this finite period of time, sporadic readers are more inclined to stop on content that is spatially differentiated, more visually rich, or just easier to consume as quickly as possible—they need something that disrupts their nonlinear pattern. The list has proven an effective way of disrupting this pattern.

Besides the fundamentals of online consumption, lists cater to the basic sensibilities of a reader. They provide them with context in terms of time needed to read an article, the basic facts, variety in the reading experience, efficient information organization, and most importantly, they're "simply a more effortless way to consume information" (Thompson 2013, par. 12). Readers are also able to better comprehend and compartmentalize ordered facts, especially in smaller quantities (Konnikova 2013, par. 5)—thus a list triumphs over a lengthy article in terms of consumption. Along with this, there are certain components of lists that are effective. From headlines that play to the way readers search, to numbered content that gives readers an idea of how long an article will be, lists are pleasing because they are generally not deceptive. Rather, they are a clear form of communication: a concise headline and the basic facts that allow a reader's brain to immediately make sense of the topic (Konnikova 2013, par. 2). Beyond that, the format easily allows a publisher to flexibly transfer its value proposition to a reader (Saleem, par. 4). The list isn't specific to one type of content, but rather is flexible enough to be used across topics.

In fact, though lists have been a popular way to consume content in the past, in the present, they provide solutions to particular problems of content abundance and on-the-

go consumption with 56 per cent of Americans owning a smartphone as of 2014 (Pew Research 2014, par. 1). This is further noted by the fact that internet usage has surpassed desktop usage as of January 2014 (O'Toole 2014, par. 1). Lists are a way to cater to these reader trends while still providing robust content in a consumable format that is familiar and easy to navigate. This is especially notable considering mobile devices are where people spend, on average, 2 hours and 57 minutes of their time a day (Brustein 2014, par. 2) consuming content, on the go.

This change in container (physical paper versus mobile phone or tablet), especially in regards to online content, has shifted reader desires. Rather than consuming long form content on a small screen (the acronym TL;DR, "too long didn't read", has been perpetuated in regards to this type of experience), short, chunked, and sticky content is what's most effective. Readers expect quick updates, rather than lengthy reading. Lists keep content short and mobile-focused, they appeal to the way readers are now 'snacking' on news, where bulleted and visually rich information is preferred (Lawlor 2013).

## **Chapter 2. Quietly: Introduced + Explained**

Quietly is a simple and easy-to-use content management platform for creating list-based content that can be embedded in three formats: slideshow, map view, and media carousel. A delivery tool focused on visually rich list-based content, Quietly offers other benefits to publishers such as analytic insight, search engine optimization (SEO) advantages, the ability to add layered data, WordPress workflow integration, and more, all of which will be described in Chapter 3. Along with this, the team at Quietly is developing a marketplace where content can be bought and sponsored. Most recently, Quietly has begun to not only provide the aforementioned tools, but also works with brands and publishers to fulfill their content needs.

As identified by popular sites that produce highly shareable articles, short form content is succeeding. Though it doesn't replace in-depth, long form content, lightweight content has proven to be successful in various formats (such as books, newspapers, and even historical contexts, as mentioned in Chapter 1). Although there seems to be a stark difference between these two types of content, Quietly saw an opportunity to find a balance between the two.

By staying neutral in the long form versus short form content debate where pop culture aggregators and journalists each fight for their own form, Quietly shows that highly engaging and shareable content can be both visual and informative; compelling and investigative. Ultimately, Quietly is focused on formulating lists as a fully thought out piece of content, showing that they don't have to be reductive. Lists can live as the content themselves, with comprehensive research and evidence behind them. They can act as supplementary or complementary content to other articles or ideas. They can provide summaries for longer form content to engage a new audience or provide fast facts for readers on the go. Lists are merely a format.



Considering the above notions, Quietly's beginnings and journey in publishing technology and services to date, will be explored below.

## **2.1. Beginnings: How Quietly Started**

Quietly is the brainchild of Dario Meli and Sean Tyson. With several years of experience working in advertising agencies, especially in digital marketing and social media, they identified an opportunity for a product that would help content producing media organizations and most importantly, digital publishers.

Meli, co-founder and chief executive officer (CEO) of Quietly, worked at Invoke Media where he met Tyson. Tyson, co-founder and chief strategic officer (CSO), has ten plus years of experience working with clients on business development, account management, and strategy. They both noticed clients struggling to produce content that was successful with readers, efficient in its production, and effectively distributed. Quietly was born out of these observations and Meli and Tyson were determined to find a solution. "Newsrooms are being decentralized, personal recommendations are the driving force of purchasing decisions, and attention spans are evaporating. We're developing a system to address all of these factors," Meli says of Quietly (2014), and with that came a vision.

With an original team of four people, the prototype began development in January 2013. In September of the same year, the first iteration of the product was launched. With a consumer focus, the product was described as the following by Meli: "You'll be able to create and share personalized lists of your favourite places and discover great recommendations from people you trust" (Lewis 2013, par. 3).

Quietly began releasing invites to the beta version app to monitor the environment and ensure the product was well received and ready for market. This process began in mid October of 2013, when the web application was officially launched. The iOS application

was released into the Apple Store on November 19, 2013, rounding out the set of tools for both desktop and mobile users.

Now, Quietly has deviated from its original consumer focus to work with publishers and brands. Though the shift seems like a classic startup pivot, both Meli and Tyson originally set out to work with publishers and brands, but saw a consumer-facing product as the place to start.

## **2.2. Format: Lists Within Quietly**

Considering print magazines embrace lists as an editorial form, as noted in Chapter 1, it's not surprising that online, magazine-like publications, including blogs, also saw value in the format. Because of this, Quietly recognized an opportunity in the market to create a platform that allowed publishers and brands to simply create list-based content and cater to this editorial trend. Not only does Quietly allow for easy list creation, these lists can be displayed in three distinct formats: slideshow (image-based with overlaid text), map view (location-based with images and descriptions), and media carousel (media based with ability to integrate photos, videos, gifs, and text. In a time where content is abundant and anyone can be a publisher (McAlister 2014, par. 10), lists are effective at cutting through the noise of a cluttered and constantly progressing publishing landscape. But list-based content can in fact complement long form content—the two forms don't need to exist exclusive of each other. Lists are a flexible format and can deliver key facts with an in-depth exploration following. Thus, they are effective in capturing readers. Engaging them with chunked text, lists play to content consumption trends and also incorporate images, which promote deeper engagement. Lists also provide visual fluency, which is the ability and ease of processing an image or information, aiding the reading process.

The list-based content created in Quietly echoes the above trends as it is more visual than content in paragraph form because it must include photos alongside copy and other data, like maps. With visuals processed 60,000 times faster than text (Scherer n.d., par.

5), a picture can convey a message to a reader quickly. By combining the short and impactful format of a list with rich imagery, Quietly plays to two content consumption trends, showing how lists can be an effective method of delivery. The list format may grab reader's attention initially, while the images and interactional components within the Quietly user experience generate greater engagement.

This engagement is another key reason why lists are effective. By employing images and content in Quietly's slideshow, media carousel, or map format, users are likely to spend more time on site. Where page views were a traditionally more powerful measurement, now engagement and measures like time on site and impressions are more effective in measuring publishing success (Poynter 2014). By capturing a reader's attention and then giving them an efficient reading experience, publishers can keep readers on their site for longer using list-based content.

Flexible not just in terms of content, lists can also exist in multiple formats. Take for example BuzzFeed or BoredPanda. Both of these internet giants are masters of the list. Creating page upon page of scrollable lists, their formats mimic F-shaped reading in a linear set-up. Quietly, on the other hand, employs a slideshow format that allows for a horizontal consumption experience. This is for several reasons, mostly with the reader's experience as the centre. This horizontal format, which readers scroll or swipe through to see the subsequent content, is very effective for mobile consumption.

To describe the experience further, Quietly's content is bundled in an iFrame, which means that all types of content, including multimedia, are consumable without scrolling (roughly five out of 100 people won't scroll to continue reading more [Manjoo 2013, par. 2]). This bodes well for online publishers as scrolling is an action online that often causes readers to navigate away from a page, especially since ten per cent of readers do not scroll at all while reading (Nielsen 2010, par. 1), meaning less content is consumed and less time is spent on site. Along with this, scrolling means readers are taken away from the top-level navigation. This could impact the discovery of more content, subscriptions to a newsletter or engagement with social channels, or, in the case of a brand or e-commerce publisher, purchasing items from a store. By keeping readers above the digital fold, there are more opportunities to further engage and

connect with them, ultimately building a relationship. This idea of the digital fold also impacts digital publishers who use display advertisements as a form of revenue. With big box and banner ads at the top of sites, it is advantageous to keep readers near these to serve more impressions to the advertiser.

This horizontal experience is also advantageous for smaller publishers, which are Quietly's focus. As they tend to have fewer resources, especially in regard to technology, the tool allows them to produce nicely packaged content without having advanced technological know-how. Whereas online list-oriented behemoths, like BuzzFeed, have full IT departments that can optimize their webpages for above/below the fold trends and mobile-first design, smaller publishers prefer simple, all-in-one solutions that allow them to capitalize on their web real estate while providing readers the best possible experience. Rather than building a post image by image, inserting copy where necessary, Quietly allows publishers and writers to build a dynamic, mobile-optimized post in one self-contained platform, with no knowledge of CSS or coding required.

