Creating Online Experiences That Help Customers Engage with Your Brand

This transcript was lightly edited for clarity.

Chris: Today's guest is a digital marketer who's passionate about creating moving content that's worth sharing and caring about. Jeremy Schoales is a senior market development manager for content marketing at Thermo Fisher. Jeremy, thanks for being on the show.

Jeremy: Thanks for having me, Chris. This is great.

Chris: Well, I've been looking forward to this one. I think it's going to be fun. So you have an interesting background for someone in our industry because you came from the consumer electronics world. So could you tell me a little bit about your time marketing consumer electronics, kind of what that was like and how it might be helpful, some things you learned to bring them into our industry?

Jeremy: Sure. Yeah, I was with Pioneer Electronics in their car audio division for a little over four years, and I've spent some time also at Belkin, who's mainly doing iPhone accessories and mobile electronics and things like that. It was a lot of fun. And marketing consumer electronics is really rewarding because it's something you can talk about your friends and family about what you're working on and when you say, "I'm in marketing," people always make that connection with, "Oh, you do advertising."

But as it's grown, especially when I was getting into it in the mid-2000s, there was this big change happening about brands developing digital content to educate their customers. You had things like YouTube taking off, where brands could totally take advantage of air time, and people were searching for content on digital forums and video sites. So it's a great time to be at the beginning of all that happening with all these brands.

So working in car audio, that industry in particular is really surrounded by and empowered by your enthusiasts. These are people that are, and when I say car audio, I mean aftermarket car audio. So you've made the decision of the CD player you have in your car isn't good enough and it needs USB and Bluetooth and stuff like that. So you're looking at car enthusiasts that are willing to throw down the money to replace their speakers and throw in some amplifiers and sub-woofers and really upgrade their technology and their dash.

So it's a whole host of having the experience online for people to see and really feel out the products that they're thinking of purchasing. So really great interactive web content, really rich videos that get people already understanding how this can work in their car. And then the other end I think of consumer electronics that people perhaps don't even know about or appreciate if you're not in that industry is marketing to your retailers, which sometimes you spend as much time, if not more, doing. So really to sell yourself into stores.

And so our big targets were, of course, at the time like Best Buy and Wal-Mart. And then you have thousands of other independent retailers that are in the car electronics business. And at the time, too, Pioneer was also in the plasma TV business, which was really competitive, and the TV market is still really competitive. And sadly, plasma TVs have gone away. Even though they were still the best in our opinion.

But, yeah, it was a lot of fun to really tell that technology story. And I think especially as it was evolving around when the iPhone really came out, and this became such a central part of your life. And then how does that extend out into the car? So, yeah, it was a lot of fun to tell that technology story.

Chris: So from an educational point of view, you're talking about…one thing you mentioned that caught my ear was how this could work in your car. So you're creating content that I'm imagining, one, gives someone an experience just by watching it. And then, two, is also helping them understand what kinds of things they're going to have to think about to put in a new system in their car so that you're not hacking the dash, and it's going to look good and sound good when you're done. Or whatever other kinds of problems, right?

Jeremy: Right. Yeah, and one big tool that we use a lot for understanding how it works in my car was the tool we called 'the fit guide.' And this is a pretty standard tool where you plug your make and model of your car into the website, and it would tell you what size speakers you need and what size your dash was because there was like two...well, actually there's a few different standard dash sizes to fit these stereos in, but we went a little bit further to say, "Okay, well, not only are these the speaker sizes, but these are our speakers that fit that requirement."

No one was really doing that at the time. This is from 2008. And then we also, on the backend, we had a really powerful retailer social network, which was pretty ahead of its time. And the main purpose of that was to educate our retailers through a classroom-style kind of presentation about our products. So they felt really comfortable selling it, and then it had its own point system, and people would accrue points and they could use our points to bid on free products from the company. So it was a really popular tool.

