

digital growth

September 2021 | ISSUE 11

The Evolution of Social Media

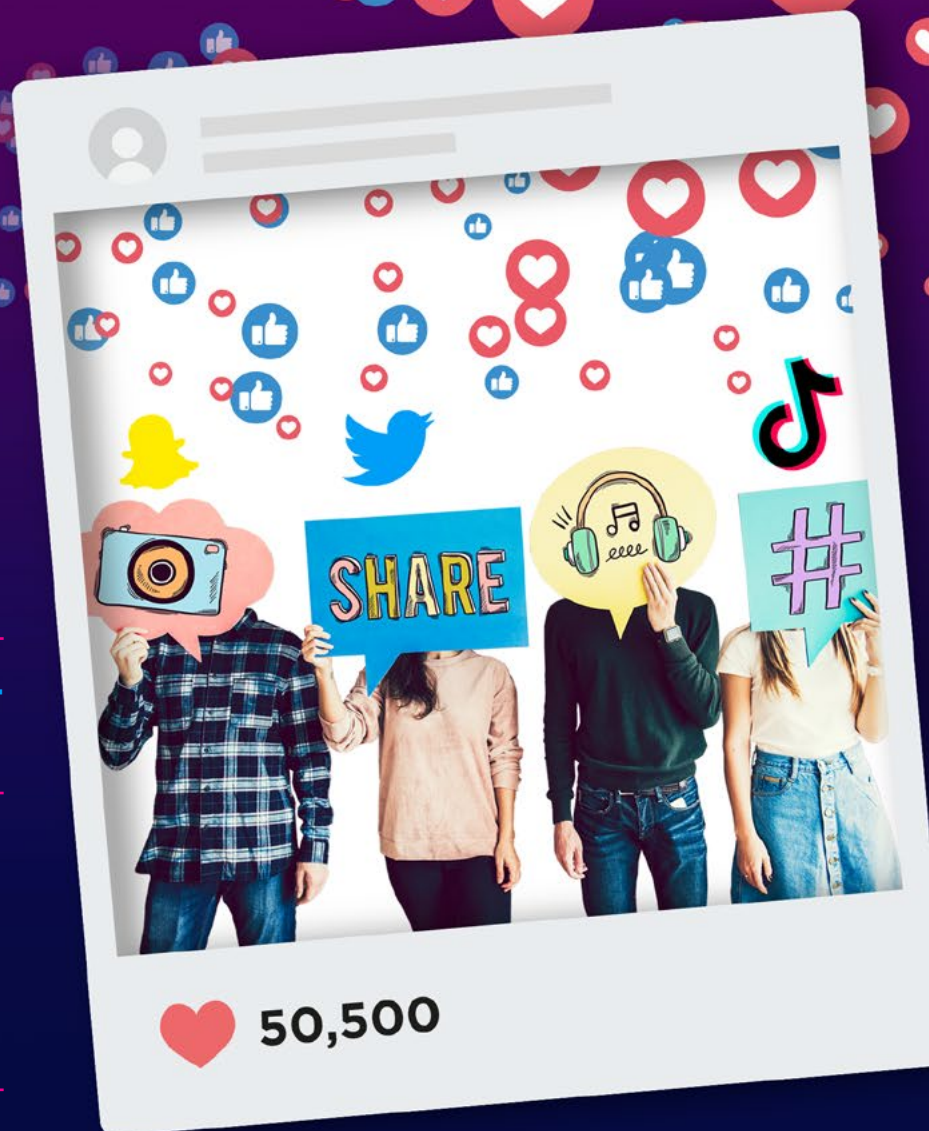
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Social Media Influencers -
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Letter From the Editor

Hi All,

Accelerated by the events of 2020, digital transformation is in full swing. And this transformation has turned the tide in how marketers and consumers engage with, use and value social media.

For businesses considering whether to begin investing greater efforts into social media marketing, the time is now. The sooner you embrace social media channels and related trends, the stronger your brand and business will become. It is vital you keep moving forward in your social media endeavors because in today's digital society, staying still means you will be quickly left behind while your competitors rise up the industry ranks.

In this issue, we take a look at how you can use social media to grow your business better. We are also proud to feature renowned travel influencer Drew Binsky in this issue. Binsky unpacks how the events of 2020 affected his travel vlog and how he discovered creative ways to continue to live his dream and reach his audience. He also outlines the ins and outs of travel influencing and gives us insight into the life of a successful YouTuber.

We hope that this issue helps you gain greater insight into how you can use social media to improve brand awareness, lead generation, conversions, and ultimately your bottom line.

Amit Vyas

CEO, NEXA

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About the Editor

Amit Vyas is the Co-Founder and CEO of Nexa, a digital marketing agency that was launched in Dubai in 2005. With close to a decade of experience within Digital Marketing, Amit has seen firsthand, the dynamic environment with which businesses now have to operate in order to achieve growth and to succeed.

Amit has worked with hundreds of businesses in the Middle East from startups to large multinational clients during his time at Nexa and previously, in the UK. He can be found at international conferences and has spoken at marketing events in the USA (SXSW and Content Marketing Conference), Australia (ANZMAC), India (Content Marketing Summit at the World Marketing Congress) as well as countless others in Europe and the UAE.



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As one of the largest fully independent Digital Marketing Agencies in the UAE, Nexa has provided a vast array of services to over 1,000 clients in the region since 2005. Nexa is HubSpot's only Diamond Partner Agency for the GCC region. www.DigitalNexus.com

MarTech

in the News



The Latest Social Media Monitoring Capabilities

By: Toni Becker

Social media is a part of our daily lives. Social media stretches far and wide, breaks down borders and connects the world. This modern online tool has soared in popularity over the years, allowing us to exchange instant communication, search for information, make friends and even market our businesses.

Today, in order for any business to be successful, it needs to incorporate social media into its marketing strategy. This is because social media platforms allow organizations to hear conversations, nurture relationships and understand the consumer on a more personal level than ever before. But, in order to do all of these things successfully, social media monitoring is required.

Social media monitoring isn't just about tracking brand mentions or replying to comments, it is about understanding what moves your target audience and gives marketers and sales teams greater insight into the entire customer cycle.

As it stands, social media monitoring capabilities are growing and this new technology allows brands to remain competitive, gain insight into their audience and drive the buying process. Below, we take a look at the top social media monitoring capabilities for brands today.

3 Must-Have Social Media Monitoring Tools and Tactics

Today, brands are constantly evaluated online by their target audience and this is why businesses need to listen to consumers online. By understanding the consumer and their wants and needs, brands are able to create the ideal customer experience, predict trends, and keep a close eye on competitors. This kind of analytical deep dive into social media can be expertly executed with the help of social media monitoring tools and tactics. However, all social media monitoring tools are not created equal, and you will need to find the best option for your brand and budget.

With the above in mind, we will take a look at the 3 most important elements for successful social media monitoring. These are the capabilities you should be adding to your marketing stack to ensure the ultimate social media and brand presence.

Capture and Measure Posts and Establish Key Metrics

It is vital that you are able to set brand benchmarks and you need to be able to measure posts, engagement and impressions (this is the minimum). In order to do this successfully you will also need to complete a social media audit on your business in order to establish your key metrics. By tracking and analyzing these metrics, you will identify how your brand performs online and this helps you predict future trends and possible issues down the road. The tools required for this, are tools that allow you to track your social media in real-time which, in turn, gives you insight into how your campaigns are working and what needs to be amended or changed completely.

Tracking Competitors

Your social media marketing strategy should also be able to track your competitors. An example of this would be tracking 3 of your strongest competitors in the social media space and by monitoring their presence, you are also able to learn how your brand is growing over time.

Artificial Intelligence and Real-Time Tracking

AI is changing the game in social media monitoring and when choosing your stack make sure your AI technology is able to:

- Analyze all conversations across all social media platforms
- Recognize patterns in audience behavior and sentiment
- Analyze demographic data as well as behavioral data including your audiences interested and opinions
- Provide you with trending conversations through sentiment measurement
- Predictive insights into consumer behavior, trends and conversations

Essentially, your social media monitoring stack should provide actionable information about your audience and the conversation about your brand online.

Now that we understand just how far social media monitoring capabilities have gone, let's take a look at the top social media monitoring tools on the market today.

Top Social Media Monitoring Platforms

HubSpot: HubSpot allows you to publish to social networks in the same place you build your campaigns, making for a more streamlined process. It also allows your team to monitor any social mentions of your brand and connect with people at the click of a button. With HubSpot, you are also able to view every interaction with your messages and create custom keyword monitoring streams for everyone on your marketing team, ensuring greater understanding of the consumer in real-time. The CRM also provides incredible social reporting allowing you to effortlessly compare the performance of different platforms, campaigns and audience engagement - all of this helps you create a better nuanced social media brand identity.

NetBase Quid: NetBase Quid provides two ways to assess social media data and takes your competitive intelligence to a new level. Through NetBase Quid you are able to see your topics of conversation and dive into certain themes that are impacting your brand - helping you discover what is working and what needs to be amended.

Hootsuite: Hootsuite is a well-known social media tool and offers advanced social media monitoring software that is able to track activity across most social media networks. Through Hootsuite, you are able to schedule posts across all your platforms and are able to expertly delegate tasks to your marketing and sales teams through the software.

The Wrap Up

Today's consumers are engaging with each other about your brand online and social media monitoring tools will help you keep up with these conversations and get ahead of the narratives. With social media insight you are able to shape the conversation and create a brand that your consumer trusts and celebrates.

With AI and in-depth analytics, social media monitoring is vital to the success of your brand. Do your research when selecting your stack and get monitoring!



TOP 17 BENEFITS OF facebook ADVERTISING



Advertising on social media platforms is a highly effective way to reach and engage with your audiences online. Facebook advertising is the OG space for this, with highly targeted ads enabling marketers to get their content seen by the right people at the right time. Let's take a look at the top 17 benefits for businesses.