With historical usage validating current use and the advantages explained above, lists are being embraced by a variety of publications. These publications include ones that report and present reputable news and information, rather than just those focusing on frivolous pop culture and deceptive headlines also known as click bait. Because of their implicit benefits, lists are becoming the norm across publications, whether they stand-alone or complement long form content. With this, Quietly provides a solution to capturing readers and satisfying their consumption appetites, while helping with web traffic for the reasons above. Along with this, Quietly also helps alleviate these problems within the editorial workflow, ultimately leading to list-based content as the most effective format.

## **2.3. Focus: Shift From Consumer to Publishers + Brands**

At its inception, Quietly was intended to break through abundance of content on the internet and social media by focusing on personal recommendations a reader chose to engage with. Whereas other social sites often found users bombarded with information they may not want (like advertisements), Quietly was a tool where you could find just what you needed, from people you trusted—quietly.

The product was geared toward a consumer audience and now because of this, the user experience is easy to navigate without any previous information or knowledge. This was one of the main reasons the consumer was focused on at first—to ensure a user-friendly and simplistic product was the result of the development team’s hard work.

Quietly is now concentrated on the digital and brand publishing aspects of the business. It’s a tool that operates in the background, allowing digital publishers and brands to procure and sponsor content while presenting it in an aesthetically pleasing way, all while obtaining insightful data to inform future content strategy.

With two distinct audiences, Quietly did make a shift in early 2014 to focus on publishers and brands as well as creating a marketplace as the core offering (details to come in Chapter 3). This decision was made as there was an opportunity to create revenue with publishers and brands versus consumers. Ultimately, there was a market opportunity to help online publishers and brands, those with magazine-like properties and blogs, create all types of content, including long and short form, with a focus on list-based articles. Ultimately, Quietly makes list-based content creation easy. A list-based article can be put together in the user-friendly content management system that fully integrates image and search functions. By building a platform that was understood by a consumer first, who often wouldn’t have experience with other content management systems or online tools, Quietly ensured that it would be simple enough for any user, whether they be a publisher, brand or consumer.

The shift was corroborated by the following fact: there was no potential for a list-based

consumer application to create revenue based on Quietly's goals. Both Meli and Tyson wanted a space where advertisements weren't used, which limited the ability for the consumer product to turn a profit. Because of this, and based on the company's original vision, focus was put on growing publisher and brand relationships while encouraging publishers to adopt the tool and use Quietly's content fulfillment services. With this plan set in motion, a variety of revenue models began taking shape, all of which will be discussed in section 2.5.

Though consumers still use Quietly, and often sign up through an interaction with a publisher's content created within the platform, they are less of a focus as Quietly's business has grown to engage brands and publishers first and foremost.

## **2.4. Partners: Who Quietly Works With**

Though digital publishing spans across a variety of types of publishers, topics, and niches, Quietly has honed in on digital-first, niche-focused publications to work with as partners. This type of publication quickly became the most apparent choice for Quietly to partner with as their familiarity with online tools and publishing made introducing them to a new tool simple. With this focus, Quietly's tools were a natural fit with the content they already made. These types of publishers were quick to adopt the tool, but more so, were intrigued to find out more about Quietly's content fulfillment services as many of them had readers with a seemingly insatiable desire for new content.

Another characteristic that Quietly's partners have is that they tend to focus their content within specific niches. As with more and more online publications, these publishers have found a specific audience that wants to engage with content and is looking for an expert on a topic of their choosing. Along with catering to a niche, whether it is a specific city, a specific hobby, or a specific lifestyle choice, the publications Quietly works with have a strong social media presence, and more often than not, are in stages of extreme growth. As they grow, they are often looking for additional content to supplement their own to satisfy their reader's desire to interact with new and engaging content and encourage more time spent on their sites. By easing some smaller, niche publishers' workflows and

challenges, Quietly proves valuable.

Within this realm, Quietly's biggest partners are *Vancity Buzz*, *The Stoner's Cookbook*, *Koreaboo*, *Vancouver is Awesome*, and *InTouch Weekly*. These publishers are demonstrating success in varying ways, but all show that audiences online demand quality content related to the specific topics they like, versus general information. Readers like nicely packaged chunks of content that align with their interests and niche publications cater to this.

As of January 2015, Quietly has started working with brands and agencies as partners as well. These brands are seeking content to add to their sites, and more specifically, aid in content marketing efforts to increase sales and interactions with their brand or products. These additions to Quietly's partners opened up a new opportunity for more service-based offerings. By working with brands that are often new to publishing, Quietly can help them establish a content strategy with a fulfillment plan to ease the process of creating and managing a blog.

## **2.5. Revenue: Business Models**

As a pre-revenue startup, Quietly has experimented with a variety of revenue models with different partners. Aside from grants and investor funding, below are the current revenue models being tested, followed by the revenue models Quietly hopes to use in the future. Quietly hopes to become revenue positive without soliciting another round of funding.

There are three potential overarching revenue models for Quietly as a start up:

- Software as a service (SaaS)/subscription: Users are charged a monthly fee for using a tool
- Transactional: Fees are taken per transaction, for things like advertising sales
- Services: A user pays for things like strategic guidance

Below, the three revenue streams Quietly has been leveraging, which tie into the above

models, are described. Of course, the ultimate goal is to find a stream that can be scaled in a way that ensures predictable revenue.

### **2.5.1. Current Revenue Models**

At the time of writing this report, there are three revenue models that are being used with various clients. These include content fulfillment agreements, joint venture opportunities, and sponsorship processing.

#### **Content Sourcing and Fulfillment**

Many online publications and blogs are in search of content. Rather than a publisher or brand hiring a full-time writer, Quietly helps fulfill their content needs with a network of freelance contributors, which Quietly currently manages.

Because of this desire for content and Quietly's ability to fulfill various content needs, many partners purchase content packages from Quietly. These content retainers are based on term commitments and vary in number of stories and frequency. Pricing is dependent on the client and includes the costs of the writing (mainly outsourced) and quality control and editing (done in house). Along with this, there are added services like strategic consultations and research based on analytics, keyword trends, and the competitive landscape the publisher is a part of. Once content is created for a client, they can add it to their blog or site to supplement their current content offerings where Quietly doesn't partake in the day-to-day management.

#### **Joint Ventures**

Quietly is working on several projects with other entrepreneurs, media organizations, and celebrity personalities to create content-focused websites and media properties. In these cases, the other party generally provides the domain and/or brand, while Quietly manages and creates the vision and strategy for the site, sources the content as well as develops and manages the site. Because of the joint nature of this venture, Quietly and the client share revenue based on a variety of factors, meaning that this revenue model fluctuates in revenue production. At the time of writing this report, Quietly is working on two joint ventures, both of which aim to generate revenue from advertisements, affiliate



programs, and content sponsorships.

### **Sponsored Content Processing**

With the goal of building a marketplace where brands will come to find great content to sponsor in order to increase their reach and brand awareness, Quietly is working with some partners to help with the preparation of their media kits and their inbound direct ad sales. Along with this, the Quietly team assists with the fulfillment of these sales when they involve advertorial or sponsored content, in the Quietly widget or through traditional copy. Essentially, Quietly facilitates an advertising package sale with the sponsor, creates the content required (list-based or otherwise), and delivers it to the publisher. For these services, Quietly charges not only for the content, but also a processing fee for facilitating the advertising deal.

### **2.5.2. Future Revenue Models**

As Quietly continues to grow, it becomes more apparent which revenue models from above are scalable and will be able to earn the company revenue in the long run. Based on what has been successful in generating revenue so far, as well as projected goals and projects, the following are the future revenue models Quietly will adopt.

#### **Marketplace Transactions**

Quietly plans to have a marketplace within the platform where brands and publishers can connect with writers to create content, as well as advertisers who can sponsor that content. Currently a manual process, where Quietly's team "match makes" at these two stages, this marketplace will encourage the use of Quietly's tools, but will focus more on the production and distribution of quality content.

When a fully automated marketplace is realized, Quietly's main revenue will come from transaction fees. These fees will be incurred from both publishers and brands. Where brands pay to sponsor publisher stories, Quietly will take a fee, and where publishers pay writers to fulfill a story, Quietly will also take a fee.

But why would both of these parties enter into a situation where they know they'll be

paying for services they already use? Because the marketplace will make negotiating and closing these types of deals extremely simple. The marketplace will be easy to use, risk will be managed, and the systems built and used to facilitate these transactions will take care of things like legal agreements, payment, and other paperwork.

### **Content Fulfillment**

Though the main revenue model for Quietly's future is through marketplace transaction fees, Quietly will continue to maintain and honour content retainers for current clients. Along with this, where necessary, Quietly's team can fulfill content orders placed in the marketplace if needed.