But we also built in a thing on that social network for the retailers to upload photos of their installations, and we let retailers put in the metatags on the make and model of the car and all that stuff like that. And then we just told the retailers, "If you'd send us these pictures of your installations, we will then feature these installations on our particular products, just like people feature their photos of their products to consumers any way." You know what I mean?

Chris: Yeah.

Jeremy: So if you went to a particular stereo and you said, "This is my car," you would then be shown photos from real retailers who've installed that same product in your car, and then the retailer gets a free plug, or gets that proper promotion so you really...one, it's helping you as a customer to understand what this looks like. Two, it's helping the retailer because now they get to pitch their wares beyond just being listed as a retailer. And then it helps Pioneer at the time because now we've got better content for you on our website.

So that's when we really tackled that. And then to the end of getting people to understand how a product works, we really tried to get more into answering that high-level question, and at the time this was still a novel concept of like, "How do I use Bluetooth in my car?" This was when it becoming state law to have a Bluetooth in your car. Hands-free we'll say.

And so we'd have that content served up like, "how to pair your phone?" Or, "What it's like to use your phone with Bluetooth." And you'd walk someone through that process of pairing their phone and then their contacts show up on the screen and all that stuff.

So now you're getting an idea of like, "Wow, that's really easy. I think this is the model that's right for me. Where do I go to buy it?" So you try to connect the dots for people, and I think that's where we were really trying to win the battle beyond just features and specs was that information battle that's in front of consumers even today. How do we get the best information in front of people in the easiest way possible?

Chris: Yeah, so I love that. I just wrote a blog post on it this morning. I'm not even quite sure I'm done, but it's all about this education. And so you talked about Bluetooth, for example. So I'm not a big Bluetooth expert. My wife uses it in the car.

But one of the things I was talking about in the blog post is assuming that people know what they need and how they're going to use it, which I think is a mistake a lot of companies make. Maybe people...you can have a company selling Bluetooth systems for a car and just assuming that if people want a Bluetooth, they know how it's going to work, and they're going to get one.

And I think especially for scientific instruments, not only do they want to know what it can do, they need to feel confident that they're going to be able to use it successfully. And so I don't think you can go too far in showing people not only what it can do, but how they're going to use it down to the very most basic things to make them feel like, "Okay, if I got this thing, I know I'd be comfortable using it."

Jeremy: Right, exactly. And I think it's probably peeling away sometimes that curse of knowledge we have as marketers where we constantly want to work in our proprietary trademark we have around this feature, or that we're the best at this, or we have a legacy of doing this.

Really at the end of the day, people just, they want to see how it works. So I think sometimes the storytelling of it gets muddled in how much a brand wants to assert its expertise. And I think some of the brands confuse that expertise with its credentials. When really I think you're building your credentials with customers in B2B or in B2C when you're showing them how to solve a problem they have. Their problem isn't, "Oh, gee, I wonder what the history of your company is." It's more like, "How do we do this today in my lab?" and "How do you make it the easiest for me?" Because then that's going to get you in the door as a brand to even be part of that discussion.

Chris: Exactly. It's the differentiator. So I'm guessing Bluetooth systems aren't wildly different for cars.

Jeremy: No. If everybody's got the same Bluetooth standard, they all work the same. I think you could work on the interface. That still is a contentious area of how user interface design is, but, yeah, you've really got to, I think, get higher than just having that spec in your product.

Chris: So the education you are providing becomes the differentiator that makes them buy from you.

Jeremy: Correct.

Chris: I think it's the same thing for scientific instruments. So let's shift gears a little bit. I'm going to move on to just talk a little bit more about life science products and educational content that you're producing at Life Tech, which is now part of Thermo Fisher. You guys

have been killing it for a long time. When I'm looking around for great examples of content marketing, Life Tech brand keeps popping up. So kudos to you, guys.

Jeremy: Oh, thanks. Thank you.

Chris: And so let's do this. I want to talk about two series of educational videos you're doing. One is the Ask TaqMan, and the other is LabChat. So first of all, can you describe what each of those series are?

