

AN INSIDE LOOK AT “QUIETLY” HELPING MEC
LAUNCH GOOD TIMES OUTSIDE

by

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ABSTRACT

This report examines content marketing and its role at various stages of the customer journey. It explores how Quietly, a Vancouver-based content marketing agency, assists companies in creating data-driven content to support their marketing initiatives.

Specifically, this report focuses on a content-centric marketing campaign—Good Times Outside (GTO)—that was launched by Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC) in June 2017. It discusses the strategic production of content that was published on a campaign-specific microsite: a total of 179 activity and event pages. It considers MEC’s business goals and the main aims of this particular project. It revisits the research and strategy that was developed to refine site layout ideas and examines Quietly’s role in the creation and distribution of content for the site. It also addresses MEC’s revised content marketing plan with the incorporation of GTO. All figures and statistics are accurate as of October 2017.

Keywords: content marketing; digital publishing; online publishing; technology; content; sponsored content

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CHAPTER 1

CONTENT MARKETING

“Content marketing is the marketing and business process for creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action.”¹

In 1996, Bill Gates published an essay titled “Content is King” on the Microsoft website.² This phrase has gained significant traction ever since and defines a new era of digital marketing. In his essay, Gates described the Internet as a “marketplace of content” and discussed the likelihood that it would eventually edge out traditional print media. He also pointed out the potential for the Internet to change the way companies were communicating with their audience: “When it comes to an interactive network such as the Internet, the definition of ‘content’ becomes very wide...the broad opportunities for most companies involve supplying information or entertainment. No company is too small to participate. One of the exciting things about the Internet is that anyone...can publish whatever content they can create.”³

As Gates predicted, the popularity of the Internet presented an enormous opportunity for companies that weren’t traditionally viewed as content generators. Early on, Gates understood the power of valuable content—whether informative or entertaining—to benefit companies trying to reach an audience and gain loyal followers. He recognized the potential for content to fulfill a value exchange with a company’s target consumer.

This leads us to the connection between publishing, marketing, and the Internet today, where content has become the new currency for businesses looking to sell a product or service. Companies have assumed the role of traditional media, with a different goal: “Content marketing is comparable to what media companies do as their core business, except that in place of paid content or sponsorship as a measure of success, brands define success by ultimately selling more products or services.”⁴ By disseminating valuable content, companies can educate and entertain—allowing them to be seen as trusted,

1 “Six Useful Content Marketing Definitions,” Content Marketing Institute, accessed September 23, 2017, <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2012/06/content-marketing-definition/>.

2 “‘Content is King’—Essay by Bill Gates 1996,” Medium, accessed September 23, 2017, <https://medium.com/@HeathEvans/content-is-king-essay-by-bill-gates-1996-df74552f80d9>.

3 Ibid.

4 Content Marketing Institute, “Six Useful Content Marketing Definitions.”

valued, and respected in the eyes of their customers. Successful content marketing initiatives publish information that the public seeks, while telling a story that they can enjoy. James O'Brien of Contently defines the premise of content marketing very simply: "Instead of being the commercial, be the show. Instead of being the banner ad, be the feature story."⁵

1.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONTENT MARKETING

Despite gaining traction since Gates' 1996 article, content marketing has been around for centuries. One of the oldest and most widely recognized examples of content marketing is John Deere's *The Furrow*, which was launched in 1895.⁶ *The Furrow* is an agricultural magazine that was printed and distributed by John Deere as a way to educate farmers on new technology and equipment. According to the Content Marketing Institute: "*The Furrow* was not filled with promotional messages and self-serving content. It was developed by thoughtful journalists, storytellers, and designers, and covered topics that farmers cared about deeply. The goal of the content was to help farmers become more prosperous and, of course, profitable."⁷

Following this, there are several important milestones that helped shape the history of content marketing. In 1900, Michelin published the Michelin Guide: "the little red guide-book was originally conceived simply to encourage more motorists to take to the road."⁸ With information for travellers, including maps, accommodation tips, and dining recommendations, the guide was ultimately designed to inspire road trips, which would increase car sales—and thereby tire sales.

Throughout the 20th century, brands continued to adapt their marketing techniques as radio, television, and eventually the Internet, grew in popularity. In 1996, at a roundtable for journalists at the American Society for Newspaper Editors, John F. Oppedahl coined the phrase "content marketing."⁹ Subsequently, in 2007, Joe Pulizzi founded the Content Marketing Institute, which has grown into, "the leading global content marketing

5 "How Red Bull Takes Content Marketing to the Extreme," Mashable, accessed September 21, 2017, <http://mashable.com/2012/12/19/red-bull-content-marketing/#ygu6knCeB5qr>.

6 "What Content Marketing's History Means for Its Future," Content Marketing Institute, accessed September 24, 2017, <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2013/09/content-marketing-history-and-future/>.

7 Ibid.

8 "About Michelin: History of the Michelin Guide," Michelin, accessed September 21, 2017, <https://guide.michelin.com.hk/en/history-of-the-michelin-guide>.

9 "Content Marketing Handbook," Content Marketing Expert, accessed November 12, 2017, http://cmex.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/cmh_v.2_en_www.pdf.

education and training organization.”¹⁰ All of these examples are evidence that the use of storytelling to provide value to a reader—with the ultimate goal of influencing an audience—has been in practice for over a century.

1.2 WHO IS QUIETLY?

At a time when content is referred to as “king” and brands and companies are slowly stepping into the shoes of publishers, companies like Quietly are becoming increasingly essential as publishing partners. Quietly was founded in 2012, in Vancouver, BC, and services a wide range of clients from small businesses and local startups to global, enterprise-level clients. Quietly offers a combination of software and services that help companies succeed at content marketing.

While traditional advertisers take the approach of interrupting people to deliver a specific message, Quietly’s approach is to stop interrupting and start adding value. Rather than push a brand’s message on a customer, Quietly helps companies create the type of content that customers seek—whether for an experience, for entertainment, or to learn something new. Quietly’s aim is to help brands shift from interruption-based communications to value-based communications—with a data-driven approach.

Quietly employs a team of between 20-25 in-house staff members, including software engineers, strategists, writers, and editors. Using proprietary technology, Quietly delivers data-driven content insights and content suggestions. With an in-house editorial team and international network of writers, they are able to help companies create an array of unique content, in any format and for any category.

Quietly’s role in the creation of content involves a number of steps, including research and strategy, headline ideation, writer briefing, editing, and publishing. They also offer content distribution and measurement in order to help companies better understand how their content is performing. Quietly helps brands assign key performance indicators (KPIs) to their content, adding a layer of accountability and reporting to their marketing efforts.

1.3 TYPES OF CONTENT AND CONVERSIONS

Quietly works with a variety of companies and brands, and therefore, helps create a wide range of content. Content can take many forms and varies depending on the marketing

10 “About the Content Marketing Institute,” Content Marketing Institute, accessed November 12, 2017, <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/about/>.

goals of the company publishing the content. Some common types of content include:

- Blog posts
- Videos
- White papers
- Ebooks
- Infographics
- Buyer's guides
- Tip sheets
- ROI calculators
- Analyst reports
- Webinars
- Podcasts
- Landing pages
- Press releases
- Case studies
- Master classes
- Glossaries of terms
- Audiobooks
- Magazines
- Newsletters
- Brochures
- UGC round-ups
- Curated lists
- Trend reports
- Interactive demos
- Timelines
- Microsites
- Illustrations
- Interviews
- Social posts
- Decision trees

Each piece of content that a brand or company publishes should serve a specific purpose and have an intended outcome. Content can be used to establish corporate branding; to develop a list of qualified leads; to build net new awareness with an untapped market; to cross-sell and upsell existing customers; or to promote customer retention and loyalty with an existing customer base. For example, a company may publish a blog post that highlights their stance on diversity and inclusion in the workplace in order to build brand trust with their customers. Or, they may publish an industry-specific, research-based report that can be accessed by entering an email address, for the purpose of gathering prospects' contact information. They may also publish customer success stories to establish credibility with new customers and illustrate how the product/service performs in the real world.

Content can also serve specific technical purposes for a company. It can help optimize a company's website for keywords, encourage backlinks for search engine optimization (SEO) and social shares, and increase visibility in organic search.