Quietly's current offerings have been proven successful with both brands and publishers adopting tools and services and complying with varying business models. Since June 2014, Quietly has worked with over 25 publishers and brands, helping them populate their sites with data-driven content that helps them achieve their goals. For example, one publisher increased their monthly traffic by 43% over 4 months. Now, in early 2015, Quietly is working with key clients to create hundreds of articles each month, which are produced by writers Quietly hires with input from the client. With new developments in the tools, services, and marketplace, these numbers will continue to grow, as expected from a startup company, and engagement will also climb, showing the importance of technological innovation in the publishing field. Another indicator of success is Quietly bringing in revenue from four clients by using the current revenue streams described above: content fulfillment, joint ventures, and content sponsorship processing. With new ideas and campaigns being implemented each day, Quietly continues to connect with publishers and brands to develop revenue streams that are scalable and realistic for the team as a growing startup.

## **Chapter 3. What Quietly Does: Value Propositions and Features**

Quietly works with publishers and brands to provide them with tools to build list-based content, while also offering services to aid in content fulfillment and sponsorship, as well as providing strategic guidance. With lists being an editorial trend and an increasingly popular format for online publications and brands, Quietly leverages this desire for content into clients using its tools and services. Though Quietly's tools offer distinct value propositions and revolve around specific features, the main goal is to change the way content is produced, distributed, consumed, and sponsored. Below, value propositions and features of the tool will be explained.

### **3.1. Value Propositions: What Quietly Offers**

With a focus on online publishers, and more recently brands, Quietly provides partners with three key offerings: content fulfillment, publishing tools, and assistance in finding sponsors for their content.

Each of these value propositions, described below, will eventually become part of an automated two-sided marketplace, where publishers are able to produce or purchase content and subsequently find advertisers to help pay it through strategic sponsorships, effectively creating revenue for publishers.

### **3.1.1. Content Fulfillment**

For many publishers, content can be a huge expense. Due to the time that well-crafted content takes to make and the costs associated with writing staff, content is thinning as fewer digital publishers are able to find a model that works to efficiently source, create, and distribute it. Much like Uber, which works on an excess capacity model, writers and freelancers are often a market that's underutilized. These professionals are able to provide publishers with access to the kind of content they need—niche or otherwise—in order to fulfill their publication's requirements. This generally comes at a fraction of the cost of full-time staff, and provides freelancers the ability to work with a variety of clients. Quietly helps connect writers and publishers through a growing network of freelancers from around the world. These freelance contributors form the network, which at the time of writing this report, is a manual process where Quietly hires and assigns a writer content specific to a brand or publisher. These writers have been sourced through signing up for Quietly, through professional networks, as well as through specific job postings. Quietly currently acts as a middleman providing quality control and editing of the content, manages processes from writing briefs to delivering publisher ready content, and overall, provides publishers and brands a simple process to source content.

Along with this, the rise of content marketing means that brands are looking to content to generate traffic to their sites and increase sales. By providing brands or ecommerce stores with the ability to create content for their website and social channels easily and relatively inexpensively, Quietly tapping into a market outside of the business' original scope. This is largely by using the contributor network Quietly has created. By targeting both publishers and brands, Quietly has the opportunity to work with more clients by not limiting itself to one, very specific type.

### **3.1.2. Presentation**

Quietly's proprietary tools allow publishers and brands to package their content neatly in a list format to publish on their site. With the idea of the list-based content at the centre, Quietly's tools easily allow lists to be built and subsequently displayed in three different ways—slideshow, media slideshow, and map view. Partners are able to customize each of the three displays to their chosen specifications, by changing font type and size, brand

colours, and more to have Quietly content blend into their site. Once complete, an embed code is generated which can be pasted into whichever content management system a publisher uses. The process is simple by adding text, photos, links, and locations with the result being a minimalist slideshow that is easy for a reader to consume. This structured list format also allows for the tracking of precise, item level analytics, and provides an SEO advantage. As many bloggers and publishers work with a small team with limited resources, Quietly allows their process of publishing to become more streamlined without dedicating more money or more time than necessary, especially when it comes to design and data. Features of Quietly's digital publishing tools will be outlined in section 3.2.

### **3.1.3. Revenue Creation**

Consumers are continually presented with low-cost or free content, meaning it is of growing importance that publishers and brands maximize the return on their content investments to engage readers more effectively. By connecting partners to sponsors, they are able to create more revenue or find more effective ways of managing their current advertising and sponsorship tactics. This sponsored content is catered an alternative to traditional advertising, which is an important distinction as consumers dislike display advertising (Lomas 2012, par. 1), as it's often viewed as an annoyance. Quietly provides a marketplace where advertisers can find publishers who are creating content that aligns with their vision or campaign goals. Sponsorship using Quietly allows the affiliation to be within the content as a clickable link throughout slides (see further details in section 3.2), rather than interstitial or periphery. Thus, the content is the main focus and the sponsorship is secondary, ensuring that all sponsorships add value to readers rather than taking away from their consumption experience.

The above value propositions will soon be accessible to partners through a two-sided marketplace which will feature an Editorial Network, where publishers can source and purchase content, and a Sponsorship Marketplace, where advertisers can come to sponsor content from partners. Described further in section 4.2, these processes are currently manual, where Quietly's staff match publishers, brands, writers, and

advertisers up personally, but by Quarter 3 of 2015, will be automated as new component to Quietly's current platform.

Partners are able to work with Quietly using any or all of the above offerings. By being flexible, Quietly works with partners to alleviate their unique challenges—from increasing conversion from social channels to building a content marketing strategy—and helps strategize solutions that work best for them.

## **3.2. Features: Why Quietly Works**

Quietly has grown significantly since the first prototype. Originally consisting of the basic functionality for consumers to create list-based content, the application now includes a more robust set of tools inspired by the needs of digital publishers and brands. Quietly's offerings can be summed up into four distinct offerings: Tools for Digital Publishers, Editorial Network, Sponsorship Marketplace, and Consumer List Creation.

### **3.2.1. Tools for Digital Publishers**

Quietly's Tools for Digital Publishers and brands will be the foundation for both the Editorial Network and Sponsorship Marketplace. These tools include display options, a sponsorship field, analytics, WordPress workflow integration, call to action features, and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) benefits.

#### **Display Options**

Quietly started with one embedded carousel display option, the slideshow. Now, there are three viewing options for publishers to choose from:

- Slideshow: showcases photos with overlaid text
- Map View: uses an interactive map to display content alongside descriptions, website links, photos, and more

- Media Carousel: uses multiple types of media to convey the message of the content where the text and media are separate from each other, but still within a carousel

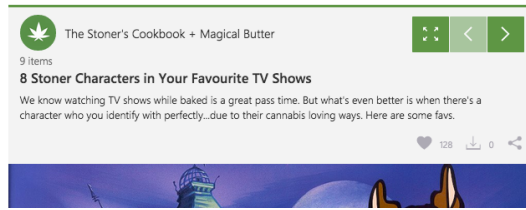
Each display option contains some consistent elements including, titles, descriptions, images, website information, hyperlinked text, and location information. The difference is merely how the content is presented, allowing the publisher to integrate the carousel into their site, making it as customized as desired. This is important as one of Quietly's goals is to enhance content, rather than distract from it—the customizability of the embedded slideshows allow for the content to blend into a partner's site. The three display options also provide the advantage in that a partner can create one piece of content in Quietly and produce three different embeds giving their content more life than one simple post. More specifically, Quietly's display options allow publishers and brands to display their content in clean and aesthetically pleasing way.

All of the features described below are available through these embedded carousels.

## **Sponsorship**

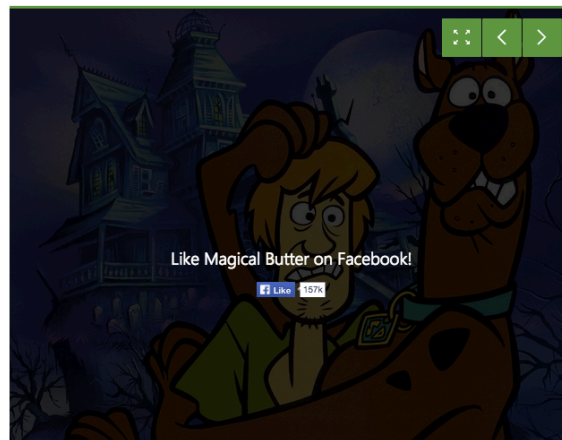
Sponsorship integration in Quietly differentiates itself from other sponsored slideshows in that it's not interstitial, where an advertisement is displayed between pages as a reader navigates. Rather, alongside the author information that is on each slide (see fig. 1) there is a clickable link with the sponsors name and associated URL. In this case the publisher/brand is *The Stoner's Cookbook* and the sponsor is Magical Butter, an oil creation machine. This model allows the reader to have an uninterrupted reading experience while still seeing the brands name, generating awareness.

Adding a sponsor into a Quietly slideshow is very simple. All a publisher or brand has to do is select the sponsorship field and add the appropriate name and URL. By making the process very easy, a publisher is then able to facilitate more sponsored post sales, if there is demand, and generate more income.