1

HIGHLY TARGETED

Marketers can set their advertising to reach people based on their location, age, interests, title, and behaviors.

2

GOALS

Facebook assists you in deciding the goal of your advertising, which helps to ensure that the ad will achieve your goals. This includes ads for awareness, consideration, or conversions.

3

FORMAT

There are many options when it comes to the format of Facebook ads, from carousel imagery to video content. You can therefore switch up your campaigns to keep it interesting for your audiences and use the best solutions to communicate your marketing messages.

4

RESULTS-BASED

There are clear results that can show you a direct indication of how your ad is performing, in a way that traditional advertising cannot.

5

FLEXIBLE

Facebook advertising allows for flexibility in that you can monitor the performance of your ad and make changes where you see fit. For instance, you can adjust the ad, or pause it if need be.

6

INTEGRATIONS

Facebook ads can be integrated with Instagram, so your ads can be run on both platforms while being managed on one.

7

LEADS

Facebook ads drive conversions which can increase sales and revenue. The platform makes it easy to generate leads.

8

RETARGETING

Facebook ads are an effective way to remind your audience about products and services they're interested in, which makes this a prime platform for retargeted ads.

9

AWARENESS

These ads increase your brand's visibility, allowing you to reach spaces that are otherwise difficult to do organically. It is therefore an important element for growth on Facebook.

10

IMPROVE SEO:

Social media is a factor in determining SEO rankings by search engines. Having ads in circulation on the platform can have a positive influence on your ranking by increasing your engagement.

11

MARKET SHARE

Since Facebook ads are easy and cost-effective to distribute, many businesses use them. To be part of the mix, maintain and increase your market share, you've got to have ads running. Since your ads are placed in front of acute audiences, it gives smaller businesses the opportunity to succeed, especially in the market where big budgets are traditionally required to compete and be successful.

12

PLATFORM SUCCESS

There are several social media channels for you to choose from. Facebook remains a prime platform for many audiences, with many people checking it often and for extensive periods.

13

GROW ON FACEBOOK

As we mentioned, these ads can help you grow to where organic reach cannot take you. By running ad campaigns on Facebook, you can grow your page on the platform, getting more engagement. This will further increase the rewards you reap, as the algorithm favors engaging content.

14

INCREASE TRAFFIC

Facebook ads can help you grow traffic to websites and other integrated networks. This requires a complete profile and strategic campaigns that lead your audience where you need them to go.

15

REAL-TIME MARKETING

Marketing in real-time is all about responsive ads. It includes the ability to jump in on trends, and when you promote these campaigns with a quick turnaround, you can increase your reach exponentially. The reporting on ad performance is also in real-time, which benefits all Facebook advertising.

16

SPEED

Facebook ads are quick and easy to produce and share. This can assist businesses in gaining results with a short turnaround time. To help with this, Facebook reviews ads quickly.

17

COST-EFFECTIVENESS

Facebook ads are an affordable advertising option. The cost per lead or sale is low, which helps to increase conversion rates with low budgets.



I Didn't Think it Would Blow Up Like This: Drew Binsky on the Travel Influencer Economy

By: Shannon Correia

While you may think content creators have reached a plateau, think again. Drew Binsky is an American creator and video maker who has tapped into the thriving market of influential tourism.

Drew's reach around the world includes almost every country. More than 7 million people follow his adventures across social media, and his video views have reached a milestone mark of 2 billion. So, how did a frat boy, broke and teaching English at 22 years old change his life around in just 2 years? Drew studied economics and turned away from the corporate world before his career began, inspiring even his parents to follow suit.

It all started with Snapchat videos before getting his hands on a professional camera.

By getting involved in the influencer economy, Drew began getting paid a six-figure income by tourism boards, brand partnerships and the YouTube platform for promoting travel. Until the covid restrictions came into place, right? Wrong.

Drew has still managed to travel to over 15 countries this past year (and has taken more than 40 Covid tests in the process). During this time, he has also been featured on BBC and CNBC. He's become a recognized figure around the world.

He explores countries in-depth, taking in their culture, history, and lifestyle. This is what has led to him encouraging his audience to travel to 'alternative' destinations like Iraq and even North Korea. In a recent trip to Afghanistan, for example, he explored the famous pomegranates of Kandahar. This was his second trip to the country, and an opportunity Drew describes as a duty to share the real and positive life experiences in the country.

Where to next when you've reached this level of success? Well, he wants to visit every country in the world. Being paid to travel and inspire - it sounds like a dream. His strategy has been creating a video a day for his audience and recording everything as it occurs in real-time as it happens. In other words, nothing is pre-planned and recorded. Hectic.

But, as is the life of influencers and freelancers, you've got to be prepared to deal with a degree of uncertainty. His income changes month-to-month, and he can go from making \$1,000 to \$30,000. This comes down to the virality of videos and ad income, plus special projects and partnerships that he's working on at the time.

Money is not the driving force behind Drew's journeys, though. The life he has chosen is far from traditional. Let's find out more from the man himself, Mr. Drew Binsky...

Q: What's been the highlight of your work as content creator?

A: The chance to go to a bunch of faraway places and inspire people by my first-hand experiences. I'm a messenger telling stories via my platforms.

Q: I bet it isn't all fun and games though. Can you tell us about what makes this a challenging role?

A: The challenging part is the physical side of traveling - food poisoning, layovers and delays, missing flights, anxiety, paranoia, and sketchy situations can be very tough. Dealing with negative feedback and trolls online can be challenging to deal with too. The feeling of pushing out content all the time instead of just going to a place to enjoy it - there is a lot on my shoulders all the time.

Q: How has the pandemic changed the way travel bloggers work and the kind of relationships brands have with creators? You've still managed to visit over 15 countries, which is an incredible feat.

A: It didn't really change that much - I was still able to visit many countries and able to make content. I've been happy to get tested, though it adds a level of annoyance, but if you can push through that, there are still places where it isn't such a big deal so I've been doing my best.

Q: Speaking of changes, what travel trends do you see bubbling? I've seen a lot of wellness travel and once-in-a-lifetime vacations that families are taking together.

A: Domestic travel has seen a big uptake. I think it's a great thing for family travel and comfort in exploring your own backyard before going overseas. Road trips are also making a huge comeback.

Q: What are the social media channels that matter most to you as a content creator, in terms of reach and revenue?

A: YouTube is number one and it's a great platform. It makes me the most money and I'll be putting all my effort into it moving forward. Facebook is great too, it's my second best. It sometimes makes me more money than YouTube. Then there is Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok. It only comes down to these 5.

Q: Can you share insights into the earnings of content creators?

A: Ad revenue depending on how many people are viewing the content and where they are based. You can charge brands, companies and tourism boards to advertise on your videos.

Q: What is the value of travel bloggers for regenerating economies?

A: Travel bloggers are huge - we have people looking up to us and audiences that take what we share to heart. So, we have a lot of responsibility and a lot of impact by going to countries and sharing experiences with them that they wouldn't otherwise know about.

I think travel bloggers visiting countries are very valuable - and underestimated.

Q: You're visiting Saudi Arabia, what are you most looking forward to exploring there and what have your experiences in the Middle East been like?

A: I can't wait to go to Saudi Arabia. I've saved one of the best countries for last and will be spending two weeks there. I'll mostly be based in Jeddah and then going down to Jazan on the Jordanian border, and then going up to the mountains and doing the Bedouin culture stuff. I'll also be visiting natural wonders like AlUla. I'm excited to gain an understanding of Saudi Arabian culture; meeting the people, trying the food. I love the Middle East and the Arab world. I think visiting Saudi Arabia will be really special.

Q: Finally, you could let brands and marketers know anything about content creators, what would you tell them?

A: I would say that content creators need to be paid for what they are worth. They have a lot of impact and eyes on them. They are not all the same though - they have different tribes, niches, incentives, so you can't group them all together. You can look at their social media accounts to identify the fake ones.

Drew's next venture will be a trip to Saudi Arabia. Follow his adventures on YouTube here:





The Art of Writing Social Media Captions

By: Jamy-Lee Mansfield

According to Backlinko, 4.48 billion people use social media worldwide, with the average social media user engaging with approximately 6.6 social media platforms on a monthly basis. That's 4.48 billion people that could come into contact with your business's social media account. As social media enjoys an upward trajectory in the wake of increased digital transformation, writing effective social media copy for business requires a winning formula that will boost your brand awareness while driving engagement and sales. While certain platforms such as Instagram rely heavily on visuals, punchy copy is the key to engaging your audience. This article discusses the fundamental factors at play when writing attractive and engaging captions for social media.

Decide on Your Tone of Voice

The tone of voice your company identifies with will depend on your brand itself. The tone of voice often gets overlooked when writing for social media, but it's important to consider how you want to communicate with your audience. Having a distinct tone of voice on social media that reflects your company culture, beliefs and values will ensure your audience perceives you as trustworthy and honest.

When deciding on your tone of voice for social media, identify your audience through buyer personas. HubSpot defines a buyer persona as a "semi-fictional representation of your ideal customer based on market research and real data about your existing customers." Consider who will be buying your product or service, the style of language they identify with, and so on. The next step is to understand your brand. If your brand aims to come across as friendly yet informative, then your

posts will need to reflect that. For example, write posts that educate your audience. If you have a lifestyle brand that is fun and passionate, then your style of copy may lean more towards quirky and enticing. Once you've identified your tone of voice, you'll understand the style of copy you should be utilizing within your captions. Most importantly, remember to keep your tone of voice consistent across all your posts and make sure that your captions sound human and relatable.