In addition, content serves the obvious purpose of helping to drive conversions. A conversion takes place when the recipient of a marketing message performs a desired action or responds to a call-to-action. These actions vary depending on a brand's business model and the intended outcome of the marketing campaign. The most obvious type of conversion is when a customer makes a purchase on a brand's ecommerce site. But there are other types of conversions as well. For example, the goal of a piece of content may be to encourage a customer to sign up for a newsletter, to demo a product, or to input their contact information to access a resource. All of these actions are considered conversions.

By producing and distributing valuable content at an optimized cadence, brands and companies have a greater chance of reaching qualified readers, driving traffic to their site, and ultimately converting customers. To successfully drive conversions, businesses need a solid content marketing plan that considers each touchpoint along the customer journey.

1.4 THE CONTENT MARKETING FUNNEL

The marketing funnel, similar to the traditional sales funnel, is an effective way to evaluate a company's content marketing strategy. According to Quietly, "A content marketing funnel is designed to create different types of content for different people depending on where they are in the buyer's journey."¹¹ By publishing content at every stage of the funnel, companies can reach customers in every stage of their purchasing journey.

Quietly works with companies to establish a marketing strategy that employs content to reach customers at each stage of the funnel. Quietly editors are trained to understand how content fits within the funnel in order to guide readers from initial brand awareness through to conversion, and beyond to post-purchase advocacy. This means analyzing the links and calls-to-action in every piece of content, to ensure they lead customers to the appropriate next steps along the path to conversion.

Content is typically attributed to one of three primary funnel stages: top-of-funnel, middle-of-funnel, and bottom-of-funnel.

According to Quietly, top-of-funnel content "works to build a community around the lifestyle of your brand. This is done through content that is never salesy, but rather informative, educating, and entertaining."¹² Further, "the goal of top-of-funnel content is to increase reach and visibility and create awareness with a target audience that helps direct them toward solving a problem/goal. To do this, your content needs to be easily accessible and free to read, watch, and/or listen."¹³ Top-of-funnel content introduces consumers to a company or brand when they're in the earliest stages of their buying journey, and are just becoming aware of what the company offers.

The goal of middle-of-funnel content is to continue to educate an audience with information they are searching for, while starting to position the brand as the solution to a

11 "What Is the Content Marketing Funnel and How Can I Use it?" Quietly Blog, accessed October 2, 2017, <https://blog.quiet.ly/industry/the-content-marketing-funnel/>.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

customer's needs.¹⁴ Once a customer has reached the middle of the funnel, they are aware of the company and are deciding whether or not the product or service is a good fit. At this stage, often referred to as "consideration," the customer is deciding whether they will convert.

Finally, the goal of bottom-of-funnel content is to convince the target reader to convert. Customers have likely completed significant research and are comparing the brand, or a specific product or service, to competitors. At this stage, customers are prepared to make a purchase or take a specific action. For instance, bottom-of-funnel content often features a call-to-action that leads customers to an area on a website to complete a purchase.

1.5 HOW B2B AND B2C COMPANIES APPROACH CONTENT

The content funnel is applicable to both business-to-consumer (B2C) companies and business-to-business (B2B) companies. These companies have varying marketing goals and often publish different types of content in order to meet them. B2C companies are trying to reach end customers, while B2B companies are aiming to sell to other businesses. Quietly editors are trained to understand the types of content that are best suited to certain industries. This section will explore how a company's target audience affects the type of content it publishes.

1.5.1 Business-to-business

For a B2B company creating content, focus is often placed on the functionality and features of a product. B2B customers are seeking knowledge and information about a related industry. The target buyer will often face financial scrutiny and must be able to show the return on investment (ROI) of their purchase. For this reason, successful B2B marketers are more likely to include research and facts in the content they publish. For B2B companies, it is important to illustrate with data how a product or service can save a business time, money, or resources.

Thought leadership is an example of top-of-funnel content for B2B marketers. Thought leadership is content written by a key stakeholder, such as a member of a company's senior leadership or executive team, that touches on insights, future trends, or innovations in an industry. While this type of content may not lead directly to a sale, it can lead to a different type of conversion, such as a reader sharing the piece of content on social media. Thought leadership pieces like "Why Brands Aren't Treating Content Like a Product (And 3 Ways to Fix It)", published on LinkedIn and written by Dario Meli, Co-founder

14 Ibid.

and CEO of Quietly, can help establish the company as a trusted industry leader among peers and potential clients.

Lengthier bottom-of-funnel content, such as white papers and ebooks, are strong content choices for B2B companies. By publishing gated, research-based content that provides examples through internal company data, companies can position themselves as experts in their industry. This type of content is also a useful tool for lead generation. For example, Okta successfully publishes this type of gated content in the “Content Library” of the Resources section on their website. By offering their customers industry-specific analysis and research, Okta can receive valuable customer data in return—and a value exchange takes place.

1.5.2 Business-to-consumer

For B2C companies, emotion plays a large factor in buying decisions. B2C customers are looking for a clear, simple, and relatable message that illustrates the personal benefits of a product or service. The buying process for a B2C customer is much shorter, and products are typically purchased to satisfy immediate needs.

According to Quietly, “Light, lifestyle editorial is a good example of top-of-funnel content for a B2C brand.”¹⁵ As well, inspiring, image-based content, such as round-ups of user-generated photos, or even infographics, are top-of-funnel examples for B2C companies. For example, this infographic (see Figure 1) by Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC) introduces readers to the benefits of canoeing, kayaking, and stand up paddleboarding and is designed to be highly shareable on social media:

15 Ibid.

Figure 1: Which one floats your boat? Canoe, Kayak or SUP

WHICH ONE FLOATS YOUR BOAT? CANOE, KAYAK OR SUP

GREAT FOR

- CANOE:** Young families, Lots of gear, Lakes. **Best features:** Fits all day (Canoe packs over the weekend!).
- KAYAK:** Windy days, Clearly seeing, Oceans. **Best features:** Great for gear. Dry storage for your stuff.
- SUP:** Full body workout, Yoga, Minimal gear. **Best features:** Minimal features. Easy to hop in for a swim.

CROSS-CANADA

- MEC Ambassador Bruce Kirby's SUP made from Vancouver to Victoria.
- Longest solo canoe trip in Canada, completed by Mike Pank (and his dog Rusty).
- Fast all ages trip: a family moved cities by canoe - with a 6-year-old (and MEC expedition support).
- Paddlefest events: see events.mec.ca
- Algonquin Provincial Park has 1000s of lakes, streams and rivers.

Types of Boats and Boards

CANOE: Recreational canoes are 12' long and 18" deep. Perfect for lakes and calm water. Usually 15-20 lbs. Touring canoes are longer and narrower. Usually 16-18' long and 14-16" deep. Usually 30-40 lbs. **Tip:** Most pack down to suitcase size. Easy to transport - no roof rack needed. Excellent for travel and apartment living. Usually 17-19' long (15-17 lbs).

KAYAK: Recreational kayaks are 12' long and 18" deep. Perfect for day trips. Be it in the lake or on calm water. Usually 15-20 lbs. **Tip:** Most pack down to suitcase size. Easy to transport - no roof rack needed. Excellent for travel and apartment living. Usually 17-19' long (15-17 lbs).

PADDLEBOARDS: Hard paddleboards are essential for touring. Padded boards make long, loaded ones easy to transport. Can hold a lot more stable and faster than inflatable paddleboards. Easy to transport and store (take note, coiled boards). Packs down to big backpack size.

Paddling Dictionary

Bulkhead: Wall that creates a watertight zone in your kayak to secure stuff and create buoyancy.

Chute: Common canoe paddling stroke - it forces the water.

Lily dipper: Long paddle just skimming the water.

Yoke: What you smell with. Kidding - it's also the front of a SUP.

Power face: Part of your paddle blade that's against the water.

Slung: Waterproofable tabs at the back of a kayak that you can adjust to help balance against waves.

Thru-hull: Side fin on a multi-fit set-up on a SUP.

Turnbushhorn: Most angles of a canoe where the slight (upward) curve creates slighty.

Yoke: Come around on a canoe to carry on your shoulders for portage.