Jeremy: Sure, yeah. It was a few years ago. We were encountering the challenge in the field with customers running into probably common problems or maybe not finding the foundational content they needed to understand how to use our products. And at the end of the day, the products are the solution, and so how could we present this in a new and different way?

And so just based on the background I had in consumer electronics, just coming fresh out of it when I got hired on, at the time Life Technologies, we pitched the idea that customers would probably be really well served if they could find the educational content they needed around qPCR. And so we kept brainstorming the idea and turned it into a video series that was going to be by scientists for scientists.

And so it was hosted by one of our own employees, and he wrote the scripts and did a phenomenal job hosting, and then the call-to-action at the end of every video, too, is, "You can submit your own questions to ask TaqMan and we'll make new videos," and that's what we did.

And so we did an episodic series that was tackling a question that was commonly coming up for qPCR users. And it's great content to have for your regular content calendar if you're doing social media marketing in our industry. You're always looking for things to push out and have it be high value and be very engaging and it's on brand and it's also relevant.

And this was great content. But as it turns out, it's also awesome evergreen content. And we were seeing viewership of this video series increase over time even though we weren't actively promoting it. You know what I mean? We weren't constantly emailing people about it. They were coming to us, or they were at least going to YouTube I'll say, searching what they needed help on and they were coming across our content.

One, we're getting great views. And that's the first step we were seeing in measuring success on YouTube. The next step was really seeing engagement. And we were finding people were far more likely to comment on that kind of content or subscribe to our YouTube channel and really stick with us as a content publisher versus it just being a very one-off experience, where we serve an ad, and then they go away and we don't really engage with them anymore or we can't.

So we were continuing to do that Ask TaqMan series, and we see wonderful engagement from it. We then chose, earlier this year, our team made a dedicated sequencing series called 'Seek it Out.' So to play on that whole Ask, and then okay, how we do sequencing? So we came with 'Seek it Out,' and that's all about NGS and saying our sequencing, and it's same principle there. We have our own employees hosting. We write our scripts internally and vet them internally, and yeah, regularly produce this content.

I think we also strive for a high value of a production so it's really easy to watch. And I think that also lends to the whole credibility that you want to display when you're producing your video content as well. You want to make it accessible and feel personal. And sometimes people can equate that with being low budget, but I think we've also tried to maintain a standard at which people feel like, "Okay, this is coming from...this has been done professionally and it's coming from a reputable brand, and I would come back and see more of this content."

Yeah, so that's the Ask series as we called it.

Chris: And what about LabChat?

Jeremy: Yeah, LabChat, it started off as an experiment where we thought it would be really interesting to hear more of a conversation with our customers and let them talk more about their work, then just maybe straight up product testimonials, which I know were super key in our market. And so it was a longer form. I would say it's almost like our version of a podcast with customers, where we chat with customers for like five or seven minutes.

And that's also been a very engaging series for us as well, and we're continuing to do that. But, yeah, I think we're trying to take on more of this series thinking around our video content and what can we get people regularly anticipating from us. So just based on what we knew people like to hear what other customers have to say. Sometimes more than what brands have to say, right?

Chris: Yeah.

Jeremy: And that was definitely the effort there with LabChat, to get customers a great platform to share their work. And I think our goal too is to not just promote the work on our instruments and our reagents, but to also really lift up our customers. I think to show others that these people are doing amazing things, similar to how you would have Nature, profile a researcher, and dive deeper into one of their publications. That's what we want to do in video form with LabChat.

Chris: Yeah. No, I think they're both fantastic examples for many of the reasons you say. So self-produced, high enough production values to look professional, and then engaging,

creates anticipation, and then shining the light on your customers, which I noticed is hard. I've done some of that in the past. Sometimes it's just hard to get customers to talk about what they're doing, but if they're doing basic research, a little easier.