Write Copy That Has a Purpose

Keep the goal of your copy in mind. What is the purpose of your post and what are you looking to achieve? If you are informing your audience about a competition you are running, then you'll need to consider factors such as a list of steps they'll need to follow to enter. Perhaps you'd like to include a Call to Action (CTA) at the end of your post that encourages your

audience to visit your website, or instruct them to make use of your company hashtag. Make sure that your captions are written with intent.

Tell a Story

Your social media page should take your audience on a journey and include them in experiences. Using storytelling within your captions can help keep your audience coming back for more. If you own a hotel, you could share a review from one of your guests and ask people to leave a comment with their most memorable visit. If it's a repost, include the actual photo of your guest and tag them within your caption, driving your audience to view your brand as authentic and trustworthy. Responding to comments on your posts is another way to keep your audience engaged and keep the conversation going. However you choose to go about it, storytelling techniques can seriously amplify your social media presence.

Evoke Emotion

Whatever your buyer persona may be, everyone can relate to emotion, so use it to your advantage when curating social media captions. If the product or service you're promoting is a residential or commercial mortgage loan, you could take your audience on a journey where they get to envision finally being able to afford their dream home or office. Perhaps you own a restaurant. You could promote that discounted family meal by telling your audience to take the night off cooking after a long day at work and opt for your product instead. Your social media captions need to be relatable and evoke emotion within your readers in order to grab their attention.

Know Your Character Limits

Every social media platform has a cap on the character limit of each post. It's worth noting that these are ever-changing, so be sure to use your search engine of choice to keep up with these. Bear in mind that while some platforms have a generous character limit, most people won't read lengthy captions, so avoid being too verbose with your copy.

Here are some social media platform character limits worth mentioning:

facebook	63,206
Instagram	2,200
Twitter	280 characters
LinkedIn	700 characters
TikTok	140 characters

Engage Your Audience

Utilize social media to get your audience talking. Engaging your buyer personas is the best way to promote your post. This can be achieved by asking your followers to tag a friend or leave a comment relating to your post. For example, if you own an ice cream parlor, you could write a post about your latest flavor and ask your followers to tag the friend with whom they'll try it out. You could even prompt them to drop a comment with their favorite ice cream flavor. Get people talking about your product or service, because that ultimately drives your sales and makes people want to learn more about your offering.

Make Use of Hashtags

Never underestimate the power of a good hashtag. Hashtags are a great way to introduce or engage your audience on a particular topic, make them aware of that sale you're about to kick off with, and more. You can use hashtags in your copy when posting a caption on Twitter, but platforms such as Instagram provide more flexibility. Opt for adding your hashtags as a comment after posting, or include it at the end of your caption. You'll also want to select the hashtags that align with the intent of your caption; go with hashtags that will ultimately serve the search purpose of your post. Avoid using too many though - you don't want to come across as spammy or overwhelm your audience.

Use Emojis

The use of emojis add a fun and relatable element to your captions. Even formal brands can utilize emojis within their posts. These universal symbols are interpreted the same way, no matter where people are in the world. Emojis can even be used to replace words, like the example below:

"Keep those hunger pangs at bay with our 100% beef 🍖 and get 20% discount for the next hour! Follow the link in bio to place your order now 🛒"

Another way to make use of emojis is to engage your audience by asking them to comment with one. Emojis are a powerful yet understated way of enhancing your captions to drive engagement and optimize your brand - all the more reason to include them in your posts.



IN CONCLUSION

Social media captions have the power to attract, engage and delight your audience while establishing your brand online. While attractive visuals are equally important for getting your audience to stop scrolling on your post, your caption is what will engage them. Build your brand awareness, get people talking and drive sales through the art of social media captions.

Does Real-Time Marketing Work On Social Media?

By: Toni Becker

Real-time marketing refers to a brand reacting in real or near real-time. Essentially, it is about a marketing team creating a relevant message by listening and anticipating the target market's needs. To put it simply, this is marketing focused on trends, current events and real-time feedback.

But, does real-time marketing work on social media?

Currently, there has been a rise in delayed media such as podcasts and streaming services, however, real-time marketing is not slowing down anytime soon. It is still the best way to engage with your target audience and convert leads into loyal customers. A current study by Monetate and Econsultancy stated that UK marketers have a 26% increase in conversions through the process of real-time marketing.

The above statistic is difficult to ignore and proves that real-time marketing does work on social media. However, you need to implement your real-time marketing strategy with best practices in mind to ensure it's a success.

Let's take a look at how you can use real-time marketing successfully through your social media platforms.

Best Practices for Real-Time Marketing on Social Media

Understand Your Brand's Tone of Voice

Your brand needs to be authentic when engaging with its social media audience and this means your social media team needs to have a thorough understanding of your brand voice. Make sure that they understand the tone of voice of your brand and

what processes need to be followed for approval. One of the biggest challenges brands face with their real-time marketing is not understanding the voice of the business and this leads to miscommunication between the brand and its audience. If the brand voice is even slightly off, the consumer won't trust the business and this can lead to an onslaught of online negativity. An example of a brand that takes its tone of voice seriously when conducting real-time marketing and real-time responses to clients and fans is fast-food chain Wendy's.

The chain has created a beloved social media personality with its charming, friendly and witty tone of voice. Wendy's has established itself in the online space and has seen enormous growth on social media thanks to its sassy tone of voice. In fact, Wendy's is a prime example of how tone of voice can help you in your social media real-time marketing. A few years ago a Wendy's Twitter follower tweeted to the brand asking for free nuggets, tweeting, "Yo @wendy's, how many retweets for a year of free chicken nuggets?"

This is what happened:



Wendy's responded in its witty tone stating outright that if the user got 18 million retweets, they would provide him with free nuggets for a year. The tone of voice was expected from Wendy's - but the result may not have been. Carter Wilkerson actually created the most retweeted tweet in the history of Twitter and at the same time, Wendy's social media following soared. Both Wilkerson and Wendy's were winners due to the brand's tone of voice and the brand sticking to its tone of voice at all times.

Here is some perspective on how this helped the brand:

Wendy's added 1.2 million new followers by the end of the year following the tweet, bringing its fan count to 2.24 million. And it registered a 126.5% follower growth rate in that year. The lesson: understand your brand tone of voice - and stick to it.

Now that you understand your brand's social media tone of voice, it is time to put real-time marketing processes together.

Streamline Your Real-Time Marketing Processes

This is vital. It's all well and good for your social team to understand your brand's tone of voice, but you also want to make sure nothing serious gets handled incorrectly. Make sure to outline what circumstances must go through leadership or director approval before being responded to. When creative and copy have been put together in moments, the process needs to be streamlined and almost rehearsed. Your team needs to make sure that all the relevant processes have been followed before engaging in a real-time marketing initiative.

Essentially, stockpile your resources for responses ahead of time and make sure that everything is handled according to well-understood processes.

Now that your team understands your tone of voice and you have processes in place, it is time to make sure you don't miss anything.

Social Media Listening

A social media listening tool will help you listen to conversations around your brand in real time. You will be able to view what comments people are making about your business and these make for excellent jumping points for real time marketing - essentially, you are able to anticipate what is happening around your brand and events related to your industry or brand.

Social listening helps you keep track of all social media platforms when it comes to conversations and mentions regarding your brand. With the right tool, you are able to analyze these mentions for insights and discover opportunities to act. Once you track what is being said about your brand or industry, you are able to analyze the information and use it to take a specific action. For example, you may respond to a happy company or do quick damage control if something has gone wrong - allowing you to shift your entire brand positioning when needed.

This isn't simply social media monitoring - it is about taking action in response to data that you have collected through social listening. Social monitoring will take a look at metrics such as

numbers of mentions and your engagement rate, while social listening looks further than numbers and analyzes the mood behind the data collected. This helps your team understand how people feel about your business and your competitors, and provides you with opportunities to take action - opportunities you would never have anticipated without social listening.

In fact, with social media listening at hand you are able to:

- Engage with customers in real-time
- Manage possible crises
- Track competitors and what is being said about them online too
- Identify possible pain points
- Discover new leads
- Identify brand advocates or social influencers

There are a multitude of social listening tools available on the market today but CRM powerhouse HubSpot provides one of the most effective. With HubSpot, you are able to monitor all social interactions with contacts, create custom keyword monitoring streams, and trigger email alerts so your marketing team can be informed as a prospect mentions your business on social media. Learn more about the HubSpot social listening tool, here.

The Lesson: If you don't use social media listening you are not going to have a successful real-time marketing strategy in place. Without social listening, you'll be missing out on a lot of valuable information to help you anticipate what your target audience is looking for. Social media gives brands the opportunity to learn exactly what their target audience thinks - and if you care about your audience, you need to listen in order to create the ideal real time marketing strategy.

The Wrap Up

In order to implement a successful real-time social media marketing strategy, you need to listen to your audience and know where and what conversations are being had about your business. Then you need to react accordingly with the right process and tone of voice.

Now, more than ever, real-time marketing is vital but it is important that you have the right processes in place to get the best outcomes.

The Rise of Social Media Use in 2021



By: Toni Becker

Digital adoption has increased substantially since the COVID-19 pandemic made its way across the globe in 2020. With social distancing regulations in place, and with more and more people making the switch to work from home, online communication and social media use skyrocketed.

Now that the vaccine has been introduced to the world, people are slowly making their way back into pre-pandemic activities. With this in mind, has social media use dwindled in 2021 or is it still soaring?

Hootsuite released their July Digital 2021 report and revealed the latest data on the state of internet usage and social media in 2021. In this article, we take a look at the state of social media use in 2021, and provide insight into what your brand can do to stand out from the online crowd. Let's take a look.

Social Media Growth in 2021

So, has social media experienced a decline or increase in activity in 2021?

According to statistics released by Hootsuite, the rate of growth in social media users is not slowing down at all. In fact, the worldwide unique user total grew by a staggering 520 million over the past year. This is significant as it represents a 13% annual growth rate. If we unpack this even further, this means that 1 in 9 of today's social media users only began using

social media for the first time in the past year.