**Figure 1: A sponsored piece of content from *The Stoner's Cookbook*<sup>1</sup>.**

The final slide in a sponsored post, which will be described in more detail below, can be customized for an advertiser to encourage readers to interact with their social channels or sign up for a newsletter or contest (see fig. 2). To further integrate a sponsorship, the first slide of the list, as well as the copy surrounding the list, like the introduction, can mention the brand, much like in native advertising (see fig. 3), providing the advertiser with one more chance to have their message resonate with a reader.



**Figure 2: Final slide call to action on a sponsored article from *The Stoner's Cookbook*.<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Lucas Young, "8 Stoner Characters in Your Favourite TV Shows", *The Stoner's Cookbook*, January 7, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Lucas Young, "8 Stoner Characters in Your Favourite TV Shows", *The Stoner's Cookbook*, January 7, 2015.



# 8 Stoner Characters in Your Favourite TV Shows

JANUARY 7, 2015 / LUCAS YOUNG

Some of TV's best characters are definitely known for indulging in the green. From animated series to comedies, here are eight of the best small screen stoners.

Join their ranks by grabbing a [Magical Butter](#) machine for \$20 off using the promo code STONER at [magicalbutter.com](#).



**Figure 3: Sponsored introductory copy from a sponsored article on *The Stoner's Cookbook*.<sup>3</sup>**

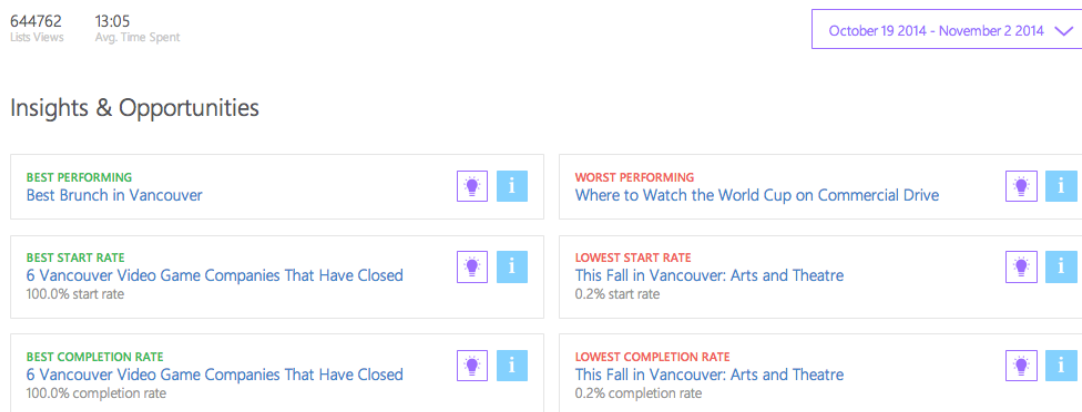
Sponsored posts created within Quietly allow the sponsorship (name and campaign URL) to be within the content, rather than exist around it, where it can be ignored by the reader or even blocked by software. This encourages the sponsor to let the publisher have full editorial control and merely be associated with the content, rather than providing or controlling it. It is up to the publisher's discretion as to how often they run sponsored stories, how much input they allow brands to have on the article, as well as how much they charge for them for this type of service. Through sponsorship trials with different partners, Quietly has determined that being associated with great content is more appealing to readers than explicit branded content or traditional advertisements. That said, an advertiser may want an explicit mention or promotion, and that, of course, is up to the publisher or brand.

In the future, Quietly plans to look further into sponsorship integration. There is discussion of having a small, tacked on banner unit on each slide where the banner will provide information relevant to the content, rather than display an unrelated ad unit. For example, this unit could encourage users to sign up for an email list or promote a

<sup>3</sup> Lucas Young, "8 Stoner Characters in Your Favourite TV Shows", *The Stoner's Cookbook*, January 7, 2015.

promotional code to receive a special offer from the advertiser. Ultimately, the style of advertising that a publisher chooses is based on his or her own editorial vision and ethics. Quietly strives to find a way to appeal to the interests of advertisers and uphold the editorial integrity of the publisher, all while giving the reader an experience they enjoy and find valuable. As Quietly works more on sponsored campaigns, new ideas of sponsorship may take form.

## Analytics



**Figure 4: Quietly Analytics Dashboard, Insights & Opportunities section<sup>4</sup>**

Analytic data can provide publishers and brands with insight into what readers like, what content is most effective, and what they can focus on in the future to attract more readers. Within Quietly, not only is analytic information available around the content, item level analytics are also available because of the nature of structured content within Quietly. This is advantageous as publishers can then see precisely which items resonate most with readers and create subsequent content around these items. Quietly's current analytic dashboard displays raw data as well as simplified insights that will eventually be productized and licensed for a fee. In the next quarter, these analytics will be distilled into simple and actionable information that will allow partners to see exactly how their

<sup>4</sup> "Quietly Analytics Dashboard," Quietly, 2014

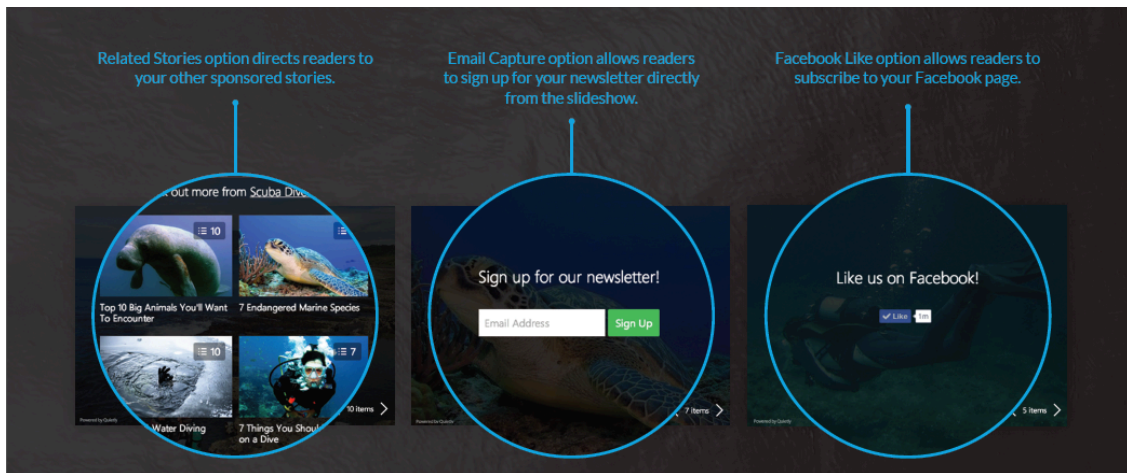
content is performing within a custom dashboard alongside tips and tricks to ensure they're getting the most out of the content they're creating. Rather than knowing how many people have landed on their page, they will see which topic or segment of their content is resonating the most with readers based on measures such as time spent on an item, item retention, and further granular measures. These insights are valuable in the sense that they can provide ideas for future content and also can uncover segments or facts a publisher might not know about their reader in order to more effectively target them.

Along with this dashboard, the team at Quietly looks into a variety of analytics, including Google Analytics and keyword trends, to provide ideas and best practices to partners as an added service.

### **WordPress Workflow**

Quietly has a WordPress plugin that allows for the custom code generated within the Quietly platform to be easily embedded on a partner's site. In order to integrate more seamlessly into a publisher's workflow, the plugin is also functional within the post creation dashboard of WordPress. This allows publishers to seamlessly add lists to their existing content all within the WordPress interface. Furthermore, the plugin will continue to evolve so publishers are able to edit and author lists within their WordPress dashboard, rather than within the Quietly platform itself, making the workflow even more efficient.

### **Call to Action Features**



**Figure 5: Quietly Call to Action Final Slide Options, as per Scuba Diver Life's 2014 Media Planner<sup>5</sup>**

Employed on the last slide of each carousel, this feature allows digital publishers to capture emails, encourage users to interact with their social channels, or refer readers to other recommended stories on their site. Each partner is able to choose which option works best for each article. This simple feature encourages readers to engage more deeply with content and allows publishers to connect with them on different platforms fostering a relationship and increasing the chances the reader will consume more content at a later date.

The customizations of the final slide include social channel integration (including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn), email capture (for either a newsletter or contest with a Terms and Services link to comply with anti-spam laws), and recommended stories, which allows publishers to highlight popular stories at the end of a story. The recommended slide is especially effective in resurfacing archived content. As a valuable piece of real estate, Quietly continues to find ways to let partners customize this last slide, which can be very useful when working with sponsored content as each final slide can be tailored to a campaign.

<sup>5</sup> Scuba Diver Life. Scuba Diver Life Media Kit, *Scuba Diver Life*, 2014.

### **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**

Most publishers and brands want to improve their search ranking so their content is surfaced more often. Quietly provides publishers with an SEO advantage as the embed code for each carousel contains all of the data within the list (photos, text, links), even though the Quietly carousel is within an iFrame. The content within a Quietly slideshow appears in the markup of the page within list tags, where the iFrame is embedded with structured data. This plays to search engine algorithms, which prefer structured content or in this case content that's presented as a list, over unstructured paragraphs (Yerian 2006). Thus, pages featuring a media carousel have an SEO advantage.