Did you know? The Prospector is known as the classic Canadian canoe.

BE SURE TO PACK

CANOE AND KAYAKS: Rafting line, Bailer or pump, Lights and flares, Compass, Extra paddle/paddle float, Dip to hold the empty side of the lake.

PADDLEBOARDS: Leash, Your core muscles, PFD, Paddle whistle, Bungees, Drybag for your stuff.

Most important? For safety, you'll want a whitewater-specific bag.

NO BOAT? NO PROBLEM

Just because you can't fit a canoe in your closet doesn't mean your paddling days are over. Rent boats and SUPs from MEC (they come with safety gear too).

Bottom-of-funnel content for B2C companies can include curated lists or blog posts that discuss the features of a specific product and answer common search queries. For example, MEC publishes aspirational round-ups, such as “The Gear You Need for a Nomadic Life”, that suggest the best gear for different outdoor excursions.

All of the above factors must be considered when companies are making decisions about the type and range of content to publish online. Quietly’s role is to guide companies who are making these important marketing decisions, in both B2C and B2B verticals. In order to further examine how Quietly assists these companies in reaching their content goals, this report will take a closer look at a specific campaign for one of Quietly’s B2C clients, MEC.

CHAPTER 2

MEC'S GOOD TIMES OUTSIDE

2.1 WHO IS MEC?

Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC) is recognized as one of Canada's top brands for outdoor recreation gear and clothing, know-how, and inspiration. MEC was founded in 1971, in Vancouver, BC.¹ It is a retail co-op that sells exclusively to members. MEC's vision is to build a community of outdoor enthusiasts: "Taking the lead from our purpose – to inspire and enable everyone to lead active outdoor lifestyles – we want to forge connections among Canadians and help them to be active outside."²

As a retailer, MEC sells their own branded outdoor gear, as well as gear from a wide variety of other brands. They provide gear rentals and organize a range of outdoor-inspired events. Currently, there are MEC stores in 22 cities across the country.³

2.2 WHAT IS GOOD TIMES OUTSIDE?

Good Times Outside (GTO) is a cross-Canada campaign comprised of online resources and on-the-ground events designed to inspire and enable social adventurers to explore their own backyard. The microsite is a unique content marketing campaign for MEC that ties into the company's strategy for remodeling their content plan.

MEC has adapted their popular branded hashtag #goodtimesoutside and developed an interactive online website that serves as a guide for outdoor adventures across Canada. On this site there are activity pages that highlight a variety of outdoor activities of varying difficulties. The activity pages are meant to inspire people to discover new outdoor experiences, just a few hours from their city centre. Readers can filter through activities by "vibe," proximity, skill level, and time commitment. The pages take readers through the activity from start to finish and feature: advice on how to access off-the-beaten-path locations; Instagram posts showing what their day could look like; and links to gear they may need. The site also features MEC-sponsored and -hosted events; these pages are designed to drive event registration and awareness. The concept of GTO is to provide

1 "About MEC: Our Roots," MEC, accessed September 21, 2017, <https://www.mec.ca/en/explore/our-roots>.

2 Ibid.

3 "MEC: Stores," MEC, accessed September 21, 2017, <https://www.mec.ca/en/stores>.

the same colour, insider tips, local knowledge, and expert advice that MEC staff provides in-store, to help readers feel excited about getting outside.

This report discusses the original round of content that was published on the site. At the initial launch, there was a total of 179 pages published, which featured summer-specific activities and events across Canada. Over the course of the summer, 14 pages were removed as events passed and were no longer relevant, leaving a total of 165 pages.

2.3 QUIETLY'S ROLE IN GOOD TIMES OUTSIDE

Before GTO production began, Quietly worked with MEC to create stories for their blog and to build out their internal content marketing capabilities. As this relationship developed, MEC selected Quietly to be their publishing partner on the GTO initiative. Quietly began working with MEC on GTO in January of 2017. Over the course of the next seven months, Quietly and MEC collaborated to develop all of the content that is now featured on the live website.

Quietly's strategy and editorial teams played an important role in the production of GTO. Quietly strategists carried out the research and provided the necessary data to develop content ideas, then marketed the project through various social and online channels once it was live. Meanwhile, the editorial team was in charge of coordinating, developing, editing, and delivering all of the content for the activity and event pages. Quietly's team was in charge of ensuring that the voice was speaking to—and the distribution channels were reaching—the appropriate audience.

While Quietly assisted in content strategy and development, this was just one piece of the larger puzzle; several other agencies contributed extensively to this project. Huge, a UX agency, led development and strategy of the online platform; 6S, a digital marketing agency, managed paid media; Smak, an experiential marketing agency, helped plan on-the-ground activations across Canada; and NKPR, a PR agency, helped promote events throughout the summer. Interestingly, the combined efforts of a UX agency, PR agency, experiential marketing agency, and content agency illustrate just how far the roots of “content” can extend into other facets of marketing.

2.4 THE GOALS OF GOOD TIMES OUTSIDE

One of the overarching goals of the GTO platform is to provide easily accessible guidance and tips on how and where to get outside in Canada and to inspire more people to spend time outdoors. MEC also has specific business goals for GTO, including:

Generating Brand Awareness

One of the main goals for GTO in terms of brand awareness is to increase visibility in the Ontario and Quebec regions where the store has a limited brand presence. While the MEC brand is widely recognized by people in Western Canada, Canadians in the Eastern provinces of Ontario and Quebec are less familiar with what the brand represents. This goal was communicated to Quietly by MEC in support of their Eastern Canada market push/focus.

Increasing Community Engagement

Another goal for GTO is to encourage social sharing. The GTO pages feature user-generated content (UGC) with the hashtag #goodtimesoutside. The site generates further awareness of the hashtag and provides a motive for users to add the #goodtimesoutside hashtag to future photos. Featuring this UGC content on the pages also increases the chance that they will be shared organically in social channels.

Driving Event Registration

For specific event pages on the GTO site, the goal is to encourage users to sign up or attend the events. These events range from MEC-run community events, to partner events like music festivals.

Selling MEC Products

Of course, an important goal of GTO is to drive users through the sales funnel, resulting in a click to the ecommerce site and the purchase of an item.

2.5 GOOD TIMES OUTSIDE TARGET PERSONA

“I like being adventurous outdoors, I’m curious about gear and I enjoy sharing fun experiences with others.”

MEC has developed personas from both an editorial and buying perspective. This means the personas address how the target audience spends their time and what they like to read, as well as their purchasing habits. MEC has three target personas: the social adventurer, the outdoor addict, and the backcountry explorer. The GTO campaign is aimed at the social adventurer.

GTO’s primary target audience is young and social—they enjoy having active experiences alongside family and friends. They are urbanites, who are curious, stylish, eco-conscious, and adventurous. They want to meet new people and cross things off their bucket

lists. In terms of device usage and connectivity, social adventurers frequently use social media and post photos to share experiences with others. This demographic uses mobile first and foremost and a desktop for sending emails and making purchases. They are likely to be intrigued and converted through inspirational images on Instagram and through blogger recommendations. Social adventurers commonly enjoy local and outdoor community events and spring and summer festivals. They may find themselves reading fitness and fashion publications, as well as online lifestyle blogs; they are dialed into the latest news, media, design, food, and fashion trends. It's important to note that the social adventurer is age-general; there is not a specific generation that does or does not fall within this persona.

Understanding the social adventurer persona helped shape the focus of the GTO activity and event pages, with an emphasis on activities that can be done close to a city, in social groups.

CHAPTER 3

GOOD TIMES OUTSIDE RESEARCH

This chapter will address how Quietly, in partnership with MEC, evaluated which activities and cities to feature in the first round of content. It will also highlight the search, competitor, and content research that Quietly strategists completed to help structure the GTO experience and determine what type of content to feature.

Quietly strategists completed research in three areas: how content on MEC's site was performing and what type of content received the most pageviews/engagements; what customers were searching for online related to MEC's specific industry; and finally, how competitors' sites were performing. At Quietly, strategists refer to these three areas of research as content insights, search insights, and landscape insights.

3.1 CITIES AND ACTIVITIES

Firstly, it was important for the team to determine which cities and activities to feature in the GTO pages. Cities were selected because they have an MEC store located in them, and activities were selected based on the specific products available—and most popular—at these locations.