This shows the growth that has taken place from July 2020 - July 2021 however, what has the growth been like in 2020 alone. Today's social media user total is 147 million higher than it was almost 3 months ago. So, is social media growing in 2021? The answer would be a resounding yes - and it doesn't look like it's slowing down anytime soon. In fact, digital growth rates continue to elevate as we head into the second half of the year.

Social Media Platforms: TikTok and Instagram Growth in 2021

As of 2021, Facebook is still the most dominant social media platform however, TikTok has seen the fastest growth of all other social media platforms. The social media powerhouse was only launched 5 years ago and is now at 5th place for most monthly active users. Instagram has also experienced significant growth and sits at number 4 in this regard.

With this in mind, it is no wonder brands are turning their attention to these image and video based social media platforms. You see, Facebook may have the most users however, Gen Z and Millennials are now migrating to Instagram and TikTok - and as these generations hold massive buying power, brands are taking notice.

For some insight, TikTok active user growth is predicted to reach 1.2 billion people in 2021. So, how does Instagram stand as of 2021? According to Hootsuite, there have been considerable changes in Instagram's advertising reach. This is important for marketers to recognize as Instagram advertising has increased by 100 million users over the past 3 months and this signifies a quarter-on-quarter growth of over 7.5%.

What do the next 6 months look like for social media and internet usage?

As per the above statistics, we can see that the digital adoption and digital use is rising throughout the world and marketers need to take this opportunity and run with it. What is also important to note is that these numbers are not dwindling and the high levels of growth - specifically around social media - cannot be ignored.

So, what can marketers and businesses do with this information?

Social Media Marketing Insights & Tips for the Second Half of 2021

Create New Value With Digital Utility

When we think of social media marketing, our mind immediately turns to businesses based in communication or entertainment. We don't think about product or service promotions anymore. That's too dull for the social media landscape isn't it? However, the latest digital innovation is moving toward focusing on everyday utility. There has been a paradigm shift in the education, healthcare and banking sectors - with many of these industries turning their attention to digital activities to better the user experience.

It may appear that these industries don't have a lot of advertising opportunities, but this is not the case. It is important you explore how you can make use of digital and social media channels to create greater value for your audiences in these industries. Think about it like this - you don't want to create advertisements simply based around a product or service. You want to take your marketing for these industries a step further through entertaining social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels. Think: inspirational video content and how-to videos. This can take your advertising to the next level in these industries

Video Content is Key

The rise in TikTok and Instagram relates to the video elements of the social media apps. In 2021, video content is on the rise and considered the most engaging content type on social media. TikTok is the undisputed leader in video content, and apps like Facebook and Twitter are scrambling to amp up their video capabilities - and brands need to be aware of this new wave of consumable content to get ahead of their competitors. Marketers can expect massive video consumption in the coming 6 months, and this will only grow in years to come.

Shoppable Social Media Content

Today, social media channels are quickly doubling as shopping sites. Many brands have now adjusted to the online landscape and platforms like Instagram, Facebook and TikTok have started to develop more online business eCommerce solutions. Snapchat and TikTok were the first platforms to make mention of this kind of offering but it was Instagram and Facebook that actually brought shopping and eCommerce capabilities directly to their apps.

Today, we have Instagram Shoppable posts and Facebook shops available to consumers. This means your audience is able to buy a product seen on a post without even having to leave the app they are on. This makes for easier purchase decisions and brands are quickly seeing the value in this kind of marketing.

The Wrap Up

The social media landscape is ever-growing and brands across the world need to consider how they can use social media to better their brand awareness and of course, their bottom line. The vision for the future of social media is very much entrenched in incorporating the latest social media technology and deepening connections built online.

Getting Started with WhatsApp Business

By: Toni Becker

Today, WhatsApp is the world's most popular messaging app, with over 2 billion monthly users. In fact, the monthly WhatsApp user is higher than that of WeChat, Telegram and even Facebook Messenger. With WhatsApp taking center stage in communication across the globe and with such a high number of users, it is no wonder the app is able to help businesses engage with customers in a more personalized and engaging way.

Below, we take a look at the power of WhatsApp and how you can leverage the app's success to better your business.

What is WhatsApp Business?

Launched in 2009 (yes, you heard it right), WhatsApp is the most renowned mobile messaging app in the world. Available in over 180 countries and in 60 different languages, WhatsApp is a part of our lives and has become second nature when it comes to communication. As stated previously, the app has over 2 billion active users per month, and this traffic represents an enormous opportunity for businesses to market their offerings, generate leads, build interest and boost sales.

In 2018, WhatsApp capitalized on this reach and launched WhatsApp business. The variant of the app is meant to be used by business owners who want to leverage off WhatsApp's usage and popularity. In the beginning, the business app was built for small businesses looking to reach the consumer but soon the app became popular and is now also being used by larger organizations looking to send high volume B2C support and notifications.

But what does the app offer and how can it benefit your business efforts?

WhatsApp for Business Offerings and Benefits

WhatsApp technology allows for instant communication with friends and family members, and this same context can be powerful when applied to business and consumer communication.

Below, we outline what the WhatsApp Business App offers and how it can better your business:

Catalog Display: This is a powerful offering and is especially useful for businesses in the eCommerce industry. When you create a WhatsApp Business profile you will be able to showcase your product or service offerings and include brief descriptions including photos, price and links. This makes for greater product or service visibility and allows for instant conversion.

Instant Responses: With WhatsApp for business, you can save time by using present responses. The app allows you to create predetermined responses to answer some of your most frequently asked questions. This ensures that your potential or current client receives the information they require at the click of a button - making for excellent customer service and increased brand trust.

Customer Segmentation: Similar to a Customer Relationship Management system, you are able to organize your contacts, leads and chats making for easy retrieval. You are also able to manage your chats by using specific filters and sort them by groups, broadcast lists and unread messages. This ensures no client or potential client gets left behind, and you are able to track lead progression seamlessly.

Stats and Analytics: When it comes to marketing and sales - data is vital. WhatsApp for business has the power to generate reports for basic metrics including messages read, delivered and sent. This will help you understand your client in greater detail, identify issues in your marketing tactics and amend where necessary. It is with this kind of data that you are able to understand customer behavior, which in turn helps you in creating a buyer's journey that works for them.

HubSpot CRM Integration: HubSpot is one of the world's most trusted Customer Relationship Management tools and is used by businesses all over the world for the purpose of inbound marketing, departmental alignment and lead generation. HubSpot recognized the power of WhatsApp in the business space and now the two can be integrated. You can now map business-related conversations between a business and its customers directly inside of HubSpot - making for effortless marketing, sales and service alignment.

Distribution Lists: With the app you are able to create broadcast lists which means you are able to send the same message (campaign) to a large number of users at the tap of a button.

The above functionalities improve the entire customer journey and better align your sales, marketing and customer service efforts.

The offerings and functionalities of the app are vast, so are there any limitations one should be aware of?

It is important to note that the app is easy-to-use but it only has basic automation functionalities. However, if you want to extend this automation functionality to integrate a chatbot for advanced messaging, you'll need to invest in the WhatsApp Business API. This version of the app is geared toward larger organizations.

The only other issue a person may have with setting up the app comes down to a "number." When you set up your WhatsApp

for business, you'll need to have a separate phone number or turn your personal phone number into your business account. That's about the only hurdle you'll have to face to be honest. And let's be real, it's pretty easy to make compromises in that regard.

All in all, it's clear that the benefits outweigh the limitations. And considering the fact that the app is free to use (yes, again, you heard it right) and helps you connect with your ideal target market on their terms, it is quickly becoming a necessity for businesses of all sizes and industries.



The Wrap Up

All you have to do to get started with WhatsApp for Business is download the app. It is a convenient channel for businesses and you'll want to get ahead of your competitors when it comes to WhatsApp communication for marketing, sales and customer service.



How to Use WhatsApp for Business: Tips and Tools

By: Shannon Correia

WhatsApp's move towards becoming more business-friendly has made direct communication with your audience easy and effective. In this article, we'll be sharing the various tips and tools on how you can use this platform to its fullest potential.

Welcome customers: WhatsApp makes it easy to share a greeting message when people get in touch with you. This is a warm way to begin the relationship with your new contacts and give them a sense of the instant response that they seek.

Categorize your chats: Creating groups is a helpful tool to ensure that you are sending messages that cater to the needs of various segments within your audience. For example, you can group together a certain age category and send relevant messages to them.

Broadcast messages: As your profile grows, so too will your interactions. For standardized messaging, it is best to create broadcast chats to reach all your content. For example, sending regional specials to contacts in the relevant areas.

Integration with eCommerce: Having a WhatsApp Business profile allows your audience to share products from your website via the app. This increases traffic to your site, improves the customer experience, and can make it easier for them to reach out and ask questions that they may have. Additionally, your business can integrate WhatsApp with its CRM to automatically share the data and contacts.

Product catalogs: To maximize your use of WhatsApp Business, create product or service catalogs. These include the name, image, price, description, and link to your website. It makes it very convenient for the customer to see what's on offer and follow through to the next stage in their customer journey.

Think about lead generation: New contacts should be considered leads for your business. By capturing and using this data, you can begin the customer journey with them. To do this, you should use the app to build a relationship through conversation.

Share specials: Promotions are an enticing way to reach out to your customers. Using this direct method, you can share relevant coupon codes and specials. This generates interest and can help boost sales.

Quick Message: Quick replies are standardized answers and questions in textual form that you can send with ease. This makes your communication standardized and the process of replying to your contacts quicker, which is important when building relationships with customers. To do this, create shortcuts that continue frequently used phrases. Aim to respond to messages within 24 hours of receipt for optimal customer satisfaction.