So let's talk about that. So two things I think people will be interested in. One is, and maybe you touched on it a little bit, where do you get the inspiration for those projects? And then two, I think it'd be helpful for people to understand how much effort goes into producing those series.

Jeremy: Yeah, the inspiration. I think we have a lot of channels, internal communication channels we're using here. I can't really get into too many of them, but I'll just say that we really try to do the best job we can of listening what is the market going to need, either straight from customers or from our own internal folks to understand what's going to help us to tell our best story.

And so a lot of that consists of just regularly keeping our ear to the ground and with formal mechanisms we've set up, and through market research. So that steers us in finding those insights we need to tap into. Then to kind of layer on some more inspiration creatively, where we maybe have not seen others do this in life sciences, but we want to blaze the trail, we'll look outside.

And I'd say we're not so much influenced by other outside brands as we maybe we are more influenced today on what's happening in just general content consumption in news and in media. And so you have a podcast, Chris, and you know you're reaching an audience that is preferring to get this content in audio form where they can just listen and dive into a conversation.

And we're looking into all those sorts of trends. And I think coming up with a creative way to present it. And I think the cool thing with doing these things digitally, as all of our marketers listening will know, is you can experiment.

And you get instant metrics, and you're able to really understand, "Okay, this works." Or, "Let's tweak this. This did not, and so let's tweak this."

So I'd say a lot of what we've been seeing...I'll say we draw direct inspiration from what was happening on YouTube, where you have non-traditional media companies that are really in the form of individuals, people call them YouTube creators. And they're doing really wonderful things as far as how long video content is, or how it's presented, and how they regularly publish, and how they're keeping in touch with their fan base to the podcasting world.

And I even think even looking at how consumer brands develop really rich media experiences when products are launched and when we're talking to customers. I think

we're drawing a lot of inspiration from them as well. So I think we're just trying to pull different swatches from different places, if you know what I mean?

Chris: Yeah.

Jeremy: And then doing our best to put it in our palette.

Chris: Right. No, I think you're doing a great job. So I think a lot of people are really curious about the effort it takes, so they can, of course, and I will put links in the show notes for all these things. How much effort it takes to produce an Ask TaqMan or a LabChat? And I'm not asking...I also don't know for you, but my impression is that people overestimate how much it takes to produce some media. And so I'd love to find out from you what it really takes.

Jeremy: Oh they think it's too hard, too expensive?

Chris: Yeah, exactly.

Jeremy: See, I think we've encountered it on the opposite end of the spectrum. Oh wait, I think, yeah, if someone's never done it, they might, they go, "You know what? I can't even think about that because it's going to be incredibly difficult." I think that's really where we try to innovate internally here to make things easier for all of our teams to use, like the LabChat. We go, "Okay, this is going to be a new way of talking to customers because it's going to eliminate a lot of things that may have been headaches for people in the past to get that customer testimonial."

So I think it's on both ends. I think people take it for granted that, oh, you just throw it in and it can be done quite easily, but there's a lot of fit and care that you'll work, either we'll do internally or we'll work with some really talented vendors to do for us.

I think the effort and time can be proportional on the great relationship you have with your vendors or your creative folks. And I think getting the job done sometimes is maybe the easier part, but finding really great people is the most challenging part.

Chris: Great vendors or great people to do the...?

Jeremy: Both. Just example of us doing Ask TaqMan. We've been really lucky to have great internal people host our video content because we feel that's super important to add to the credibility of our content, but then you need someone that's comfortable in front of the camera, and not everybody is. And to your point, too, about trying to interview customers, whether it be the trade show or on LabChat. Some of them aren't really comfortable, telling their story in that forum. So they can try to innovate and think of better ways to present that story.

But I think the work involved, I think it gets underestimated from what we've seen and especially in our industry, too. It maybe just falls on one person in a particular division or business group. And it's just not scalable. The other thing, too, is when you've got a company as big as Thermo Fisher Scientific, there are multiple divisions and groups that are going to benefit by someone trying to scale a plan or a template for content. So you don't have all these groups and teams reinventing themselves every time they want to accomplish the same thing.