### **3.2.2. Editorial Network**

Quietly's Editorial Network is made up of freelance contributors from around the world that specialize in different topics. They provide the content publishers desire and are incentivized to do so as many writers have excess capacity, therefore they can fill their time doing something they're good at while making money. Currently, these writers are hired by Quietly on a contract basis to produce a pre-determined amount of content for a specific partner, where Quietly mediates the content delivery and quality. In the future, when Quietly adds to its current platform, the Editorial Network will be a part of the marketplace where writers and brands or publishers can connect directly and facilitate a content deal.

When the tool is added to and the process is automated, Quietly profiles will become writers portfolios where they can showcase their work and be rated based on their past work and skillset. Publishers and brands, whose Quietly profiles will become business profiles, will have information about their voice and style, as well as upcoming jobs. Writers will be able to apply for jobs and even pitch ideas, while publishers and brands can view writer profiles to determine if that writer is a good match for their publication. From there, the automated process would consist of a portal where publishers can submit a content brief, deadlines can be set, content can be delivered, and payment can be streamlined.

Built to help fill the gap in supplying and fulfilling content may publishers face, this network will help publishers save money by not having to employ full time writers, rather they can source content when necessary. It can also be a great resource for publishers who are looking into sponsored content but want to be slightly removed from it in order to maintain their ethics. This network will become one side of Quietly's two-sided marketplace that will also include a sponsorship marketplace.

### **3.2.3. Sponsorship Marketplace**

The Sponsorship Marketplace component of Quietly's tools will feature a pool of advertisers looking for great content to sponsor in order to associate their brand with great content. As native advertising and content marketing continue to grow (BIA/Kelsey, in their 2013 report note that revenue is expected to grow from \$1.6 billion in 2012 to \$4.6 billion in 2017 [par. 2]), this is a valuable way for publishers to increase revenue while also allowing advertisers to reach readers in a more meaningful way.

At this time, the Quietly team manually administers this process, where publishers are paired with brands to work on a campaign together. There are two ways this process currently works:

1. A publisher or brand approaches Quietly with a piece of sponsored content, which Quietly's team subsequently fulfills.
2. Quietly uses its network to bring an advertiser to the brand or publisher to create a sponsored content campaign.

From there Quietly helps facilitate the sale and/or creates the content to fulfill the sale. The monetary transaction varies between each option as there are different fees and costs associated with each one (more details can be found in section 2.5).

Once automated, the Sponsorship Marketplace will be a platform where brands/publishers and advertisers will have profiles that outline the key details needed in a sponsorship sale, like monthly visitors and page views from the publisher and campaigns from the brand. With this information, the two parties will be able to connect and facilitate a sponsorship transaction.

Once fully developed, the entire Quietly Marketplace, with both editorial and sponsorship streams, will provide a space for publishers to both source and sponsor content, eliminating complicated steps and processes, while bolstering their publication all within one place.

#### **3.2.4. Consumer List Creation**

The Consumer List Creation tools also live alongside the features mentioned above and are a set of tools to create and share lists with friends and networks. As mentioned previously, this component of the business is no longer the focus. With that said, the team at Quietly is currently working on finding the best way to entertain and communicate with current consumers and intends to have a plan for this by mid 2015.

## Chapter 4. Case Studies

Quietly, in working with several digital publishers, has demonstrated the success of the tools and services it offers. The following case studies highlight two specific partners and will detail not only their use of Quietly's tools, but will also demonstrate the diversity of digital publishers and brands worked with, their successes, needs and challenges, as well as the business models Quietly has established as a growing startup.

Not only do these case studies exhibit how Quietly's tools can be adapted to different digital publishers; they also demonstrate how success for these publishers varies. By using different tools and techniques, and applying them to areas in which each publisher wishes to grow, these case studies also show that success in digital publishing is dependent on the publisher as well as the resources they already have (including traffic, distribution, staff, and so on).

To note while reading through the case studies on *Vancity Buzz*, a local Vancouver news and entertainment online community, and *The Stoner's Cookbook*, a marijuana edibles and culture site, is that, though Quietly offers a finite set of options through its tools, there are infinite possibilities in which digital publishers can use them to achieve their desired results. Along with this, it can be seen that certain trends within digital publishing, like headline composition and content structure, apply across verticals and show that even with similarities, digital publishing is still very diverse, making it apparent that flexibility is key when implementing tools or solutions.

Within the diversity of publishing, there lies even further differentiation in online publishing due to the limitless opportunities to focus on a niche, present content in a unique way, and amplify distribution through new and ever-changing channels. Quietly's flexible offerings allow publishers to leverage exactly what works best for them and to satisfy their specific goals, no matter how diverse. Whether it's sourcing content, the



tool, or sponsorship, Quietly provides variation within each area offering to allow a publisher the ability to create his or her own success through the use of a simple platform.

The following case studies will provide insight into how Quietly works with publishers in practice showcasing the flexibility Quietly offers within its tools and services.

## **4.1. Case Study: *Vancity Buzz***

Started in 2008, *Vancity Buzz* has since established itself as an online source for all things Vancouver, including news, lifestyle content, entertainment, sports, food, and events. Through the lens of the cultural community found in the city, *Vancity Buzz* has nine members of their managing team and a contributing staff of over 40 writers. This online publication has now become a source of local information, and also a community.

This community is evident through *Vancity Buzz*'s large social following of 110,000 followers on Facebook and 62,000 on Twitter. Along with this, their presence of social media shows user engagement through commenting, sharing, and liking of their content. This is further proven through the 4.3 million visits to their site per month, amounting to a total of 2.2 million monthly unique visitors (Vancity Buzz 2014, 1).

Another important element that sets *Vancity Buzz* apart from other online publishers is their well-defined and relatable niche. Although niche publications have always been a part of the publishing landscape, there has been a growing desire for more curated and reader-specific information (Sharma 2013, par. 3). Through this specificity, they can engineer their content to perform by driving traffic.

### **4.1.1. Use Cases + Examples**

*Vancity Buzz* was one of the first clients Quietly worked with and continues to be an active partner. Being a digital-first publication, Karm Sumal, CEO, was open to trying new tools and embrace technological solutions. The editorial team at Quietly began

creating content for *Vancity Buzz* to increase the visual nature of their posts, streamline the user experience, especially for mobile, and create content that would thoroughly resonate with their audience. *Vancity Buzz* immediately saw traction with this format.

Quietly also provided strategic guidance around what topics, language, and headlines could be the most effective. Quietly's editorial team shaped content to appeal to readers' sensibilities—showing them things they might not know and doing it with an air of humour.

For example, this article “15 things to explain to out-of-towners about Vancouver,” (fig. 6) appeals to two types of readers: tourists and Vancouverites. Satisfying the curiosities of both, tourists want to feel prepared when exploring a new city and gain a local perspective, whereas Vancouverites want to test themselves to prove they are truly a member of the Vancouver community.

Framing the article title with a numeric quantifier, readers knew how many items they would view, allowing them to allot a certain amount of time to their consumption—another thing that makes list consumable as ordered lists essentially, “enumerate the innumerable variety of the world and give us a sense of mastery over our environment,” (Thompson 2013, par. 2).

Receiving 3,700 shares at the time of writing this report, this content was also mentioned on QMFM's Morning Show showcasing that a simple concept, when executed thoughtfully and distributed through the correct medium, can be effective in reaching readers. Along with shares, the post received over 45 comments and the Facebook likes ranked near 600, with over 350 shares. Even when reposted five days following the original release, the content drew high engagement.

Scroll through the list below to get the inside scoop on Vancouver's deepest, darkest secrets:

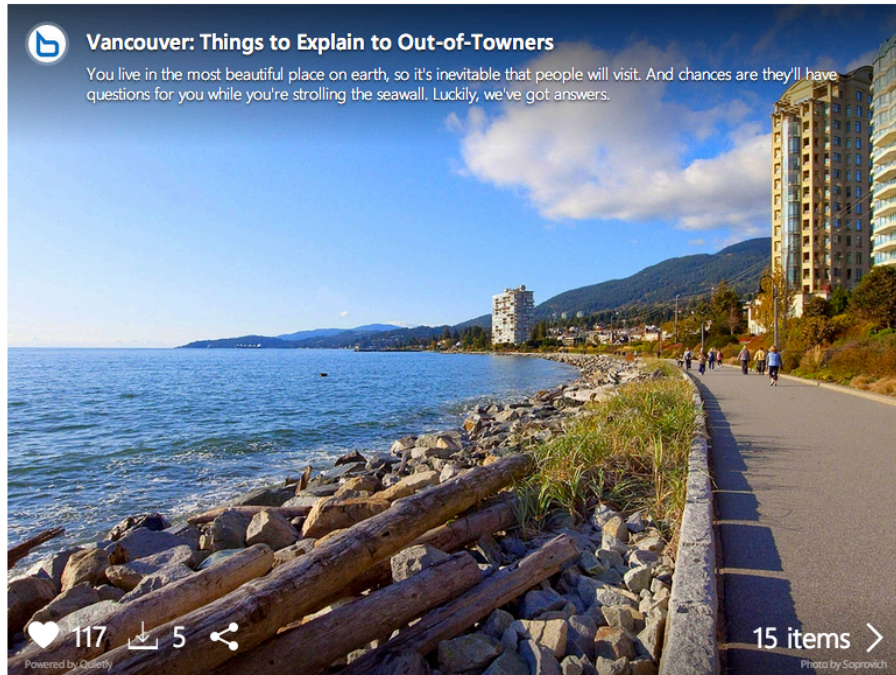
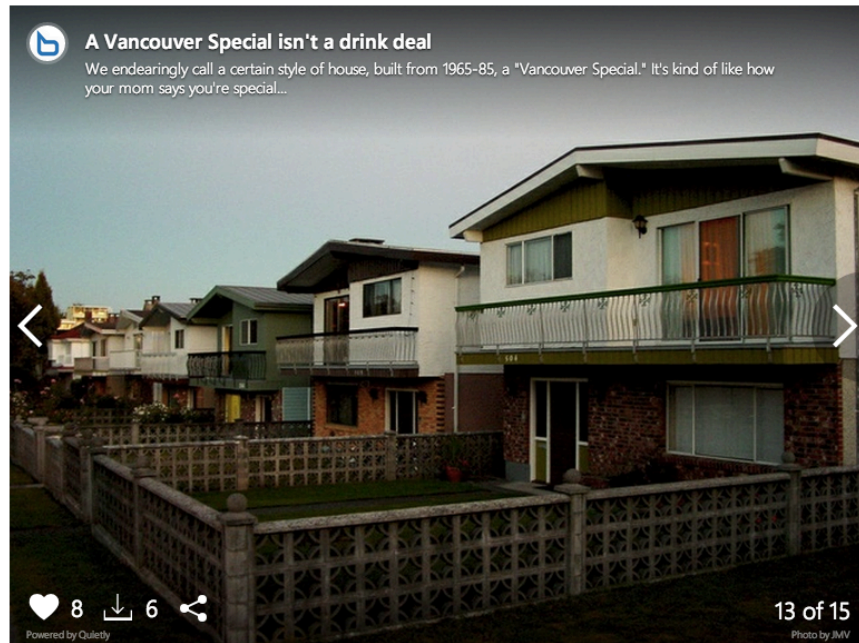


Figure 6: **Vancity Buzz Quietly List, “15 Things to Explain to Out-of-Towners About Vancouver”**<sup>6</sup>

Quietly’s editorial team wanted to replicate this success. From the previous article, it was discovered that *Vancity Buzz*’s readers were interested in new and interesting facts, but more importantly, they were interested in these facts from an insider perspective. *Vancity Buzz* has built a reputation for being up to date on what is relevant to Vancouver’s local population. Because of this, readers expect a certain level of expertise on a topic from a local angle.

<sup>6</sup> Vancity Buzz Staff, “15 Things to Explain to Out-of-Towners About Vancouver”, *Vancity Buzz*, June 16, 2014.



**Figure 7: Slide from *Vancity Buzz*'s "15 Things to Explain to Out-of-Towners About Vancouver"<sup>7</sup>**

Quietly's editorial team wanted to replicate this success. From the previous article, it was discovered that *Vancity Buzz*'s readers were interested in new and interesting facts, but more importantly, they were interested in these facts from an insider perspective. *Vancity Buzz* has built a reputation for being up to date on what is relevant to Vancouver's local population. Because of this, readers expect a certain level of expertise on a topic from a local angle. Going off this brief along with the success of past content, the team created an article titled "16 things you probably didn't know about Vancouver". Appealing to the curious and those who truly want to prove themselves as locals, this content performed very well on *Vancity Buzz*'s site, taking a top spot in terms of monthly traffic.

Another element of Quietly's format that complemented *Vancity Buzz*'s content was the visually rich nature of the media carousels. *Vancity Buzz* has a Flickr pool of beautiful photos readers can submit to and they share these regularly on their Facebook page.

<sup>7</sup> Vancity Buzz Staff, "15 Things to Explain to Out-of-Towners About Vancouver", *Vancity Buzz*, June 16, 2014.

These posts, often just an image, are some of the most popular posts on their site. This shows that *Vancity Buzz* readers engage with visual content. By merging written content, that *Vancity Buzz* has traditionally produced, with visual content, that has a proven track record with readers, Quietly provides a platform that appeals to both sensibilities.

In fact, visual content drives engagement, which can be seen through Facebook's Timeline for brands. One month after its introduction, photos and videos saw a sixty five percent increase in engagement (Schoenfeld 2012). Other highly successful social networks have focused on being highly visual, such as Pinterest, and they too also show higher levels of engagement than text-first platforms. In fact, Pinterest generated more referral traffic for businesses than Twitter, Google+, YouTube, and LinkedIn combined (Crook 2012, par. 3), showing how effective visual content is. This is something that's always been at Quietly's core—visually rich content that promotes engagement.

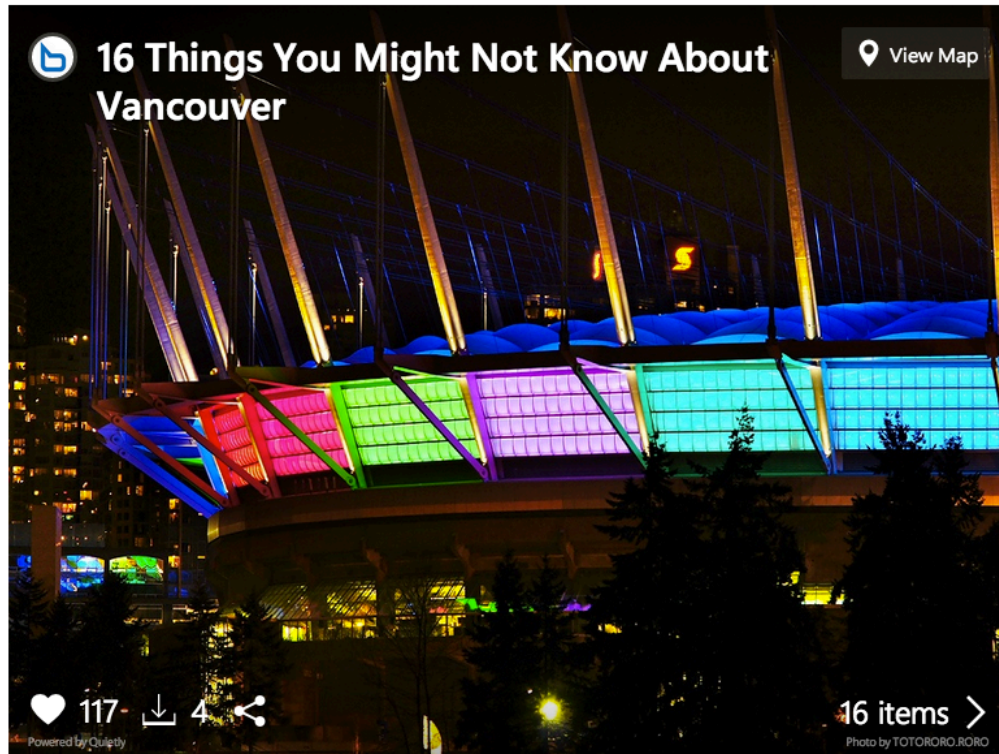
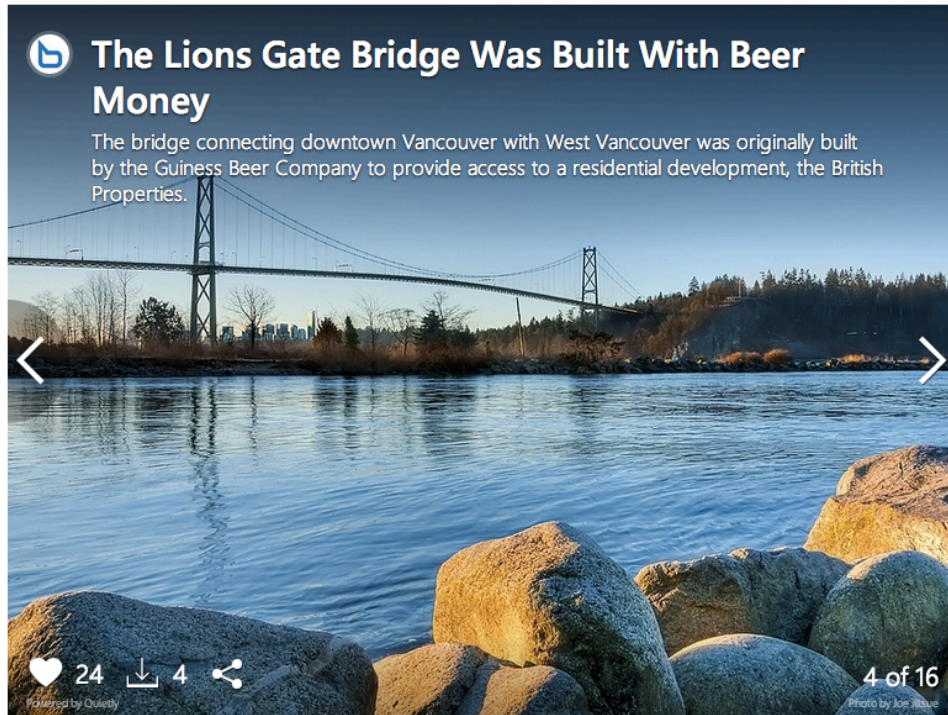


Figure 8: *Vancity Buzz* Quietly list, “16 Things You Probably Didn’t Know About Vancouver”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Vancity Buzz Staff, “16 Things You Probably Didn’t Know About Vancouver”, *Vancity Buzz*, June 16, 2014.