Communication avenue: You can use WhatsApp to ask for and receive feedback. This can strengthen your relationships with customers and you can use this as input for improving the customer journey and brand's perception.

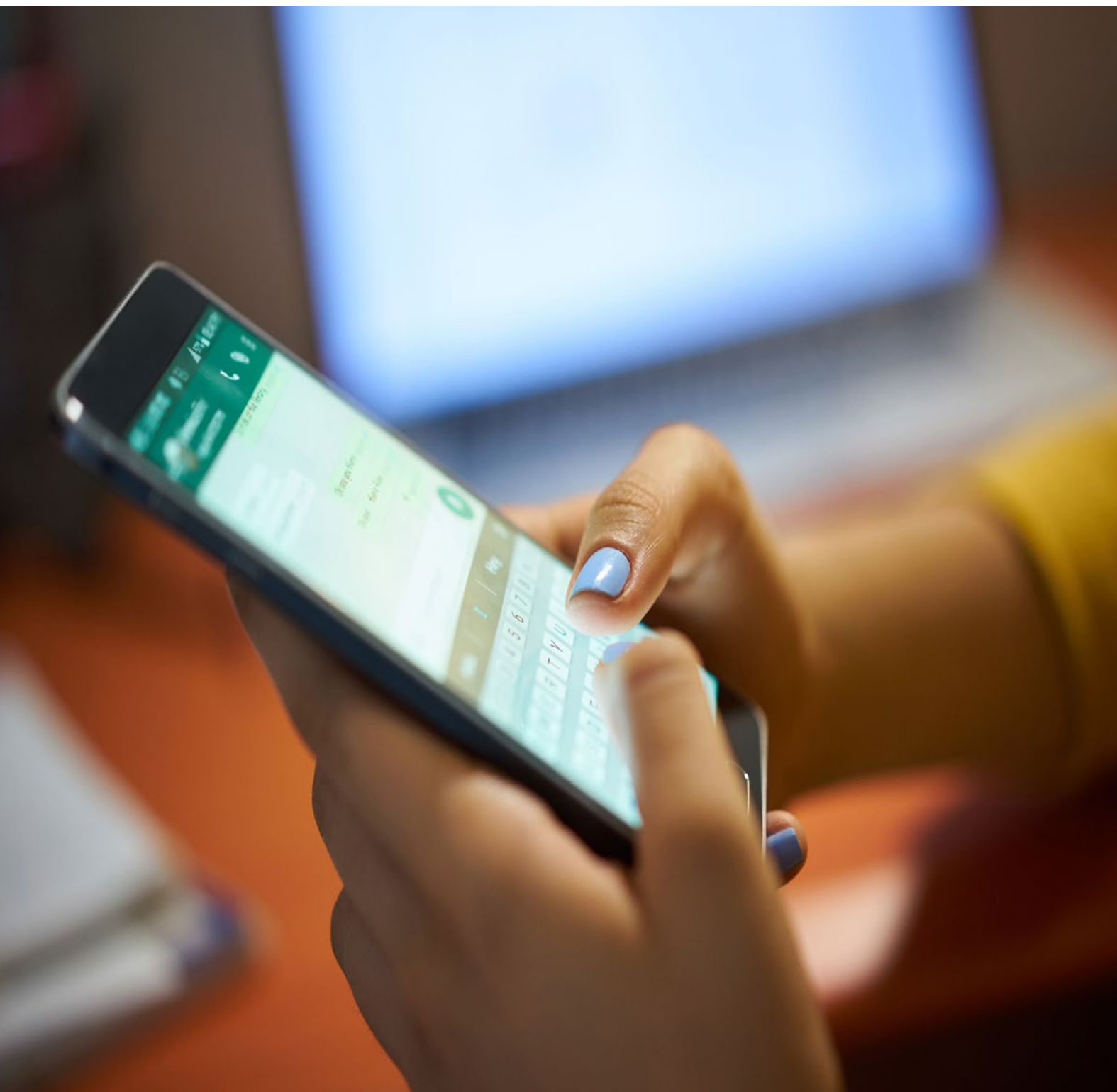
Offer support: Text messaging is a comfortable alternative to a phone call for many customers. This can be used to create engaging and ongoing conversations that help understand your customers better. You can also offer them additional customer support and service to increase engagement, follow-through, and satisfaction.

Share a Story: WhatsApp Story allows you to share short-term content that can increase visibility and serve as a reminder to your contacts. This may spur your contacts to find out more about what you've posted and thereby re-ignite ongoing interest.

Share a range of content: WhatsApp allows you to send a variety of content to your contacts. This means you can spice up the texts with photos, videos, locations, voice messages, GIFs, and PDFs.

Create a community: You can build communities among your customers. To do this, treat your WhatsApp contacts the same way you would an email subscriber - they've signed up to join a club hosted by your business for exclusive chats and offers that others are not privy to, or are missing out on. In other words, ensure your profile has a purpose.

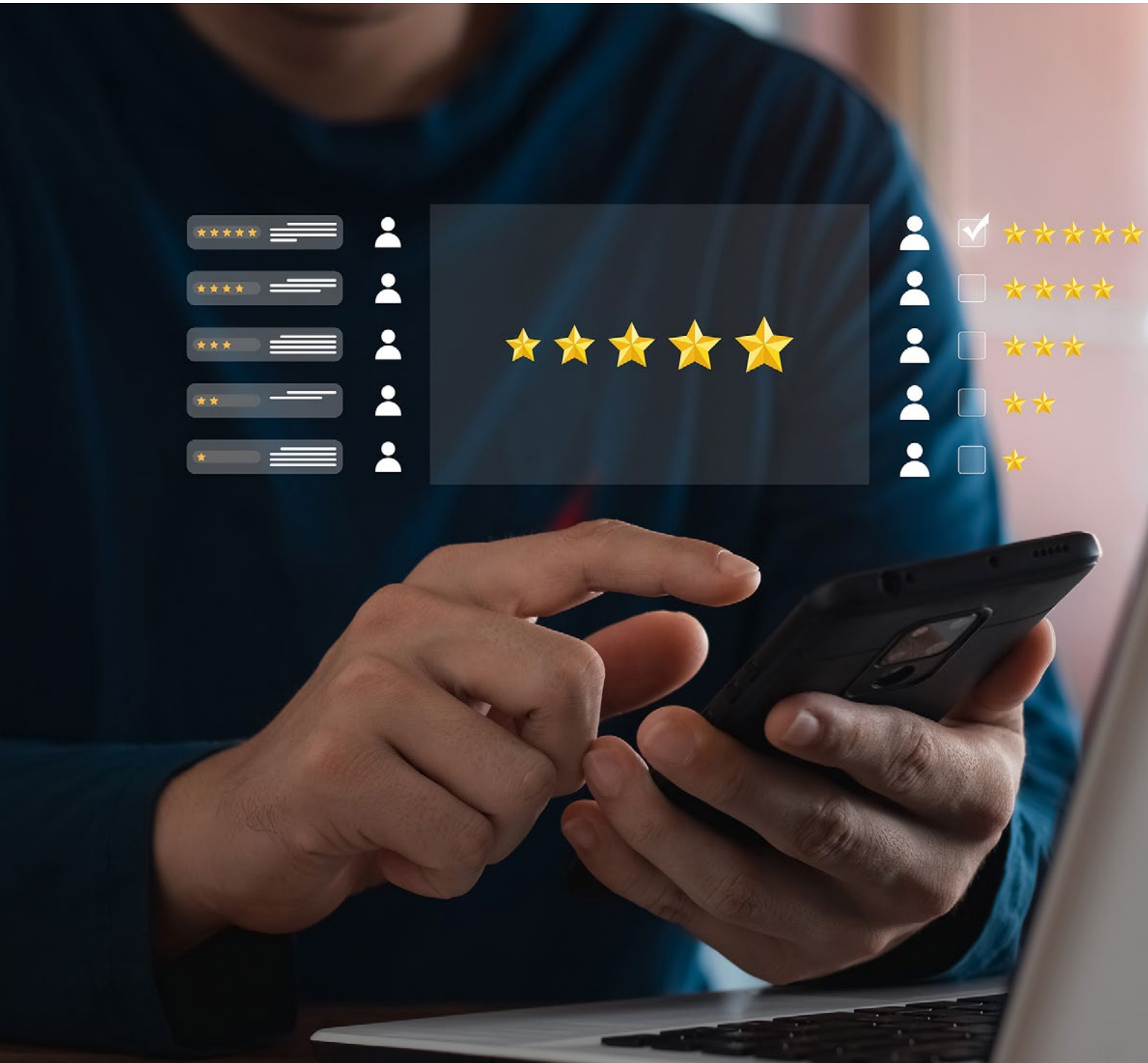
Share your contact info: Be sure that your profile has enough visibility. You can reach out to contacts via links, shares on social media, and a unique QR code. This makes the connection between your business and customers that much more efficient.



How to Use WhatsApp to Generate More Interest and Leads

By: Shannon Correia

WhatsApp profiles for businesses offer a number of features that increase the lines of communication between customers and businesses. This helps in attracting and generating more interest in your brand, as well as more leads for your marketing and sales team to work with. Here's how...



WhatsApp is the world's most used messaging app. Businesses are using it for its ability to put you in direct contact with your customers through one-on-one interactions. Let's look at the stats before we dive into the specifics of how to use this app to generate more leads:

- The messaging app has over 2 billion users
- More than 100 billion messages are daily
- Over 60 languages are supported

Using WhatsApp to Generate More Interest

By increasing communication channels, you are giving your customers more ways to reach you. More options mean they can engage in a way that is most comfortable to them, and for many, a text beats a call or email. It's a direct line that creates one of the quickest responses which is very attractive to today's customers.