So it's a lot of work. I will say probably people maybe underestimate more, how much work it takes. And I think all the time we've gotten to where we're at with how we're resourced internally and how quickly we can churn content out by just taking those baby steps of trying out the Ask series and then trying social in this way, and then going to trade shows and doing this. And we've worked really hard too, on just promoting it internally.

And I think then showing the ROI on it, really through ways of consumption and engagement more than direct revenue because that's how the content marketing game works. And we've developed that trust to build up the right team and resources to support the projects.

Chris: Okay. So that wasn't the answer I expected honestly, but I'm just looking for the truth. So.

Jeremy: Truth is it's hard. It takes a lot of time.

Chris: Yeah, okay.

Jeremy: But I think, too, when you get down to it, you really try to think about how do we scale this, and I think where we've really tried to be smart is to not reinvent something every time we want to do the same thing around, say, customer testimonials or promoting publications or things like that. You want to build an engine and a system that content can slip through, and be vetted, and ultimately get out to your communication channels.

Chris: Right. So what I like about both of these things, Ask TaqMan and LabChat, it looks to me, and I don't watch a lot of them, but I think I've watched enough, that you have a visual template. So you are set up to do the Ask TaqMan. There's a set it looks like in some way and it's a series.

So you've committed to say, "We're going to do at least X number of this," and then hopefully more people ask questions and you keep going. But you've made a plan and a machine for producing a particular kind of content. And you're going to crank it for as long as it works, I imagine.

Jeremy: Right.

Chris: And the same with LabChat...I'm curious specifically about Lab Chat. Are those Google Hangouts? Or how are those produced?

Jeremy: Those are done through Skype.

Chris: Skype videos.

Jeremy: Yeah, you're probably using some software to record your interview right now, right?

Chris: Yeah, and we could record video if we were doing just that.

Jeremy: Yeah, so we do kind of the same thing. We had to think about that one because we really wanted a high quality video capture. And it's tough sometimes when you've got a customer in a basement lab on their LTE, not Wi-Fi, but they're using LTE cellular connection. They're trying to talk to you on Skype, and you're like, "This is getting a little tough."

But I think, yeah, the goal's ultimately to get really good as the best we can video and audio, which from a podcast standpoint, the expectation is a little lower than say advice, news, mini documentary. So I think we fit that into that profile of media.

Chris: Cool. Well, I want to everyone to check out those and more of your work especially Rap Battle...oh we have probably couple more reasons to bring you back. I hope we get to you. And I'm going to put a link to that on the show notes.

Jeremy: That was a good one. That was a fun project.

Chris: That's just a different topic. I'd love to go into that one, but people should check it out anyway, and then they should email me and say, "Yes, bring Jeremy back to find out about that thing."

Jeremy: Oh, thanks, man.

Chris: But, so finally, Jeremy, I want to wrap up with this. So I consider you to be a leader in this area of life science content marketing, and you came from outside the industry. And one of the goals of this podcast is to help other marketers become leaders in their own companies, and really what I want to do is help people elevate the art of marketing across our industry. My vision is that we create marketing that is as innovative as the science we're trying to sell.

And so in addition to what you just talked about regarding the inspiration for your series and how you managed these projects and think about them and all the outreach, what else

have you noticed that it's taken for you to be successful as a content marketer moving from automotive consumer electronics into life science instrumentation?

Jeremy: Yeah, and it was...well, thanks for that compliment. I really appreciate that. It's quite humbling. I think I'm doing the best I can. I think we've got a phenomenal team, and I think that's really what drives me every day. We've got really excited individuals that want to do this same game.

And really taking it out of any formal business education standpoint, I think it's just a matter of...I was very fortunate to get the job I was able to get at the time with Life Technologies, and very fortunate to have wonderful management and leadership that had a vision for this content and then supported me along the way. And then it's just been a really great series of fortunate events to grow into where we're at today as a brand.