The pages feature the regions of Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, Alberta, Nova Scotia, and Manitoba, and activities from the following categories:

- Road Cycle
- Mountain Bike
- Lake (Canoe or Kayak)
- Rock Climb
- Paddleboard
- Surf
- Travel
- Fitness
- Camp
- Day Hike
- Multi-Day Hike
- Trail Run
- Road Run
- Swim
- Indoor Climb
- Urban

3.2 SEARCH INSIGHTS

Search insights are observations of the search landscape, keyword trends, and reader interests based on research into search behaviours and topics. Quietly strategists underwent comprehensive research to understand the search patterns of Canadians across the major cities with MEC stores, and suggested actionable insights based on this data. They

determined the top searched-for activities in each province and the top three searched-for activities in each city with an MEC store. This helped determine which activities best aligned with each region.

For example, if strategists determined that the top three activities in a given city were cycling, camping, and running, they could recommend that a higher percentage of pages in this city feature these activities. As well, they could understand which cities had the most diverse range of searches, and therefore offer a wider range of activities for users in these regions.

Quietly strategists also used search insights from previous MEC content strategies (created to inform blog content) to help supplement these statistics. For example, if search insights established that people in Western provinces had strong search interest in rock climbing, they could confirm this insight with past research put forward in content strategies. Ultimately, the search landscape varied across Canada and in order to best appeal to people's interests, Quietly suggested strategic content assignments across each region.

Once the strategists determined the best activity categories to align with the regions, it was important to narrow down which specific activities to feature. For example, which specific parks or trails were most popular for hiking in BC? To understand this, strategists considered search traffic; if a particular location was widely searched for, it was included as a recommendation.

3.3 LANDSCAPE INSIGHTS

Landscape insights are derived from analysis of a company's competitors' content. Quietly strategists conducted in-depth competitor research for a diverse range of websites. By doing so, the team could understand what qualities make similar sites effective and how they're organizing and architecting information. It allowed strategists to pinpoint best practices for site functionality, layout, and content choices, as well as identify white space and understand how to carve out a niche in the outdoor activity and gear space.

Quietly strategists completed landscape research for typical content competitors like MEC's American counterpart, REI. They also researched similar experiential platforms, even if they didn't relate specifically to MEC's industry. For example, Under Armour's MapMyRun is activity specific and different from MEC's typical "content competitors," but provides users with a similar digital experience. This was done to ensure that the entire microsite was competitive with similar platforms.

Quietly evaluated competitor sites/campaigns based on the following framework:

- **Format:** Content length: is it short form or long form? Is there an emphasis on design or utility? How dynamic is the site in adjusting for web/mobile/tablet?
- **Call-to-action (CTA):** Is there a clear CTA strategy?
- **Voice & Tone:** Is there a distinct voice and tone? Who is the target user and does the content effectively target them?
- **Funnel:** Is there a mix of top-, middle-, and bottom-of-funnel content? Does the content funnel strategy match the consumer lifecycle? Does it guide the reader from top-, to middle-, to bottom-of-funnel content or are there dead ends? What's the linking strategy?
- **Value:** Is the content editorial or advertorial? (i.e. is it overly promotional or does it deliver real value to a reader in the form of information/education, entertainment, or inspiration?)
- **Personalization:** Is the site content automatically tailored to the user? Does it detect the reader's IP address and then serve up relevant content (tailored to their geolocation)? Is it based on interactivity?
- **Multimedia:** Are there non-written elements (e.g. video, interactive content, image galleries)? How much emphasis is put on these elements? Are they effective?
- **User-Generated Content (UGC):** Does the content have a UGC component? Are there competitions or contests? Do they use a hashtag?
- **Events:** Does the content tie in with events or the larger community?
- **SEO:** Is the site optimized for SEO?

3.4 CONTENT INSIGHTS

Content insights are derived through an analysis of the content on a company's website. To gather content insights for GTO, Quietly used a combination of tools such as Google Analytics and Quietly's proprietary analytics tools, to identify trends and popularity of content on MEC's blog. To understand which precise location activities to feature in each activity page, Quietly analyzed high performing blog posts that already existed on the MEC site. The activities featured in these popular blog posts were selected and pulled

into activity pages. For instance, a run round-up on the MEC blog might have featured three runs in Toronto—and if this page performed strongly compared to other run-specific blog stories, each of the routes was transformed into a distinct GTO page. This research was combined with the search insights mentioned above to determine the specific trails, parks, runs, camping spots, kayaking routes, etc. to feature in the activity pages.

3.5 IN-STORE PURCHASE INSIGHTS

In addition to the above research, it was important to look at regional sales data for MEC stores. In order to gather this information, Quietly worked with MEC's marketing analysts. This allowed them to understand what type of equipment MEC customers were purchasing in certain regions, and therefore determine what activities were most popular in these areas. This illustrates how closely tied the GTO research and content initiatives are to MEC's actual sales.

CHAPTER 4

THE EDITORIAL PROCESS

Once the strategists had gathered data points and insights, they shared this information with Quietly's editorial team. The process for generating content ideas was collaborative; strategists and editors worked together to develop unique ideas for the activity pages, based on the research. The editorial team's internal production process was lengthy and required the efforts of every in-house team member, a total of seven staff, in addition to numerous contractors. On the editorial side, GTO was overseen by Quietly's editorial manager, Haley Cameron. The editorial team's role was to add a creative angle to these data-driven topics, to ensure the content is engaging, persuasive, and likely to be shared.

4.1 MANAGING EDITORS AND WRITERS

Once content selection was finalized, the next step was sourcing writers with knowledge and experience in the featured activities and regions. During the production stage, Quietly hired four freelance managing editors to assist in overseeing the production process. Managing editors were each assigned a different region in Canada. Each managing editor was responsible for sourcing writers who had knowledge and experience in both the region and the activity. In addition, MEC staff with expertise in certain activity categories were called upon to write. It was the responsibility of each managing editor to coordinate writer contracts, negotiate budgets, and plan submission deadlines.

4.2 WRITER BRIEFS

Once the writers were selected, they were each assigned activity pages. This ranged from 1-10 pages per writer, depending on their availability and areas of expertise. They were provided with detailed briefs that were created specifically for GTO, in partnership with Quietly and MEC. The briefs broke down each section within a page, with specifics on what type of information to include, character counts, and examples of the type of language to use.

The briefs also provided useful information on how to go about researching the most relevant, searched-for content for an activity. For example, writers were encouraged to do a Google search on the topic and try to answer "related search" queries.

4.3 PHOTO SOURCING

Writers were responsible for sourcing the header images and Instagram posts featured on each page. The editorial team was responsible for fact-checking these images. This

included ensuring the photos were on brand for MEC, that they reflected the appropriate location, and that any people in the photos were using appropriate safety gear (e.g. helmets and lifejackets). Header images were largely sourced from MEC’s own photo bank as well as MEC Flickr Pages and partner sites, including: Ontario Parks, Sepaq, Parks Canada, and Parkbus. Quietly reached out via email in order to gain permission to use the photos from any government or other third-party websites.

4.4 EDITING AND FACT-CHECKING

Once writers were briefed, they created the content for the activity pages. Upon completion, they submitted the pages to the assigned managing editor, who completed an initial edit of the activity pages. Managing editors were responsible for ensuring that all information from the brief was included, edited, and on-brand, before submitting it to the Quietly team. Once the activity pages reached Quietly, the in-house editors completed a round of in-depth fact-checking and copyediting.

In order to optimize user experience and searchability, specific character counts were determined for each section. The in-house editors also ensured that character counts were correct for each section, and that all content aligned with MEC’s voice and tone. MEC’s voice is casual, conversational, human, and relatable; it makes the reader feel personally addressed. This meant that editors were responsible for ensuring that the content was authentic, and the writing featured visual guidance and sensory elements that transported the reader to the activity being described. The activity pages were edited to avoid lengthy adjectives and “tourism-board speak.” For example, instead of referring to “lush forests, pristine lakes, and an amazing array of wildlife,” scenery could be described as “all landscapes your inner adventurer could hope for.” After the editor’s review, the pages received a final quality assurance check from Quietly’s in-house editorial manager, who sent the completed pages off to the MEC team.