Business accounts on WhatsApp provide more chances for visibility. By posting a Story, you can share reminders with your contacts which then triggers interest and starts the customer journey. You are also able to share relevant messages with segmented contacts to tailor your communication with them and encourage an ongoing relationship.

Finally, by integrating WhatsApp with your CRM, you can manage all of your conversations with ease and keep the data on record to create a better understanding of each customer and what their needs are. It also makes it easy for people to share content with their contacts via the app.

How to Generate More Leads Using WhatsApp

First things first, consider all of the contacts you engage with via WhatsApp leads. They may be existing leads or new ones altogether. See, this app is not merely for customer convenience but can be seen and used as a tool for understanding your customers better and improving the relationships you have with them.

When it comes to generating leads, you cannot just message people. Users are protected in that way, and therefore you need to create interest among your audience to engage with you. In short, they need to take the first step in messaging you. WhatsApp's rules allow for promotional content to be sent to the customer once this conversation begins within the first 24 hours. Thereafter, information relating to the query and one additional promo message can be sent.

These measures are put in place to protect the customer and ensure that they aren't bombarded with marketing materials. It is imperative that the above is known and adhered to for a successful strategy for WhatsApp Business users.

So, how can we use WhatsApp to generate leads?

Share Your Profile

It may seem obvious, but once you have a verified WhatsApp Business account, you need to ensure you're sharing your contacts with everyone. Have it visible on your site and include it in other communicative material, such as your email signature. You don't have to share your number, you can simplify it by sharing your unique QR code.

You can share your WhatsApp details via:

- Your website (click-to-chat widgets)
- Social media profiles
- Paid adverts
- Email signatures

Pro tip: Ensure you are using effective calls to action.

Make Use of Automation

WhatsApp Business makes message automation easy. You can create various shortcuts that are appropriate to your business, ensuring that you're messaging efficiently. This also creates an improved sense of customer service and shows the customer that your brand is professional through your consistency in responses. It also makes the goal of responding to messages within 24-hours a realistic target.

There are a number of tools that can help you build your own chatbot. These require no coding and often include templates which you can then customize accordingly. Alternatively, check out WhatsApp Business API. Here's some more info: "The WhatsApp Business API allows medium and large businesses to communicate with their customers at scale. Using the API, businesses can connect thousands of agents and bots to interact with customers programmatically and manually. Additionally, the API can be integrated with numerous backend systems, such as CRM and marketing platforms."

Don't forget while WhatsApp is a highly effective tool to generate leads, it is just as important to focus on nurturing leads through the app (by engaging in long-term relationships through conversation), and lead conversions (as it can be used for sales or directing traffic to your site). What are you waiting for? Unleash the many opportunities that WhatsApp presents for business. It all begins with generating more interest in your brand.

Why WhatsApp Matters

2 billion users on WhatsApp, making it the most popular messaging app in the world

100 billion messages are sent on WhatsApp daily

5 million businesses started using WhatsApp Business within the first year of it launching.



How to Use Instagram Stories to Build Your Audience

By: Shannon Correia

One of the most highly successful features that Instagram has introduced is Stories. This day-by-day snapshot is accessible to billion Instagram users in the world, including businesses. In this article, we'll be sharing tips on how to make this feature work for you .

Instagram Stories Help You Grow

Who can resist a fleeting glimpse that appears at the top of the Instagram app? Not only does it play on limited viewing time, but the tapping is addictive, with many chances to engage by reacting, participating, or commenting on a Story. Additionally, it is content that you needn't commit to by displaying it on your profile, though you can increase its longevity by including it in a 'highlight' on your profile.

Stories present more authentic in-the-moment content, compared to the usual staged photos and videos that are shared on the app. This feature is so popular that the app shared insights revealing that over 500 million Stories were published each day in 2019, a figure which we're sure has grown since then.

As one of the most essential features of Instagram, you've got to be using Story content to build your audience.

How to Use Stories to Build an Audience

When we say "build an audience," we mean to grow and develop with a community of people. Customer engagement online is all about relationship building, so you've got to be able to share and connect with users. Posting needs to be thoughtful in the sense that you want to encourage interest and responses by sharing unique content.

There is so much that you can share. Instagram includes several features within Stories that encourage user engagement. Let's take a look at some of them:

Before you can include these various elements, though, you've got to start with the content itself. Whether it's a video or photo, you should be thinking about ways to add in captions or text for content, overlays that make it pop (think unique layouts that transform an otherwise very 'flat' visual), and mood enhancers by adding in music. To increase visibility, be sure to include location tags where possible and hashtags where appropriate.

The thing is, Story content is a lot of work for businesses. With its limited lifespan, you've got to keep working at it daily (ideally), be creative with what you're posting, and then also be prepared to interact with people when they respond to keep the momentum going. In other words, there needs to be a strategy to the madness.

Since Instagram Stories can shed insight into the personality of a brand, you've got to consider who this audience is. There are many helpful insights available to Instagram business accounts that can be used to help tailor content that works. Additionally, when building an audience, you've got to consider reaching out to new users. This could be people who come across your profile, or ideally, people being drawn to your profile by the Stories you post.

Achieving this is simpler than it sounds. You've got to create shareable posts - for example, a restaurant can share a (branded) slideshow of an easy-to-follow drinks recipe that people then screenshot or send to others. Another option is to share user-generated content in an appreciation post, which can help further your reach and your customer's admiration for your brand. Do the same with partnerships and collaborations that you have with influencers and other businesses too to expand your reach.

This helps you to see the various options for content to share on Stories as you don't always need to create it, which saves you time and skills, without compromising on your ability to be consistent and interesting. You can also use this to tease new posts and reels, leading people to your new content which they may have otherwise missed.

There is a lot of creative freedom when it comes to Instagram Stories, so be sure to explore various ways of entertaining and delighting people with what you post. They're great as reminders about what you have going on, behind-the-scenes take on what you're working on and promoting, and drumming up excitement for launches and updates.

Another benefit for business accounts with a high enough follower count is the ability to include a 'Swipe Up' feature. This is a great opportunity to keep your Story light, yet have easily accessible content that does all of the explainings for you. For accounts that offer Instagram Shopping, you can include product stickers in your Stories too. This will tag the item from the catalog, which can lead people to instantaneously tap to buy it.

To make Story content as easy as can be for your social media manager, you may decide to use specific templates or follow a particular style. This has a knock-on benefit of helping with brand recognition for your customers. If you're having a lull with content or need to drum up engagement, you can also use Stories to promote a contest over a period.

For two go-to tips that relate to trends in marketing in a general sense, be sure to include video content in your Stories. Firstly, be sure that it's vertical so that it fits the screen when your audience views it. Secondly, make use of a call to action. These buttons can direct your audience so they don't just go on to viewing the next person or business's story, but are instead inspired to get involved and further their journey with your brand.



Instagram Stories Build Engaged Communities

Your audience's attention is focused on the here and now. Sharing regular and creative Stories on Instagram can help you to build your audience effectively through visibility and interactions.

How to Grow Your Social Media Followers in 2021... Without a Budget

By: Shannon Correia

As one of the most important elements of digital marketing, social media channels are imperative for growth online. If you'd like to increase your followers in 2021, but don't have a budget to work with, you're going to need to focus your efforts on organic reach and visibility. This is notoriously tricky to get right but fear not - here's a how-to guide to help you reach new heights.

Marketers have moved away from 'vanity' metrics, or the numbers that don't really surmount to any effect on your ROI. It refers to things like 'likes,' which don't necessarily require any effort or action on behalf of your audience. The key to surpassing vanity metrics is to measure engagement. When it comes to your followers, that means having an active (read: high-quality) audience. Many platforms continually work on cracking down on bots, which are commonly bought to appear as followers to inflate metrics.

Having a follower as opposed to regular visitors to your social media channels is a marker of commitment on the audience's side. They could easily just find your profile when they're looking

for something particular, but having your profile come up in their regular feed is the goal as it strengthens relationships.

The truth is, growth on social media is far easier when you have a budget to work with. This is because you can advertise to highly targeted audiences. The goal should be to allocate some of the marketing budgets towards social media, as even a small amount can go a long way. Without any money behind your efforts, you're relying on organic reach, and this can be difficult on apps that have been around for some time.

Social Media Growth Without a Budget

The truth is, growth on social media is far easier when you have a budget to work with. This is because you can advertise to highly targeted audiences. The goal should be to allocate some of the marketing budgets towards social media, as even a small amount can go a long way. Without any money behind your efforts, you're relying on organic reach, and this can be difficult on apps that have been around for some time. Don't lose hope, though.

How to Get More Followers on Social Media in 2021

Develop your aesthetic: Your brand should be clearly defined and recognizable. People need to know what to expect and be able to identify the tone and style of your brand through the content you share. This makes them more likely to trust your brand - and with that, comes followers. Have a few go-to hashtags, as well as one that is specific to your brand to increase your digital footprint.

Be consistent: Posting needs to be consistent. The algorithms need this to understand your content accurately and push it to relevant audiences. There should be a near-constant stream and ongoing interactions with your audiences.

Optimize your posts: Optimization is key when preparing to share content. Each platform will have different specs on how to do this, but the goal is to follow the guidelines of the platform and attach as much information to the post as possible. That means you need to include captions, hashtags, and alt text, for example.

Use all features: Social media platforms are multi-dimensional in that you can share various types of content. Be sure that your content covers different types of media and that if there is the option to share ephemeral content (Stories), then be sure to post about it.

Platform selection: There are a number of predominant social media platforms, but be sure to hone in on the relevant ones to your brand. Having half-hearted attempts can harm your ability to effectively reach and engage audiences. These are the platforms you need to know in 2021.

Have a strategy: When you analyze your audience to understand their needs, you can produce relevant content that appeals to them. By having a channel that is exciting to read and pleasing to the eye, you're likely to attract people and entice them to follow you to updates.