And I think we're all pretty driven by what our customers are doing, and I would say that's been so fulfilling for me. And when I look back on working in consumer electronics to being in life sciences, and I think I get this sense, too, from my colleagues as well, that when we look at what the customers do here, it feels like that higher calling in life when you feel like, "Wow, I'm around work that is really important to society." And the visions we support or groups we support at Thermo Fisher are all over the place, from forensic science, to inherited disease, to cancer and cancer research.

And when you just dive into those stories, how can you help not but be inspired. It's really moving. And I think where we are all driven, and I can speak for myself, too, is we want to tell the most compelling story possible.

And I'm just in love with that notion of marketing about where do I take a reader or viewer on some sort of arc, where...and you're very traditional, like movie-making sense. Main character presented with a problem. Main character presented with a challenge to not overcome that problem, but then main character finds a way, and we all feel good at the end. And I think that arc is always going to be really interesting for people, and people are always going to be in love with stories.

I just want people to really be in love with the science that's happening around us. And so I think when you've got that in your, gosh, this is like pun intended, but when you got that in your DNA, it's going to drive you. And it drives me. Now granted, I've got that mindset. I think we are also really well-served by people who are highly analytical, and I don't think you'll find a shortage of those in the life sciences industry, who'll help you get into your marketing data and really analyze things. And then there's other, of course, wonderful strengths we need around us to support that.

But I would say for me, you've got to try to find an arc to tell your story and to bring people along a journey that I think needs to be laced in emotion as well as of course, hard core data, right?

Chris: Yeah.

Jeremy: But we're all getting...those customers are doing that great work are driven by an emotion to serve others, to, I think serve their careers, to serve their teammates, and ultimately serve society. And so I think when we start having those discussions and tell those types of stories, it never gets old.

Chris: Nice. Yeah. That's beautiful. And it's a cool industry to work in. We get to see these incredible scientific discoveries that are very important, as you say, for society, and yet we get to throw a layer of art on top of that as marketers. And to me that's what makes this whole thing fun.

Jeremy: Well, it's a really exciting time, too. And I think there's tons of head room for brands to elevate that storytelling art. Just think what's happening today with...I'm looking very closely at how NASA communicates to the public. And it's a really hot time for space exploration. But they're set up in a way that their whole organization is really empowered to tell stories, and whether it be through video form or...like the space station has its own Twitter account, and astronauts have their own Twitter accounts. That's amazing.

Chris: Now they're...yeah.

Jeremy: And I think there is just as much interesting work happening and really all the disciplines of life science that you could feel that same content funnel. I think where the public...it's easier for people to grab a hold on to space maybe. And maybe there's a bit of more education that the public can know what we do, but I even think our customers, too, they're not always up to speed on techniques and methods and things like that.

And you need to provide that background. And they're going to connect with other researchers just as well.

Chris: Yeah. It's all great stuff, and I love the NASA example. Those guys are, I would say, exceptional at doing it. And the astronauts themselves, if you have not watched a video or listened to an interview with Chris Hadfield, I highly recommend that. Personally I think he's the most interesting man in the world. And Jeremy, I want to thank you so much for this...

Jeremy: THE most interesting man in the world.

Chris: Fantastic conversation. I can go on and on about this whole thing, but thank you so much for joining me today.

Jeremy: You got it, Chris. Thanks so much for having us. I appreciate it.

Chris: You bet.

The Next Golden Age of Audio

There is no better way to grow an engaged audience of loyal brand advocates than through a podcast. But getting started might seem a bit daunting. I know how you feel. There's a lot to learn.

The good news is you don't have to do it alone. I've been creating podcasts and <u>audio stories</u> since 2014 and I'm ready to help you set up for recording and handle all of the editing and post production. It's easy.

1. [Schedule a call.](#)

2. We'll develop a clear strategy.

3. Start growing your audience.