**Figure 9: 2 slides from *Vancity Buzz*'s "16 Things You Probably Didn't Know About Vancouver"<sup>9</sup>**

With *Vancity Buzz* being a close partner, Quietly has been able to gain access to their editorial meetings and receive feedback from their team. This insight has allowed Quietly to build features that best suit their needs.

#### **4.1.2. Business Relationship**

Quietly's tools have allowed *Vancity Buzz*'s team to have technological tools that they wouldn't be able to use otherwise as they have limited technological and development resources. Now, Quietly is working with *Vancity Buzz* to enhance their advertising through sponsorships, further developing Quietly's Sponsorship Marketplace. As both *Vancity Buzz* and Quietly grow, so will the partnership between them. More than a

<sup>9</sup> Vancity Buzz Staff, "16 Things You Probably Didn't Know About Vancouver", *Vancity Buzz*, June 16, 2014.

monetary relationship, both parties are still developing a cost structure that will benefit both parties, including advertising processing fees and payment for content fulfillment.

### **4.1.3. Conclusion**

In summary, Vancity Buzz has utilized Quietly for the slideshow and map view tools to leverage the SEO benefits as well as increase the visual nature of their content. These features have also helped them further establish themselves as a go-to Vancouver directory source. They have been a lighthouse client for sponsored stories and have allowed Quietly's team to start focusing on what's needed for the Sponsorship Marketplace based on their advertising needs and willingness to allow Quietly into their sales processes.

Now into their sixth year as an online publisher, *Vancity Buzz* has, and continues to, refine their voice. When Quietly first began working with them as a partner, not all members of the team were sure about using lists. This perception was something *Vancity Buzz* was wary of as they are shifting their focus to become more newsworthy and credible. In order to show the versatility of lists to their team, Quietly focused on how long and short form content can complement each other. Along with this, building tools that solve problems they had, like displaying map-based content and integrating into their current workflow, has allowed *Vancity Buzz* and Quietly to grow their partnership for mutually beneficial success.

## **4.2. Case Study: *The Stoner's Cookbook***

A marijuana edible and culture website with a focus on recipes and community that started in 2006, *The Stoner's Cookbook* joined Quietly as a partner in July 2014, and is still actively involved. Connected through an investor who saw the potential for both parties to benefit, *The Stoner's Cookbook* quickly became a match for Quietly.



*The Stoner's Cookbook* based their initial use of the tool on the visual nature of the content. What they found resonated with their audience best, as proven through their Facebook feed, was visually rich, and often comedic content with an informative twist. After creating sample content for them based on previous articles, they immediately saw the value of content presented in a new and unique way, noting it would perform well on social channels. This content became the basis of their blog. The partnership has continued to grow to incorporate Quietly's Social Media Manager to help assist with strategizing around their social calendar and sharing processes.

*The Stoner's Cookbook's* willingness to experiment with new tools and pursue innovative techniques showcases a shift in publishing. As they are a digital first publication, it's not surprising they embraced a new technological tool.

#### **4.2.1. Use Cases + Examples**

*The Stoner's Cookbook* offers a variety of content through Facebook for their readers. One of their original goals was to convert these Facebook browsers to readers of their website content. To do this, Quietly helped *The Stoner's Cookbook* transform their traditionally formatted content to increasingly list-based content. This included incorporating more actionable and enticing headlines and visuals, where they began noticing growth in their onsite traffic and time spent onsite as well (see figs. 10 & 11).

Focused on the same topic, the two stories below showcase how different headlines can resonate differently with readers. By providing a reader with a numerical indicator, they're more likely to click through, as they know the time they'll have to invest in finding the information needed (Thomson 2010, par. 5). Along with this, Figure 11 more accurately emulates how a reader would search the internet for this specific information, by searching "differences between" rather than a longer, more convoluted headline. This thoughtful headline construction can increase the chances of *The Stoner's Cookbook* article surfacing higher in search engine rankings, contributing to measurements like time on site and page visits—things that advertisers look for.



## How to Decide Between Indica and Sativa – Which is Right for You?

Do you remember what type of marijuana you consumed last? Was it sativa or indica? Most people have NO IDEA what subspecies of cannabis they are consuming...

[Read More](#)

**Figure 10:** *The Stoner's Cookbook* article post, “How to Decide Between Indica and Sativa – Which is Right for You?”<sup>10</sup>



## 6 Differences Between Sativa and Indica Strains

Have you ever wondered why some batches of weed are just better than others in both taste and effect? It has a lot to do with the two predominant strains and the varying differences between them.

[Read More](#)

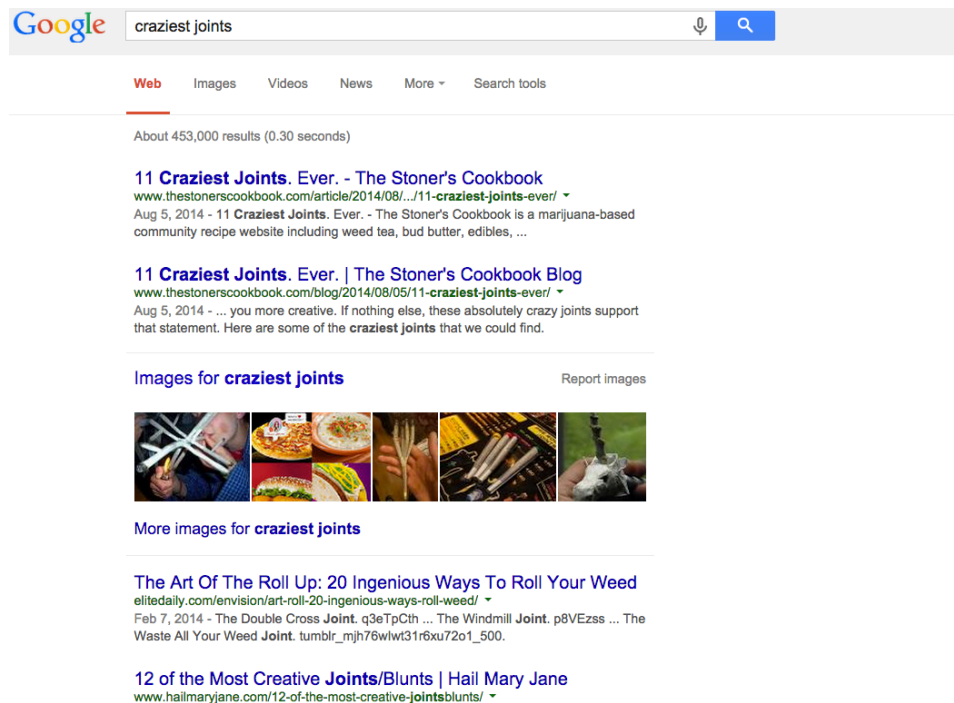
**Figure 11:** *The Stoner's Cookbook* article post, “6 Differences Between Sativa and Indica Strains”<sup>11</sup>

Along with providing a more visual approach to content, Quietly also provided *The Stoner's Cookbook* with SEO benefits. Because the media carousels created in Quietly contain not only images, but also content, the embed code contains keywords and search terms. This information is then rendered as a structured list to search engines, though it appears as a media carousel to consumers. The structured nature of a list appeals to search engines over unstructured content as they can better unpack and

<sup>10</sup> Matt Gray, “How to Decide Between Indica and Sativa – Which is Right for You?”, *The Stoner's Cookbook*, June 17, 2-14, accessed October 15, <http://www.thestonerscookbook.com/article/2014/06/17/how-to-decide-between-indica-and-sativa-which-is-right-for-you/>.

<sup>11</sup> Lucas Young, “6 Differences Between Sativa and Indica Strains”, *The Stoner's Cookbook*, September 18, 2014, accessed October 15, <http://www.thestonerscookbook.com/article/2014/09/18/6-differences-between-sativa-and-indica-strains/>.

understand the information (Yerian 2013, par. 1). Visible to search engines in the page’s markup, this information can be packaged into rich snippets that are more easily surfaced (Yerian 2013, par. 1). *The Stoner’s Cookbook* team started noticing lift in their search engine results after using Quietly (see Figure 12).



**Figure 12:** Google search results for terms “craziest joints” as of September 20, 2014<sup>12</sup>

Now, Quietly’s editorial team helps *The Stoner’s Cookbook* create the majority of their content. This allows them to grow their business, engage their audience, focus on monetization, and expand.