Collaborate: The method of working with influencers requires a budget, so if you're without one, then work on creating affiliate relationships. These are partnerships whereby the affiliate marketer will get a percentage of the sale - you can mark up the prices accordingly in advance if need be. This way, you're reaching new audiences and don't require any upfront payments.

Tracking: Social media platforms have become a lot more business-friendly in recent years and have included analytical insights. Use these to your advantage to find out the best times to post and to see which types of content are most successful. This goes hand-in-hand with testing content, which should be an ongoing task with adjustments made where necessary.

Have a team: Whether it's one person or a team behind your social media, be sure to take care of all aspects, from community management to creative content production. You may not have a budget to spend on growing your followers, but you'll need to use the social media budget and resources available to create quality content.

Competitions: One of the most effective ways to grow your audience and stimulate engagement organically is by hosting a competition. You will have to supply the prize so it isn't exactly free, but if you're able to do this, you can count on this being the most effective way to grow organically.

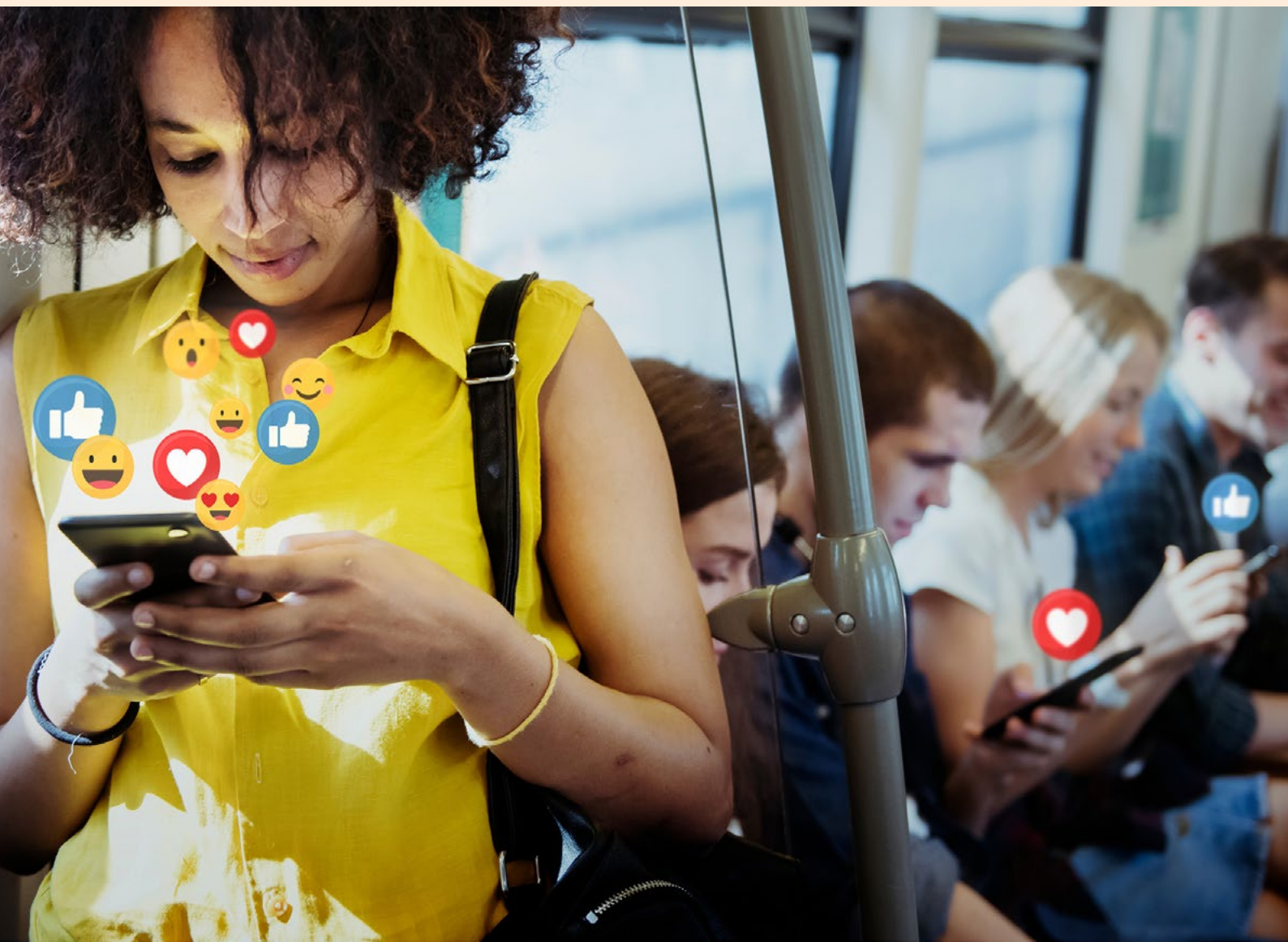
Cross-promote your brand: Your growth on social media may not be linear across all of your channels. As such, you'll want to include links to your other platforms in your bio. It should also be easy for your audience to share your content to other platforms, and you can encourage this using calls to action. Finally, be sure to promote your social media channels on your website and via your email marketing.

Contact with the community: Whether it's through sharing user-generated content or being an active member of the community, your brand needs to show its appreciation and sense of belonging. This will increase your reach and visibility, all while showcasing the business's values.

Engage in real-time marketing: This is reactive marketing which helps you ride the wave of social media trends. When you get it right, it can help you grow your engagement and follower count.

Social Media Followers in 2021

Understand that growth without a budget on social media takes time to achieve. By making this a priority and working at it each day, you'll be on your way to increasing the number of followers you have in no time. This growth is often a better indication of your brand's success on social media, as the followers you gain will typically be more loyal than those lured to your page through advertising.



Social Media Influencers in 2021 - The Latest Evolution

By: Toni Becker



Influencers. Either you love them or you loathe them - or you want to be them. At the end of the day, no matter your thoughts, marketers need them. An influencer is an individual who has the ability to affect or “influence” the purchasing decisions of others due to their popularity, knowledge, authority and audience. And with the rise of social media apps like TikTok and Instagram, influencers are making their way into popular culture and taking over the celebrity culture of years past. What makes influencers so powerful (more so than the celebrities that lined glossy papers but never actively connected with fans) is their ability to actively engage with their audience and this familiarity is what drives influencer marketing.

This isn't exactly a new phenomenon. Influencer marketing has existed in the modern era since the 1930s, and can actually be traced back all the way to the gladiators of ancient Rome. However, the word “influencer” as we know it today only entered our modern lexicon recently, and was only added to the dictionary in 2019.

Today, it is almost impossible to scroll through social media without seeing an influencer marketing something. Visit your favorite social influencers page right now and you are sure to see them showing off the latest makeup, clothing, skincare lotions and even cryptocurrency. These posts take many forms, from instagrammable branded images to long YouTube videos, there are always new ways to promote a brand through influencer marketing.

Because the social media influencer space has evolved so rapidly, it is hard to define what a social media influencer is and how one can be identified. Below, we unpack what a social media influencer is today, and how you can partner with a social media influencer to better your brand reach.

Defining influencers is quite simple if you think about it logically. An influencer is simply an individual who has “influence” in a certain area. When it comes to being a social media influencer it comes down to engagement. Think about it like this: if you get one post like, you are influencing one person that is actively engaging with your content. Now, imagine that on a grander scale.

In order to view influencers and the online influence that they yield, let's take a look at how TikTok stars have become the most sought-after social media influencers of 2021.

The TikTok Influencer of 2021

We know of the Instagram influencer, a person who is usually gorgeous, posts aesthetic images and shares their lifestyle or fashion sense to the world - think The Kardashians. Then there is the YouTube influencer, from the drama-fueled likes of Jake Paul, Tana Mongeau and Trisha Paytas, to makeup gurus Jeffree Star and Nikkie Tutorials through to relatable YouTube stars like PewDiePie, Jenna Marbles and D'Angelo Wallace. All of these individuals hold substantial influence for brands, and when they promote a product, you can be sure their millions of subscribers will be quick to make a purchase. However, one type of social media influencer has taken center stage this year and TikTok stars are gaining greater reach than their social media counterparts.

You see, as the pandemic hit the world in 2020, millions of people from all over the globe turned to social media app TikTok for entertainment. And during this time, many TikTokers developed fanbases that go beyond a simple Instagram share or like. Marketers quickly picked up on the fact that at-home consumers are now consuming more content than ever before - and their attention has turned to TikTok. And with this in mind, brands begin to develop strategies for long-term brand building - not short-term sales. And brands are doing this by investing in high-quality video content across bite-size video apps like TikTok and now Instagram Reels. And who better for

brands to partner with than individuals with thousands of like-minded followers? Now, influencers are being baked into much broader and long-term brand strategies.

TikTok offers a place for you to source the ultimate influencer for your business, but if most of your target audience are on Facebook or Instagram, you obviously need to find influencers that have a strong presence on those platforms. But when it comes to the latest evolution of social media influencers, TikTok is taking reign.

One of the other biggest shifts in the social media influencer landscape is terminology. The word influencer may have made its way into the dictionary in 2019, but some influencers are now preferring to be called “content creators.”

Influencers or Content Creators?

So, why the sudden shift? This is because influencers are quickly gaining measurable results for businesses and their ideas, and their content can help brands flourish. In a sense, they are not merely a voice for the brand, they can help in all aspects of marketing creativity. You see, the influencer hype has soared so much that it has been predicted that brands will spend upwards of \$15 billion on “influencer” marketing by 2022. And this is why the term is changing - influencers actually offer measurable value and are now closely associated with monetization through content creation, brand deals and sponsorships. They are no longer just “faces,” they are brands themselves and thanks to easy-to-use apps like TikTok or Instagram Reels they have the power to create content themselves. An influencer that creates their own content, thinks of their own ideas and works hard to get a message to the masses is in fact more than an “influencer”, rather they are a bonafide content creator.