Quietly’s editorial team received the first round of completed pages and began the editing process on May 22nd. They delivered all final content to MEC on June 19th. Once MEC received this content, their internal editorial team also completed a thorough read-through and edit of all pages, prior to publishing.

Good Times Outside was officially made available to the public on June 12th, 2017—and launched to coincide with Canada’s 150th birthday celebrations. On June 14th, the media received a first look at GoodTimesOutside.ca during MEC’s ‘Picnic En Flannel’ kick-off to summer event in Toronto.

CHAPTER 5

GOOD TIMES OUTSIDE FINAL SITE

The search, content, and competitor data that strategists gathered, as well as the specifics of the social adventurer persona, helped shape the final approach to the individual pages and the GTO site as a whole. In particular, Quietly, Huge, and MEC strategists looked closely at the 10 factors used to evaluate competitors (see section 3.3), as well as other user experience considerations and best practices, to help develop a strategic layout and content plan. This section explores how Quietly has applied the 10 elements to GTO’s final site layout, page layout, and content.

5.1 GOOD TIMES OUTSIDE SITE LAYOUT

This section highlights GTO’s final site layout, especially in relation to user experience and site navigation.

The GTO website is accessible and straightforward to use. The design is both intuitive and engaging, and the layout of each page is consistent. There is no barrier to entry; it is available to any user who can access the Internet. The site is also optimized for mobile, to align with the social adventurer demographic who are frequent mobile users.

Users can navigate the site and discover activities in several ways. They can sort content by length, difficulty, and distance from their current location. Activities were developed to fit all skill levels and range from “Beginner Friendly” to “A Little Tougher.” Users can also filter content according to seven different “vibes.”

Vibes

The vibes represent the type of activity—whether a user is looking for a more laid-back, family-style activity, or an intense multi-day challenge. Once users have selected their province, they can filter through the following vibes:

Unwind: These activities are relaxing, such as camping and festivals.

Epic nature: These activities are highly “Instagram-worthy” and feature stunning sites in nature such as massive cliff faces, waterfalls, lakes, and mountain climbs.

Challenge: These activities require a high-level of effort and often feature locations that are difficult to get to. Some examples include setting a personal best, portaging, and training for an obstacle course.

Adventure: These activities are usually multiple day, such as a three-day hike.

Social: These are activities where you can meet people, such as run groups, festivals, and day hikes.

Me-time: These activities are things you can do alone, such as an urban run.

Kid-friendly: These activities are family-friendly, such as camping.

Vibes were determined based on multiple factors, including revisiting the social adventurer persona to identify what types of factors would influence the target market’s decision making (e.g. close to home, picturesque, social, etc.) Vibes were also influenced by the data-driven activity categories selected, and what these activities lend themselves to. For example, many of the camping pages suggest spending the night at a quiet, family-friendly campground, thus aligning with the kid-friendly vibe.

Categorizing activities based on vibes was a strategic approach recommended by Quietly. This approach ensures a sense of “no zero data states,” despite the fact that 179 activity pages don’t guarantee comprehensive coverage (a minimum of 3 options) across every region and every activity. This means that by using the vibes filter instead of an activity category filter, MEC can ensure that no matter where a user is located and what vibe they search for, they have options. For example, the goal was to avoid having a user in Edmonton search “running” and have nothing populate—this could make a user feel like there was nothing to do near them, and would defeat the end goal of breaking down barriers to getting Canadians outside.

5.2 GOOD TIMES OUTSIDE PAGE LAYOUT

This section highlights GTO’s final page layout, especially in relation to format, non-written elements, and SEO.

Format

Each GTO page features a total of 4-6 moments, of short-to-medium length (from 200 to 960 characters). The activity selected for each page is very specific and does not sound generic. Many of the hiking, running, and cycling routes feature specific trails within a park or city centre. For example, “day hiking” in Halifax focuses on the Cape Split Trail. This specificity is taken further in the breakdown of each page. Each moment describes a specific step, task, or other notable point within the activity, focusing on tactical details someone would require and insider knowledge a local could share. For example, for pages that detail a hiking trail, the trailhead coordinates are provided with instructions on how to access the trail, how long it takes, the total distance covered, and the sights someone may come across, etc. Twists and turns, rest stops, viewpoints, and other notable features, like parking access and drinking water availability, are all noted—readers are taken through the activity from start to finish.

User-Generated Content

Most moments are accompanied by a user-generated Instagram post that is placed to break up the editorial content on each page. The embedded Instagram posts each feature the activity location, and include a #MECStaffer #MECNation #goodtimesoutside or #onserejointdehors hashtag whenever possible. The target demographic (the social adventurer) frequently uses social media and are likely to be intrigued and converted through inspirational images, making Instagram content a strategic choice to accompany the moments.

Multimedia

Some pages also feature videos, which are MEC generated, hosted on Youtube, and embedded in the page. They offer advice and tips related to the activity; for example, the Vancouver False Creek Seawall Run activity page features the video, MEC Running: Lacing Hack.

Event Pages

On the GTO site, there are standard activity pages, as well as Big Day Out event pages, and Tier 1 and Tier 2 event pages. As mentioned previously, GTO's primary target audience enjoys having active experiences alongside family and friends. They are adventurous and want to meet new people. One of their defining characteristics is that they enjoy local and outdoor community events, and spring and summer festivals. Accordingly, MEC made a strategic decision to develop unique events that align specifically with this persona, as well as to incorporate MEC-sponsored and partner events in the GTO microsite.

Big Day Out Events

The Big Day Out events composed the "on-the-ground" aspect of the GTO campaign. They offered a way for MEC to connect in person with influencers, media, and prospective members/customers to more effectively spread the word about the new digital platform. The events were developed by MEC staff who entered an internal contest to win a paid day off to share their idea of "Good Times Outside." MEC selected 25 of these outdoor experiences and MEC staff across the country were each granted \$1000 to organize and execute the event.

Prior to being selected, MEC staff were responsible for establishing an event location, date, detailed event summary, and a description of the activities arranged for the eight-hour day. They also had to highlight their target market for the event and indicate any risks associated with the activity. MEC staff were asked important questions about how they planned to market the event to their target audience. For example, how did they see this story being shared during and after the event? Were there any special interest groups

or public figures that would be interested in participating in and sharing the story? The answers to these types of questions helped MEC decide which activities had the most potential to draw a crowd and gain traction on social media.

Once 25 events were selected across the country, an event page was created for each and published on the GTO site. Some examples of events included:

Hiking, snorkeling, and bouldering by Peggy’s Cove on the Atlantic coast – Halifax, NS

Canoe flotilla to a movie on the river – Edmonton, AB

Stand-up paddleboard dodgeball tournament – Vancouver, BC

Tier 1 and Tier 2 Events

The second type of event page features Tier 1 and Tier 2 events. Tier 1 events included the summer festivals sponsored by MEC—WayHome and The Big Feastival in Ontario, as well as La Grosse Lanterne and Jackalope Fest in Quebec. Tier 2 events were hosted by Chasing Sunrise, an MEC partner organization. This collaboration was important for MEC as it offered an opportunity to develop an events-specific campaign for Canada’s 150th birthday. For example, one of the tier 2 events was a special sunrise hike put on across the country on July 1st. Tier 1 and tier 2 event pages were built to drive registrations and ticket sales. They featured links to the official event websites and ecommerce sites where readers could purchase tickets.

These types of events were featured because they align with GTO’s messaging and goals. They encourage Canadians to get outside and enjoy nature in a social setting, as well as to share their experiences via social media using specific tags.

SEO

One of the goals of GTO is to encourage Canadians to explore the outdoors, but the site cannot serve its purpose if users aren’t discovering the pages in their online searches. Thus, in order to optimize the GTO site for search engines, the activity description for each page (that is, the first few sentences that summarize the activity) usually included the specific activity and location featured.

Further, activity- and location-specific keywords were incorporated into page title tags and meta descriptions. Meta descriptions summarize each page’s content and appear in search results on search engines. For the GTO pages, meta descriptions are a maximum of 140 characters and contain the focus keyword, as well as the location, activity, and a call-to-action. For example, the meta description for the Juan de Fuca Provincial Park page is, “Plan a multi-day trek along the rugged 47km trail of Juan de Fuca Provincial Park on Vancouver Island, British Columbia.”