A feature that Quietly built as per *The Stoner’s Cookbook* recommendation is the final slide customization. They wanted to encourage readers to peruse more of their content,

<sup>12</sup> Google Search, accessed September 15, 2014.

thus they have employed the recommended last slide feature on each of their posts containing a Quietly list.

*The Stoner's Cookbook* immediately saw lift on their older articles once they added this feature into their workflow. These statistics were also reflected in the analytic data that Quietly monitors. For example, a list titled "10 Coffee Shops to Visit in Amsterdam" appeared in Quietly's analytics as being one of the top twenty performing lists on eighteen different days, after only being promoted once. This residual traffic was due to the list being surfaced as a recommended story on other articles by *The Stoner's Cookbook*.

Now that Quietly and *The Stoner's Cookbook* have mastered the content workflow, the two parties are working together on a monetization strategy that will help with the formation of Quietly's Sponsorship Marketplace. Quietly is helping them leverage their current advertising offerings to better serve their customers and content. Wanting to move towards more sponsorship, *The Stoner's Cookbook* will benefit from the use of Quietly's built-in sponsorship functionality that allows the publication to retain editorial control by presenting already created content to a sponsor. In fact, *The Stoner's Cookbook* is beginning to exclusively sell advertising packages that the Quietly team helped them design.

Similar to magazines, like Bauer Media Advertising notes, the sponsorship model Quietly has created will add value to a reader's experience (n.d., par. 10). Rather than being deceptive, thought out partnerships and sponsored content will enhance a reader's experience. Relevance is key. Rather than alienating readers with dissociated advertising and annoying banner ads, sponsorship integration will be seamless; allowing the experience to remain unchanged all while making it apparent that content is sponsored to not deceive readers. Though sponsorship can be seen as a "slippery slope of deception" (Nashed, 2014), incorporating this type of advertising smartly and while being transparent will likely circumvent common issues. Along with this, sponsors will benefit from being integrated into the content, rather than featured in an auxiliary advertisement that can easily be blocked out by numerous advertisement blocking tools. This is especially enticing for advertisers as the use of these tools, such as AdBlockPlus,

is increasing—up to 144 million users growing each year (Blanchfield 2014, par. 2). Even *The Guardian* has touched on the subject stating that blocking web ads could be as detrimental to publisher revenue as Napster was to music (Hern 2014, par. 6).

*The Stoner's Cookbook* has been working with Magical Butter, an oil creation machine, on a sponsored campaign for several months. Each month, Magical Butter purchases five sponsored stories that include the integration, final slide, and lead in mentioned in Chapter 3, section 3.2. They measure the success of this campaign by tracking link clicks and measuring sales that come from the promotional code that is included in the article. So far, they have seen an increase in the number of machines sold as well as associated their brand with content that is popular and engaged with, thus, more qualitatively, exposing their brand to more readers and potential customers. Quietly also works with the publisher to provide insights into the success of the campaign, which they can deliver to the advertiser. By arming *The Stoner's Cookbook* with quantifiable success, it's more likely that Magical Butter will continue to advertise with them and purchase sponsored content packages.

By looking subjectively at their media offerings, the Quietly team was able to provide suggestions to improve their advertising package, especially with the inclusion of sponsored content. This is a strategic service Quietly offers partners in order to help them achieve their financial goals while also helping shape the Sponsorship Marketplace. As their content becomes sponsored and advertisers see the benefit of being associated with great content, the Quietly Sponsorship Marketplace will begin to grow with *The Stoner's Cookbook* being a lighthouse client.

#### **4.2.2. Business Relationship**

As a key component of the business model, Quietly and *The Stoner's Cookbook* have negotiated a partnership where *The Stoner's Cookbook* will purchase content for sponsored campaigns, and when Quietly helps bring a brand for said campaigns, Quietly earns a percentage of the deal. Along with this, *The Stoner's Cookbook* will be using a member of Quietly's Editorial Network to populate their blog with organic content. This

will be facilitated through Quietly, thus *The Stoner's Cookbook* will pay for content fulfillment.

### **4.2.3. Conclusion**

Much like *Vancity Buzz*, *The Stoner's Cookbook* is experiencing continual growth. As this happens, they are looking into expanding their audience and engaging them with visual content that is informational, along with creating transparent and meaningful sponsored content experiences. Quietly will continue to support them in and act as a strategic partner in their growth, listening to their feedback to provide an even more relevant and useful set of tools.

## **4.3. Use Cases + Partners: Summarized**

These two case studies showcase the changing landscape of digital publishing. Rather than mimicking the traditional print publishing world in a digital format, these digital publishers have reconceived what publishing means online and embraced technologies to better support readers and present content, with Quietly being a central part of their technological innovation.

Quietly, as seen through the above examples, provides these two publishers with the tools they need to augment and supplement parts of their business that are challenging for their teams. Both *Vancity Buzz* and *The Stoner's Cookbook* show Quietly's mission in action—creating content that is both as appealing to readers as it is to sponsors. With this advantage (and the tools available to compete with the viral media giants) they're able to focus on what really matters—their readers and their content.

Though Quietly's exact business model continues to evolve, especially as the automation of the Editorial Network and Sponsorship Marketplace is realized, the team is bringing in revenue through various means depending on the needs of each client, as outlined in section 2.5. Of course, the ultimate goal is to create a two-sided marketplace

where Quietly takes a portion of every transaction alongside a freemium model for the tools, outside of this marketplace, digital publishers use.

Through the examination of *Vancity Buzz* and *The Stoner's Cookbook's* use of Quietly, it's clear that not only are Quietly's tools useful for digital publishers, but also, trends in online publishing are confirmed through their challenges. This shows that, in practice, Quietly is assisting various digital publishers with their various goals, showcasing that publishing technologies are effective and Quietly has the ability to exist in a competitive landscape.

## **Chapter 5. Conclusion**

“Publishing is not what it once was” (Ronte 2000, par. 1), nor will it ever remain static. Whether the advents of new technologies provide solutions or challenges to publishers, adaptation was, and continues to be essential. As the digital environment continues to grow, traditional ways of doing things in publishing will no longer be appropriate. Rather, publishers will have to embrace technology and fundamentally change their business practices to not only stay competitive, but to stay alive.

These changes have created a space in the market where tools and practices to assist with changing technology and the internet are a viable business. Inventors, business people, developers, and companies have jumped upon this opportunity to help publishers succeed. Quietly is one of these companies providing a digital advantage to publishers. Rather than going it alone, Quietly helps publishers with content, revenue, and strategy.

By building a tool and providing services to help shape the way content is created and consumed, Quietly is on a mission to be a key player in shaping online publishing. Helping publishers succeed by finding solutions to common problems, like sourcing content, engaging readers, and creating new revenue streams, the team at Quietly has established a set of easy to use tools to help publishers get on the right track. By working with a variety of publishers and understanding their needs, Quietly has grown exponentially since its incorporation in December of 2012.

At the time of writing this report, Quietly works with a variety of partners offering them three key services: Publishing Tools, Editorial Network, and Sponsorship Marketplace. Expanding from a consumer app to a publisher/brand focused suite of tools and services, Quietly is an example of innovation in the industry and, more specifically, how a start up often tackles an issue in a unique way, very quickly.



With the goal of creating a fully comprehensive and automated marketplace for the acquisition and sponsorship of content, Quietly is continually finding ways to bring publishing and technology together. This marketplace will be helpful as content continues to be essential to both publications and brands and this popularity doesn't seem to be slowing down. Quietly will continually innovate within the publishing technology field all while improving and creating more efficient and helpful tools and services. Simultaneously, Quietly's partner base will continue to grow and emphasis will continually be put on providing quality content and efficient creation and distribution.

Quietly has already started exploring content marketing opportunities and plans on merging current offerings and the future marketplace with this idea to create an offering the digital publishing industry is demanding. Along with this, Quietly's goals, products, and services are starting to be affirmed as competitors offering similar services are being noticed in the landscape. Though this is potential competition, it also shows the Quietly team that their ideas and work are valid and seen as useful to clients and the public.

With a group of digital publishers already actively using Quietly's tools and services, inbound leads for content, sponsorships, and more are coming in each day. Along with this, more and more digital publishers are seeing Quietly used on other sites or hearing about it through referrals, subsequently using Quietly on their own. Immediately seeing value, whether it be due to providing an effective and visually appealing way to present content, a way to increase revenue, or an avenue to procure content, digital publishers are finding Quietly's offerings compelling. This is especially the case with the two-sided marketplace, where digital publishers recognize the benefit of a tool that offers this, and agencies and brands do as well.

Ultimately, the rise of publishing technology companies and tools like Quietly, mark this moment as a (yet another) time of change in the publishing industry. Whether it's easing the creation of a popular editorial format, like lists, or streamlining workflows and finding content fulfillment solutions, publishers understand the issues and are taking steps to find solutions to them, embracing technology, learning new skills, and discovering innovative ways to make an industry that many claim as dead, not only viable, but

robust. With the continued development of technology, publishers and brands (who are becoming publishers) will have more to adapt to. Embracing tools of change now will make the future of publishing easier. This is especially the case as digital publishing will eventually become essential—both a necessity and a norm.

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