



Words: Kate Ward,
Vice President of
International, Refinery29



Reaching your Audience across Platforms

Refinery29 is a digital lifestyle media company for women. Publishing on their own platform as well as a large distributed ecosystem, they reach over 175 million users a month across all platforms with an audience in over 100 countries. Refinery29's Vice President of International, Kate Ward shares her perspective on the company's unique approach to content for a global, mobile and social audience.

What does 'content' mean for Refinery29?

Last year we made over 30,000 individual pieces of content. We don't limit or categorize ourselves in terms of editorial-written content vs video or photography vs. illustration – rather we aim to create the richest, most meaningful, and most engaging content for our audience, wherever she is.

Looking at our illustration and photography as examples, we know that over 70% of our audience say they could pick a Refinery29 image out of a line-up. That's incredibly powerful, both when we think about growing our own brand globally, but also in the context of the strong vision we can apply to our brand partnerships and creative solutions. We believe in the power of experiential as a means of bringing our content to life. Last year we created "29

Rooms", a two-day immersive activation that invited visitors to take a journey exploring 29 unique rooms created in collaboration with well-known artists and makers, alongside activations for several integrated brands. More than 6,000 people visited over the course of the weekend, resulting in a wealth of user-created content through photos and videos on social media. The halo was clear: 29 Rooms reached one in six users on Instagram and was a powerful and impactful expression of our brand.

By focusing on a variety of creative outlets, whether editorial, photo, illustration, experiential, video and more, we are able to achieve true depth of engagement and brand power. It is the diversity of our creative execution that has been essential to our brand, and how our audience consume and engage with our content.

How are you responding to the greater consumption of content on social platforms and mobile?

The media landscape is rapidly evolving; today, 70% of our content is consumed away from our own platform. The pace of change has been rapid and the potential for media and content to be widely distributed continues to expand. As a result, the opportunity to engage audiences has never been more significant.

Our time is spent thinking about that engagement and how to better serve our audience with content that natively resonates with each specific channel. Fundamentally, each channel is unique, so we have created custom programming and creative strategy. For example, in video, we are creating short-form content for our Facebook channels where we have seen huge engagement, but is markedly different from longer-form documentary



or scripted comedy that we producing for YouTube or OTT platforms.

A great example in our channel-first approach to content creation is our Snapchat Discover. Upon joining the platform, we were given an opportunity to build a whole new expression of our brand for a new audience. We put together a multidisciplinary group of creators - from editors to illustrators to strategists - who have been given the freedom to innovate, test content formats and executions.

But whilst publishing in this highly distributed world means that much has changed, the power of a brand has not. We believe that the power of Refinery29's brand has been critical to our success in a mobile/social world. Even when people are consuming your content away from your platform, they are still connected to the overall brand voice and feel the impact of the mission because we are strategic about choosing to expand on platforms that best serve our specific audience. Whether you are consuming on Snapchat, on Instagram, reading our daily email newsletter or coming to our .com, the audience still know it is Refinery29.

What is the role of data when you are creating content?

Our proven understanding of our audience is one of the key reasons why

we have been successful. We don't need to be everything to everyone, but we have an incredibly deep knowledge and understanding of our consumer, and that is driven by both insights and data.

Refinery29's success can be attributed to the marriage of art and science. We use data and performance insights to inform content creation decisions, and then aim to optimize successes. Take our coverage of the Korean beauty industry for example: in 2015 we saw a rise in searches around a Korean beauty product, BB cream. We experimented with coverage of this Korean beauty trend in a round up article, which performed well above average. As a result, we continued to invest in and iterate on this topic so much that now we have a beauty correspondent based in Korea covering this content every month. Korean beauty remains some of our top performing content by the number of visits, in addition to incredible engagement, with over 68% above our average time spent on this content. We continuously leverage data to determine areas of content to explore, and then combine it with a huge amount of live insights, from headline and image testing to our global republishing strategy, in order to optimize content that will result in the further reach and deepest engagement.

How is your global expansion shaping your approach to content creation and distribution?

Our audience is made up of global citizens — part of an always-on culture — in which albums are dropped, clothing lines released and influencers talk to audiences on a truly international and personal scale. Just as our audiences have a global outlook, as a digital media company we apply the same global outlook in our growth strategy. We recently launched Refinery29 in the UK and Germany, with offices in London and Berlin. We chose those cities because they are at the heart of a cultural movement, home to a creative community and play a large part in shaping the world, not just in fashion and style but in the articulation of culture. The content created from these countries serve our mission by honing in on the topics our audience cares most about and inspiring them to harness their power. We realize this potential through our own publishing stack, allowing us to simultaneously re-publish stories to anywhere within our network. We see our international expansion as a global creative network, with stories, talent and video being shared, and that is not just from our largest site, Refinery29.com, to our German or UK platforms but in all directions.