5.3 GOOD TIMES OUTSIDE CONTENT

This section highlights the final content on the GTO pages, especially in relation to the content funnel and the linking strategy.

Voice and Tone

The voice of the GTO pages is friendly, welcoming, and overall in line with the MEC brand. It is casual and conversational, and makes the reader feel personally addressed. For example, the “running” page for High Park in Toronto addresses everything that the average runner might be contemplating during their run: “Wrap up and refuel with a bulletproof coffee at the end of this route. If you’re tight on time, you can easily shorten this route to 5K without missing the nature (or the coffee.)”¹

Sales Funnel

The GTO pages present primarily top-of-funnel content for a B2C audience. The pages are positioned to provide educational, informative, and inspirational content and present users the tools they require to get outside. If readers are interested in learning more about specific gear, they can quickly and easily access MEC product landing pages. These are distinct pages within the MEC website that display a list of items that are available to purchase for a specific type of product. For example, if a user accesses the GTO page for camping in Mount Seymour Provincial Park and clicks on “tents” under the heading “essential gear,” they are taken to the page “tents for car camping.” At the bottom of each page, readers can also click to read a related lower- or middle-funnel blog post. These links drive users to lower of funnel content, or to directly make a purchase.

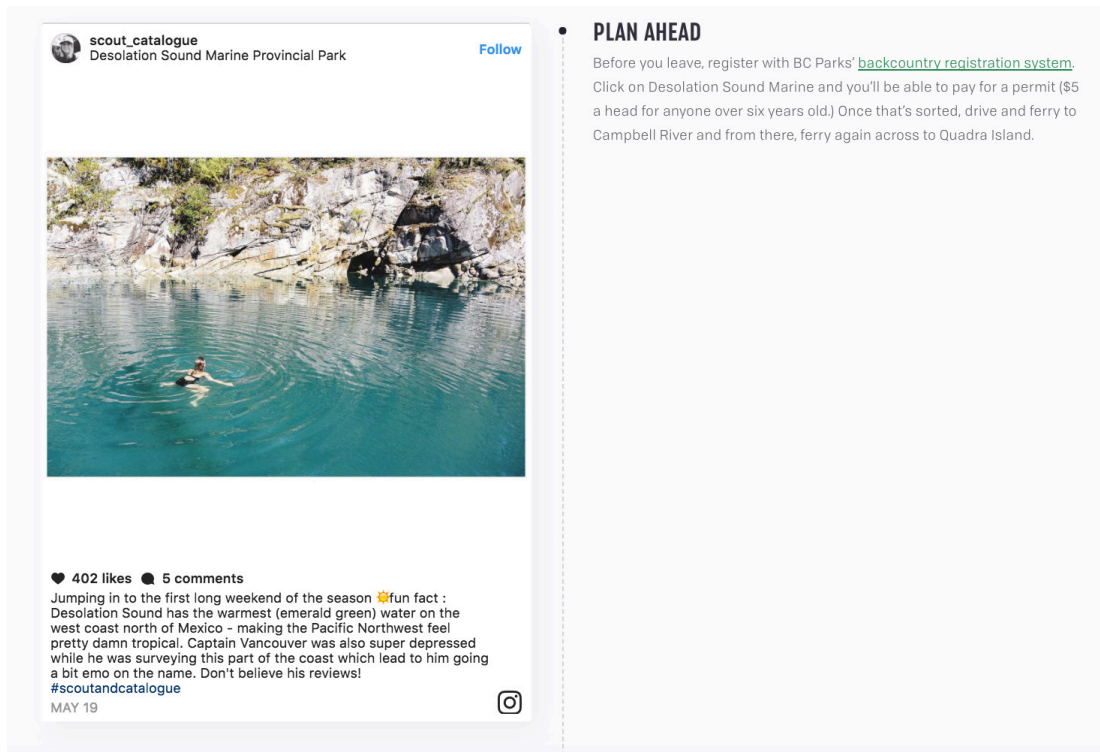
CTA Strategy

The linking strategy is consistent throughout the GTO pages. There are strategic calls-to-action (CTAs) throughout the editorial sections—links lead to official parks pages, trail information pages (such as Trailforks), the Leave No Trace Canada website, and where relevant, an MEC product landing page, events page, or blog post.

¹ “Awesome run route for nature lovers” Good Times Outside, accessed October 2, 2017, <https://gto.mec.ca/en/activities/awesome-run-route-for-nature-lovers>.

The activity page titled “Island Hopping in a Kayak” features the Discovery Islands of British Columbia and is an excellent example of a page that follows a precise CTA strategy designed to drive users through the sales funnel. The first link leads to an external site, BC Parks’ backcountry registration system, which provides educational content that informs readers how to register for a weekend trip in the backcountry.

Figure 2: Island Hopping in a Kayak - Moment 1 “Plan Ahead”



The image shows a screenshot of an Instagram post on the left and a text box on the right. The Instagram post is from the account 'scout_catalogue' (Desolation Sound Marine Provincial Park) and features a photo of a person kayaking in clear, emerald-green water. The post has 402 likes and 5 comments. The caption includes a 'fun fact' about the water's temperature and a historical anecdote about Captain Vancouver. The text box on the right is titled 'PLAN AHEAD' and provides instructions on how to register for a permit through BC Parks' backcountry registration system, including details about the permit cost and the route to take.

scout_catalogue
Desolation Sound Marine Provincial Park [Follow](#)

402 likes 5 comments

Jumping in to the first long weekend of the season ☀️ fun fact : Desolation Sound has the warmest (emerald green) water on the west coast north of Mexico - making the Pacific Northwest feel pretty damn tropical. Captain Vancouver was also super depressed while he was surveying this part of the coast which lead to him going a bit emo on the name. Don't believe his reviews!
#scoutandcatalogue

MAY 19

PLAN AHEAD

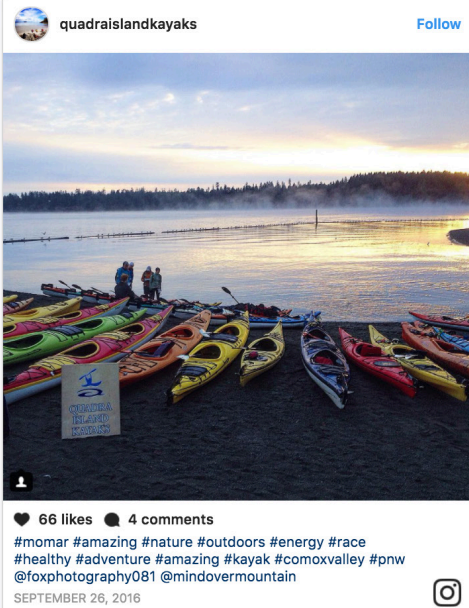
Before you leave, register with BC Parks' [backcountry registration system](#). Click on Desolation Sound Marine and you'll be able to pay for a permit (\$5 a head for anyone over six years old.) Once that's sorted, drive and ferry to Campbell River and from there, ferry again across to Quadra Island.

Next, users are encouraged to find out more information on how to rent a kayak, and can click on a link that brings them to the MEC gear rentals page. Readers can also click to the MEC events page, to register for introductory kayaking and marine navigation workshops.

Figure 3: Island Hopping in a Kayak - Moment 2 “Trade Your Car for a Kayak”

TRADE YOUR CAR FOR A KAYAK

Just south of the main town on Quadra is Heriot Bay, which makes for an ideal first destination. Once there, ditch your vehicle and hop in a kayak. If you haven't brought your own, or [rented one](#) from MEC in advance, there are three local options for this: Quadra Island Kayaks, Spirit of the West Adventures and Nimbus Paddles. From here on out, your boat will be your preferred mode of transportation. If you're new to kayaking, look into guided tours, or check out [intro kayaking and marine navigation](#) MEC workshops to gain skills and know-how before you launch into the water.



quadraislandkayaks Follow

66 likes 4 comments

#momar #amazing #nature #outdoors #energy #race #healthy #adventure #amazing #kayak #comoxvalley #pnw @foxphotography081 @mindovermountain


SEPTEMBER 26, 2016

As readers reach the end of the editorial sections, they can click through to product pages for gear like sleeping bags and headlamps that would be relevant to their trip. Additionally, the featured blog posts range from middle-of-funnel content, like “Types of kayaks” to bottom-of-funnel content, like “Camp in comfort: ways to improve your next escape.”