Essentially, the influencer space is becoming the content creator space and today, they are more than mere celebrities. They are experts in their field as performers, writers, photographers, videographers and editors. And they want to be recognized for the quality of their work - not just their follower count. And this is why brands are trusting them more and more to deliver results.

How to Use Influencer Marketing to Better Your Business

So, we have surmised that influencer marketing is no longer about simply paying someone to be the face of your brand and is now about working with creators themselves. These modern-day creators now have the power to contribute to the creative process of your overall marketing efforts through editing video apps like TikTok and Instagram Reels. With these changes in mind, let's take a look at how you can use this latest influencer evolution to better your business.

Short-form Video: We can't stress this enough - video is where it's at! As stated previously, short-term videos have quickly gained popularity thanks to apps like TikTok and Instagram reels, and they are only gaining more traction as the days go by. You see, people want to be entertained and short-term video content is lauded as one of the most “addictive” entertainment sources for today's audience.

Your brand needs to get on top of this trend with creativity and strategy. By working with an influencer in your industry, you are able to create content that does not simply “sell” your product, but intricately weaves it into the viewer's mind.

For example, Subaru created influencer videos to show off their new Impreza. They worked alongside content creator Devin Graham, a YouTube influencer (see, video is key) who has close to 5 million subscribers. Instead of creating a video that shamelessly promoted the vehicle, they published a fun video of the influencer and his friends taking turns on a slip and slide that propelled them off a 500-foot cliff. So, what has this got to do with the car? The campaign was titled #meettheowner and show what kind of individuals are associated with the Subaru brand. The key is emotion and creating a sense of community. It is the emotional aspect of car buying that was focused on - not necessarily the vehicle itself. That is the power of strategic influencer marketing.

To sum it up: today's influencer marketing is about emotion, not “sell sell sell.”

Social eCommerce Features: Here is another evolution in influencer marketing: social media platforms are now using e-commerce features. Instagram and Facebook are two examples of this evolution. With new purchase features becoming available on these apps, new shopping behaviors are quickly emerging. Influencer marketing and brand sponsorships are now being taken to a brand new level with posts becoming shoppable and videos can provide transitions from simple influencer content to greater e-commerce solutions.

For example: influencers are able to post images or videos to Instagram and viewers are able to click on a link that takes them to the Instagram e-commerce shop that allows for quick purchases.

Authenticity is Key: TikTok is a place for all audiences, but Gen Z basically owns the platform and this generation is now becoming the consumer powerhouse with their collective spending being estimated at \$100 billion. As the older Gen-Z's begin to enter the workforce, brands need to pay attention to what matters to this generation. And Gen-Z is all about quality, individual expression and authenticity. With this in mind, your brand needs to work with influencers who are viewed as authentic and stand firm on important social issues that apply to this generation.

For example: TikTok and YouTube influencer Trisha Paytas caused immense damage to a skincare brand's credibility. This is because they got caught up in a scandal at the launch of the product. This significantly impacted spending as their Gen-Z audience refused to support someone who didn't share in their values.

In Summary: Make sure you partner with influencers who share in your brand values - and do the relevant influence before diving right in.

The Wrap Up

The above outlines the evolution of social media influencers in 2021 and we have provided you with some insights to help you make the best of influencer marketing in 2021. We look forward to watching this marketing tactic grow and evolve further. Watch this space.



Amplifying Your Social Media Content in 2021

By: Toni Becker

A few years ago social media was mostly made up of a few static images, a simple status and limited engagement. When MySpace and Facebook were first introduced to the public, we all saw these platforms as a place to chat to friends and family and share our thoughts on a personalized forum. Who would've thought that in such a short amount of time we would be able to use a variety of social media platforms to amplify a brand message and make more sales?

Today, the social media landscape is vast and consists of influencers, videos, creativity, a multitude of platforms and paid advertising options. Social media platforms offer a place for brands to reach their target audience and portray their brand message in a more creative way than ever before. However, the content that brands create is only as valuable as the target audience seeing it. You see, there is nothing more frustrating than spending time and money creating and crafting social media content that is only viewed by a few people or worse - a lot of people who are not in your target market! This is a problem many marketers are facing - so how do you make sure that your content reaches the right audience, at the right time?

This is where social media amplification comes into play. Amplification refers to the strategy you use to increase your brand reach and visibility across the social landscape.

In this article, we take a look at the value of social media content amplification and how you can use this strategy to better your marketing efforts.

The Value of Social Media Content Amplification

As stated previously, content amplification is about ensuring your content reaches your target audience. The problem is that organic reach on social media is difficult (and that is an understatement). This is because more than half of all social media content posted gets zero shares and a mere .1% of posts are shared more than 1000 times. With this in mind, if you want to get your content seen by the right audience, you need to implement a social media content amplification strategy that

reaches across newsfeeds, platforms and target audiences. This is how you will get your brand message across effectively - and reap the real rewards.

So, how do you create a powerful social amplification strategy in 2021? Let's take a look.

Creating a Social Media Content Amplification Strategy in 2021

Create an Advocacy Marketing Program

Before we dive into why an advocacy marketing program is a great way to build your brand, let's take a look at what this concept actually means. To put it simply, advocacy marketing is a form of marketing that makes use of your happiest customers and turns them into enthusiastic advocates for your brand. This is done by encouraging them to share their positive experience with your business through a variety of digital channels - including social media. You can create an advocacy marketing program by getting your happiest clients to sign up to receive your latest brand news and give them the opportunity to share this news directly to their personal social media platforms. (This can be done through email newsletters, videos and more). By encouraging your "fans" to share your content you are sure to gain greater

reach than by just sharing your content on your personal business social pages. This is because personal social media profiles achieve significantly greater reach than brand-owned social platforms.

Now, you may be asking yourself what value your advocates get from sharing your content? Once you have identified your ideal candidates, you need to determine what motivates them as clients. For example: are you able to provide them with discounts or coupons in exchange for sharing your content? You see, in order to keep your advocacy program going, your advocates or top fans should be encouraged to share your content and gain value from sharing your content. If you are still unsure of whether or not this kind of content amplification is for you, give it a try and analyze the success of the campaign to decide whether it is working for you, or what needs to be amended going forward.

Take a look at the following KPIs when initiating an advocacy marketing program for your social media content strategy:

- **Sharing Rates**
- **Earned Media Value**
- **Total Audience Size**
- **Total Program Reach**

Once you understand your KPIs, you are able to determine what it takes to make the most of your advocacy campaign and better your social reach significantly.

Social Media Influencer Marketing

Advocacy marketing is different to influencer marketing because a brand advocate will usually reach 500 - a few thousand people while influencer marketing can reach well over 10 000 fans across social networks. Influencer marketing is a new-age way to amplify your social media presence and content and through this strategy, you are ensuring thousands (if not hundreds of thousands) of views.

Today, social media influencers are celebrities and beloved by their audience on their particular social channels. These are people who have built a reputation and are viewed as a trusted source of online information. With this in mind, when an influencer shares your brand on their platform, you can be sure that a large portion of their followers will end up sharing that same content. This means greater reach, increased brand awareness and of course, more sales.

Choosing to work or partner with an influencer can be tricky and it is important to keep the following in mind:

- An influencer is an ongoing partner who can amplify your content over a long period of time
- Influencers expect some sort of compensation for their efforts
- Make sure to track the success of your influencer campaigns and report on how they have been driving traffic and sales. This is not only about content reach and engagement - you want to see results. You can do this by using unique URL UTM codes to track campaign success.

At the end of the day, whether you like or loathe influencers, they are quickly becoming an important part of brand marketing and are not going away anytime soon. Jump on this opportunity before your competitors do.

Make Use of Multiple Social Media Platforms

This should go without saying but some businesses have remained "stuck" in the social media landscape. It is important that businesses don't become stuck and investigate the multiple social media content distribution channels that are available to them and their target audience. Today, the most popular social media platforms are: Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest and Snapchat. Of course, you don't have to create a presence across every single platform - you need to be present where your target audience is present.

Amplification is about making as much social "noise" as possible and by publishing your content on a variety of platforms you are increasing your brand exposure online. Again, you don't want to waste your time on platforms that do not align with your business - so do the relevant research. For example: if you cater to a Gen-Z audience, Facebook and LinkedIn may not be the platforms for you. However, TikTok and Twitter and some smaller platforms such as Reddit and Discord may offer powerful social media reach.

But the key is to not stay stuck - experiment, share and reach your audience where they are at.

Look into Native Social Media Advertising Platforms

Today social media platforms offer advertising opportunities to brands. Whether through promoted posts, pre-roll video ads or sponsored content, you have the opportunity to reach your social media audience through paid advertising.

Paid social media advertising should be incorporated into your social media content amplification strategy, but make sure to keep the best practices in mind:

- Promote content in a way that supports the buyer's journey and sales funnel. This means that your promoted content should have a strong call to action, be these linking viewers through to your website, lead form or e-commerce site. Remember, you want to use promoted posts to see a return on investment. This isn't just about likes and shares.
- Make sure that your promoted posts are aimed at your ideal target audience. Promoted posts give you the opportunity to select your ideal audience through demographics, likes, and online behaviors. This will help you cut through the noise and reach your ideal audience.
- You can also use promoted posts for remarketing purposes (that is, you can reach leads you already have in your database). This means you can create posts to help guide a lead through the sales funnel while keeping your brand top of mind at all times.

Paid ads can be cost-effective when implemented correctly. And when you place emphasis on tracking your ads, you are sure to see a greater return on investment.

The Wrap Up

The social media landscape has changed since its inception and continues to evolve with the times. But one thing is for certain - brand social media content matters and you need to amplify your content to get the best results.

DIGITAL GROWTH

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