

How watching TV can make you a better content marketer

As a huge fan of British mysteries, I am always reading books by authors such as Peter Robinson, Peter Lovesey, Ann Cleeves, and Ian Rankin. And I watch many British detective shows such as “DCI Banks,” “Inspector Morse,” “Lewis,” and “Vera.” Many of these shows are directly based on British authors’ books (“Vera” is based on Ann Cleeves’ Vera Stanhope series), or based on the characters developed by the authors (Colin Dexter’s character Inspector Morse has inspired three TV shows: “Inspector Morse,” “Lewis,” and “Endeavour”).

Last Friday, I finished reading Ann Cleeves’ “Harbour Street” and coincidentally (weirdly, really), the “Vera” episode (“On Harbour Street”) that aired Saturday on WETA UK was based on that very book! It was a great opportunity to see how the TV adaptation of the book stacked up— what was the same, what was different.

The same

The main premise of the story was exactly the same: an older woman, Margaret, is stabbed on the Metro. Chief Inspector Vera Stanhope’s sergeant, Joe Ashworth and his daughter are on the train when the dead woman is found. Vera investigates, leading her to a house on Harbour Street in the the town of Mardle, where the murdered woman lived. Vera pursues the investigation by talking to several people who knew the victim. Most of the main characters are the same: Vera, Joe, Margaret, Kate, and Dee (Margaret’s friend, an alcoholic prostitute).

Yet different

Other characters are different or even completely eliminated. For example, in the book, Vera has a constable named Holly, but in the TV adaptation, her name is Shep. Also, last names

are different for many of the characters. The TV episode follows the same general plot as the book but eliminates a few side stories (e.g., a burning down of a building for insurance purposes), changes several details (e.g., Dee falls to her death in the TV show whereas she is stabbed in the book) and even has a different murderer (not going to give that away!). The action in the book takes place right before Christmas and it is cold, snowy and the roads are icy. In the TV adaptation, the action is set in what could be summer (or late spring, early fall).

What is content marketing?

Content marketing is essentially re-purposing content, that is, taking various types of informational material (for example: a how-to video, a news article) at your disposal, and using it in different ways to help market your product or advocate for your cause.

How do you re-purpose content?

When you re-purpose content, you are generally taking material that was produced for a certain purpose and/or medium (e.g., a long-form article in a trade publication) and you are adapting to a different purpose and/or medium (perhaps a blog post).

Screenwriters re-purpose content, right?

If you want to adapt or re-purpose content successfully, you can learn from what the “Vera” screenwriters did with “On Harbour Street.” Basically, they took a 376-page book and made it fit the time and story constraints of a one-and-a-half hour TV show. To achieve this, they concentrated on the main character, Vera (since she’s the title character of the TV series), while cutting out non-essential stories and extraneous characters. Perhaps because it is easier to film outside during the warmer months, the timing of the action was changed from winter to summer.

There are three steps you should follow when re-purposing content:

1. Know and understand the original material

- What is the essence of this content?
- What are the content's most important points or key messages?

2. Understand the medium where the content is to be re-purposed.

- What are the length/time/space constraints?
- When is the content going to appear?
- Will you need graphics or better explanations?

3. Understand and know the audience

- Who will be accessing the content?
- How will they be accessing the content?
- How are they different or the same as the audience for the original content?
- Do they have special needs?

Bottom line: To re-purpose any type of content, you must be able to maintain the content's original meaning while making it relevant to new audiences and different media.