Figure 4: Island Hopping in a Kayak - “Essential Gear”

ESSENTIAL GEAR


Find what you'll need to have fun on the islands.
[Shop mec.ca](#) | [Find your nearest store](#)




TENTS




SLEEPING BAGS




HEADLAMPS




STOVES



CANOE OR KAYAK TOURING CHECKLIST
Caught up the creek without a paddle? Not if you use this list.
[Read more](#)



CAMP IN COMFORT: WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR NEXT ESCAPE
Ready to level up? Have a little fun with your set up with these comfy extras.
[Read more](#)



TYPES OF KAYAKS
Open water, touring, whitewater or racing, there's a boat for every aquatic setting.
[Read more](#)

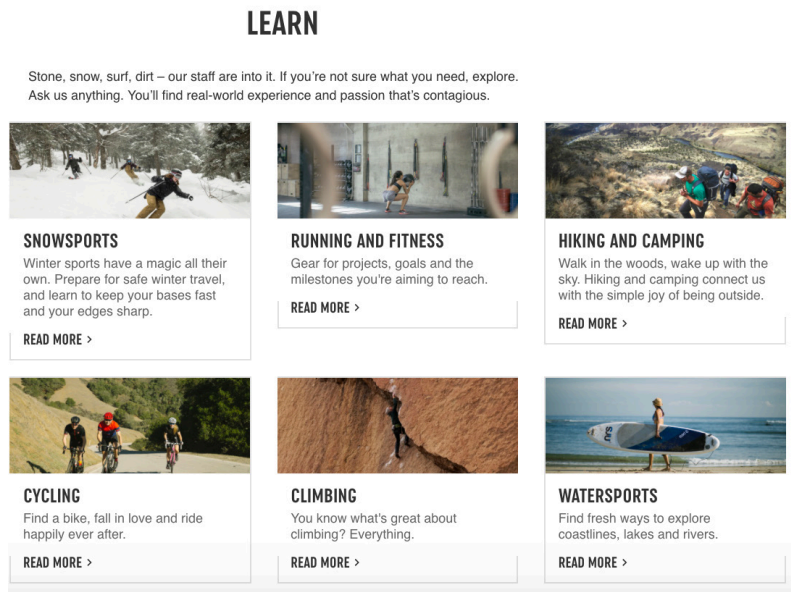
As readers scroll down the page, the CTAs progress from informative external and internal pages, to middle- to bottom-of-funnel content. Once a reader has reached the bottom of a page, there are clear next steps and conversions can be measured in clicks to the MEC website.

5.4 MEC CONTENT APPROACH: PRE- AND POST-GTO

GTO presents a top-of-funnel content initiative that adds a new element to MEC’s content strategy. Prior to the addition of this platform, the MEC website featured a variety of avenues for readers to locate content, including the MEC blog and the “Learn” section. The MEC blog is comprised of a wide range of top- to bottom-of-funnel content, such as: travel and adventure stories from MEC staff, gear and packing checklists, and tips on how to conquer some of Canada’s most challenging climbs, hikes, and mountain bike trails. Some posts are product-specific and highlight the features of MEC products, while others simply provide outdoor adventure stories or highlight MEC regional partner programs.

In addition to the blog, readers can access MEC “learn” content. This content lives on the MEC website and acts as a resource for users.

Figure 5: MEC “Learn” Page



Learn content is middle- and bottom-of-funnel content that provides readers with information about how to prepare for specific activities, including choosing and caring for gear. Some examples of learn content pages are “How to choose bike tires” and “How to

care for your tent.” According to MEC, learn content on the website sees a large amount of organic traffic via search.

Organic traffic is any traffic that arrives at a site via unpaid search, or does not come through other referring channels, like paid advertisement. Learn content answers specific search queries and long-tail keywords, meaning it’s very likely to rank well in search engines and to be discovered organically. Gaining traffic through organic search is a positive for MEC, and for this reason it is in MEC’s best interest to continue to create, publish, and distribute new learn content.

Meanwhile, the introduction of the GTO platform to MEC’s current content, provides a new avenue for MEC to distribute top-of-funnel content. The top-of-funnel content on the GTO site has been strategically created to not only answer popular search queries in the landscape, but also to lead readers towards a clear path to purchase. GTO utilizes popular keywords in the landscape and is likely to see higher organic search traffic because the activity pages highlight specific places and parks. GTO therefore fills MEC’s top-of-funnel content needs, and allows the MEC blog to focus on middle- and bottom-of-funnel pieces that lead readers towards the register.

The launch of GTO marked the beginning of an improved content approach for MEC. This approach means producing more bottom-of-funnel, product-specific content for the blog, additional learn content, and new GTO pages, with a goal to establish a clear path to purchase for all online content. By doing so, MEC can cover all of their bases and account for customers at every stage of their buying journey.

5.4.1 The Customer’s Path to Conversion

To understand this revised content approach, let’s take a look at how MEC content might function if a user completes an online search. If a user enters the search term “how to plan for an overnight hike” in Google, it is likely that the related MEC learn content post “Planning for Overnight Hikes” will appear. Thus, a user has reached the MEC site via organic means, with a specific question. Woven into this learn content is the line, “Use our backpacking checklist to make sure you don’t forget something crucial.” When the user clicks through to the backpacking checklist—a bottom-of-funnel piece on the MEC blog—they are invited to check out specific MEC products on their respective product landing pages.

But where does GTO fit in the above equation?

Imagine someone is interested in doing an overnight hike near Calgary in Big Elbow Provincial Park. Upon entering these search terms in Google, it is likely that the GTO page

“Big Elbow Provincial Recreation Area: Sleep in a Secluded Valley” appears.

At the bottom of the GTO page is the featured learn content “Planning for Overnight Hikes.” Again, woven into this learn content is the line, “Use our backpacking checklist to make sure you don’t forget something crucial.” Once the MEC customer clicks through to this learn content from the GTO page, they are one step closer to reaching the bottom-of-funnel backpacking checklist, and clicking through to a product listed in the post.

Yes, a user could simply enter the search term “backpacking checklist” into Google, and reach the bottom-of-funnel backpacking checklist directly. But access to the learn content and the content in the GTO pages means MEC has accounted for consumers at all stages of the sales funnel. They have also accounted for the natural way that users search, navigate websites, and become inspired to make a purchase.

5.5 WEBSITE INSIGHTS

Once GTO was live, Quietly analyzed user engagement and behavior across the site using Google Analytics. This analysis helped them understand how GTO was performing and whether their distribution efforts were successful. It also provided insight as to how MEC might optimize additional GTO pages and future content marketing initiatives. This section explores some of the most important metrics that Quietly examined for the GTO site.

Pageviews

By analyzing pageviews, MEC could understand whether their goal to increase brand awareness in the Eastern provinces was successful. They learned which provinces saw the most traffic and therefore the most interest, and whether pageviews were proportional to the paid spend invested in the regions. For example, were GTO pages receiving the most traffic from areas where there was the most paid promotion? These insights will help inform which provinces to continue to place emphasis on, both in terms of content production and paid promotion.

Click-through rate

This data informed Quietly how many users clicked through to an MEC.ca landing page, such as a blog post or a product page. By determining the average click-through rate across the GTO pages, they learned which provinces had the strongest engagement with the content. They also dug further to determine whether regions with a paid spend saw a higher or lower click-through rate. With this information, for example, they could understand whether lower volumes of paid traffic actually saw better engagement.

Top clicked activities

These insights provided MEC with information on how to approach future content. Strategists could determine which activities were generating the most clicks to both product pages and blog posts. For example, did the activities that require more equipment and expertise lead readers to click through to supporting stories in order to learn more? Should MEC be creating more content around equipment-heavy activities to generate more clicks to product pages? This type of information will be particularly beneficial from a purchase conversion standpoint for MEC.

Vibes

This analysis allowed MEC to discover the most popular vibes across all provinces. For example, did most visitors prefer activities that make for shareable stories—that is, adventures with stunning views? Based on these insights, MEC can prioritize the production of certain vibes for any future GTO content.

Sorting

Using this data, MEC determined the most popular sorting options across all provinces. For example, how did “Closest to me,” “Longest,” and “Easiest” stack up in terms of popularity? Were visitors looking for accessibility? Were they put off by longer activities? Or do they prefer longer adventures as long as they are easy to get to? Based on these insights, MEC can focus on providing comprehensive activity coverage for future pages.

The final result of the Good Times Outside campaign is a comprehensive online experience filled with fun activity guides to suit Canadians of all fitness levels. The site benefits MEC’s larger content initiatives by providing additional content to glean valuable insights about their target consumers’ online behaviour. While certain insights can be used to help MEC understand what type of content is engaging and how to make strategic content selections in the future, the company ultimately wants to understand whether GTO is reaching its initial goals. This includes the number of MEC purchases that originated from the GTO site, as well as whether MEC’s social following and the use of the #goodtimesoutside hashtag has increased. At the time of publishing this report GTO is still in its early stages, and certain measurements are in their infancy. Thus, Quietly strategists along with MEC will continue to monitor GTO’s performance to understand whether it’s reaching these goals.

CHAPTER 6

GOOD TIMES OUTSIDE DISTRIBUTION

Quietly was also responsible for developing and carrying out a distribution strategy once the platform was live. Distribution refers to paid advertising or promotion through MEC’s social channels. The distribution process was collaborative, involving Quietly’s editorial and strategy teams.

Quietly strategists selected the activity and event pages to be distributed. This was done based on several factors, including historical search trends for various activities, ongoing performance optimization, and the dates and registration goals of specific events. Once this distribution strategy was established, strategists compiled the creative copy for each social platform and sent it to the editorial team. The copy was strategically pulled from each activity or event page—with an emphasis on the most interesting, creative, colorful information and strongest calls-to-action.

The editorial team was responsible for editing all of the advertising copy going to the social channels. This involved editing copy for Facebook ads, Instagram posts, and Instagram and Facebook Videos. The goal of this copy was to clearly and succinctly portray each activity in a friendly and inviting way that inspired readers to click-through to learn more.

6.1 FACEBOOK

GTO was advertised and promoted heavily on Facebook. The advertising copy on this platform included three sections: a headline, social copy, and a description.

In the examples below, there are multiple samples of headlines, social copy, and captions. This sampling illustrates the different headlines and social copy combinations that were A/B tested through Facebook ads. This means that a number of different copy combinations were distributed, and then the results were compared, to help the team understand which samples performed the best, or received more engagement/click-throughs.

The following copy was edited and approved by the editorial team and highlights the “Camping” activity page for Barrie, Ontario, featuring Killarney Provincial Park.

Headline 1: Camp in the iconic Canadian wilderness

Headline 2: Camping in Killarney Provincial Park

Headline 3: Plan your next camping escape to Killarney Provincial Park

Social 1: An authentic taste of Canada’s iconic backcountry.

Social 2: From pink granite cliffs to paddle-in wilderness and meteor showers – are you feeling inspired for your next outdoor adventure yet?

Description: If you’re looking for an authentic backcountry adventure, Killarney is where it’s at. Get inspired for your next camping trip.

6.2 INSTAGRAM

GTO was also distributed through sponsored Instagram posts. The below advertising copy promotes the Tier 1 event page for Montreal’s Jackalope Festival.

The captions varied in their description of the event—from detailing the date and location to providing information about what activities to expect.

Caption 1: Set at the Esplanade of Montreal’s Olympic Stadium, Jackalope Festival is happening August 18 to 20. #goodtimesoutside

Caption 2: Looking for a rush? You won’t want to miss the crowd at Jackalope Festival this August. #goodtimesoutside

Caption 3: Thousands of adrenaline-hounds gather to soak in high-level competition at Jackalope Festival. #goodtimesoutside

6.3 LEARN CONTENT

MEC’s learn content was also distributed on Facebook alongside GTO pages. This was part of a retargeting campaign, where users who had previously visited a GTO page were retargeted with a deeper funnel article related to the activity page they visited. This was made possible by cookies. Cookies are small files that are issued by a website (in this case GTO) and then stored on a user’s computer. They are designed to hold a small amount of data specific to a particular customer and website. Cookies allow servers to retrieve this data and use it to customize webpages for future visits to the site. For instance, if somebody visited the above mentioned activity page for camping in Killarney National Park, they could be “cookied” and retargeted with MEC’s learn post, “How to choose a tent.” Below is an example of the advertising copy used to promote this middle-of-funnel article.

Headline 1: How to choose a tent

Headline 2: Know your gear: how to choose a tent

Headline 3: How to choose a tent for your camping needs

Social Copy 1: From tent basics to some more advanced “good-to-knows.”

Social Copy 2: To help equip you for all types of camping conditions.

Description: A quality tent lasts for years. Some are designed for high mountain storms, some for nights in the summer. Find one to suit your needs.

6.4 DISTRIBUTION INSIGHTS

Once this content was distributed in the various social channels, strategists evaluated its performance from an editorial perspective. By understanding which headlines, social copy, descriptions, and captions performed strongest in A/B tests, they could gain insight into how to optimize advertising copy in the future.

For example, by comparing click-through rates and impressions between location and activity-specific headlines (e.g. Camping in Killarney Provincial Park) and more editorialized headlines (e.g. Rough it in the iconic Canadian wilderness), Quietly could understand which types of headlines attracted readers, and then optimize ads accordingly. They could determine whether headlines that clearly informed users which activity and location to expect tended to generate more click-throughs to the website, and therefore, whether specificity is important when developing future advertising creative for social media.

6.5 SPONSORED CONTENT

The editorial team also assisted in the strategic direction, development, and editing of two sponsored content posts on third-party publications. These posts were paid-for editorial coverage that placed GTO in front of the desired target audience, on a platform that is trusted by this audience. The sponsored content campaign focused on Montreal and Toronto readers, as these markets were the biggest area of focus for GTO’s launch.

The first story was published on MTL Blog: “5 Outdoor Weekend Trips Within 2.5 Hours Of Montreal: Quick getaways to help you truly enjoy your summer.” The second post was featured on Narcity Toronto: “5 Super Fun Activities For The Perfect Weekend In Toronto: You don’t have to leave the city to have the time of your life.” The posts were written by the teams at each respective publication and sent to Quietly and MEC for review and approval. The entire process involved ideation and briefing, fact-checking the drafted posts, ensuring the voice and tone aligned with MEC’s standards, and completing a full substantive edit and copyedit for each piece.

CONCLUSION

Examining MEC's content strategy brings forth the question: how effective is content marketing for brands? The short answer is, if content doesn't tell an engaging story, it won't attract and retain an audience. In the case of GTO, employing the skills of a strong group of editors resulted in high quality editorial content on the site. Meanwhile a network of writers with specific regional and categorical expertise ensured that GTO pages were not only consistent and correct, but interesting, unique, creative, and genuinely valuable to the reader. This element of quality storytelling is what truly sets a company's content apart from its competitors' and helps build a loyal audience.

With the launch of GTO, MEC has illustrated the importance of stepping outside the realm of publishing traditional blog content. By experimenting with new and innovative ways to share valuable content with an audience, companies can understand more about their customers and enhance the results of their content marketing efforts long-term. Creating blog content as a supplement to, or alongside, other types of content is a solid way to reach the most people, collect the most data, and drive the most conversions.

Early examples of content marketing illustrate the power of content to move an audience, and to do more than just sell a product or service. In 1996, Bill Gates foreshadowed the potential of the Internet to change the way content was produced, used, and viewed—and now more than ever, Gates' statement rings true. Today, content continues to shapeshift and take unexpected new forms—providing a significant opportunity for creative brands and companies to make their mark. And as long as these companies continue to publish informative, compelling content that tells an interesting story—whether it be through video, powerful thought leadership, a clever lifestyle magazine, a podcast, or an interactive microsite—they have much to gain.

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