

SOCIAL MEDIA: TIPS FOR INTRODUCING YOUR AUDIENCE TO YOUR BRAND



BY GARY STINSON

Facebook. Twitter. Instagram. SnapChat. YouTube. Flickr. LinkedIn. Periscope. Pinterest. Yelp. Don't for one second think that this is the end of the list of social media channels. In fact... there are most likely new platforms being created and uploaded to app stores around the world as we speak. Each social media channel is making promises to increase your online footprint substantially – allowing you to reach thousands of new faces simply by joining their new platform. Is this an accurate statement? Potentially. But the question isn't "WHERE should we be connecting?" but "HOW should we be connecting?" in an ever increasing world full of ways to communicate socially.

During my tenure in the world of digital and social media a lot has changed. What was once a tool built to connect co-workers and fellow students, Social Media has evolved into the most inexpensive and opportune way to promote your brand and products. It allows you to skip past the middle man -- newspapers, radio stations and television sets -- and connect directly with your existing community, and potentially new attendees. Just because new platforms and tools will pop-up and cause you to adjust your existing strategies, it doesn't mean that everything has to change. Below you will find 6 tips that I have followed over the past 6 years that have structured my day-to-day thinking when it comes to crafting content for various social media presences for an individual brand.

TIP #1 – Quality is More Important Than Quantity.

I chose to start with this tip because I think there is an impression in the world that you should constantly be posting new content because the more you post the more interaction you will have. In my experience that is far from the case. On average, businesses that post constantly on their social channels tend to have a higher opt-out rate than those that are posting quality content a couple of times a week. This is kind of like being that one person in a crowd of people that talks too much. There will be a point when people stop listening to the things you have to say because they are tired of hearing you speak.

Different platforms allow for different opportunities in the amount of posts that are appropriate. Social media platforms like Facebook provide you with a "timeline" for your homepage, constructed to build a snapshot of what's been happening over the past few days. Twitter, on the other hand, has built a homepage that is predominately a real-time scrolling opportunity so you see things as they are happening. Ultimately your social media strategy will vary from platform to platform, but one rule that never changes is that good content is always better than a lot of content.

Obviously, in the Festival industry, there will typically be a time of the year where you have more to say than other times... and that is ok! It's probably over the course of a month when your events are taking place dominating the television,

newspapers, radio, and much more. Quite frankly, people are more interested in you when it benefits them, and naturally they will have more opportunity to participate in the heart of your season.

TIP #2 – Talk to Your Audience Like You Would Your Best Friend.

I graduated from college less than 10 years ago and when I was studying there was absolutely no discussion about social media in the business world. Most of the journalistic topics in curriculums educated you on how to properly write a press release using the standards set by the Associated Press Stylebook. While all of that information is crucial when learning the structure of writing, it can also create an invisible wall between you and your followers if you stick to its formal structure too closely. You want your followers to be engaged in conversation with you, and they are more likely to talk to you when you speak like a person and not a term paper.

When posting on social media, don't be afraid to use characters, stylings and phrases that are not AP Style approved. While "...", "y'all" and "!!!" are not AP Style approved, and would most likely never be used in a press release, you have to remember...SOCIAL MEDIA IS NOT A PRESS RELEASE! You want it to feel like a conversation amongst friends. We need our audience to feel how excited we are in our text, and know when we are taking a breath; they should even be

able to anticipate our sarcasm. I challenge you to look through old text messages you have shared with your best friend, or even listen to the conversations you have every day a little closer, and find a way to translate that type of communication to your social media postings.

Another thing to consider with this tip is determining the voice of your brand. For many festivals and organizations, it is very important to steer as clear from anything offensive as possible. However, many brands have found a place in the social-sphere that have succeeded while airing on the more playful...slightly fiery...side. One "fiery" example is Taco Bell, who has managed to get away with requesting a DNA test for one user who claimed to have a "food baby and I think @TacoBell is the father" and suggesting to another user that they had the idea to include nachos inside of a burrito while drunk.

TIP #3 – Create Sharable Content.

Anyone in a social media role can spend a lot of time creating fascinating, visually striking content for their social media channels, however, those posts means nothing if they don't elicit engagement and interaction. Ultimately, your focus must be on creating the type of content that you would want to "Share" or "Retweet" onto your own social media pages.

Creating content that is shared is one of the most crucial tools in growing your online presence. What you need to know is that every time a post is shared, you have the potential to reach an individual's social audience. This consists of their own friends and family, that may not currently follow and interact with you online. If that extended audience sees one of their "friends" interacting with a brand, they are in return more likely to interact themselves. It's the same thing as shopping at a mall. If you see a friend in a new pair of jeans that they really like, there's a better chance you're going to purchase those jeans based on the user feedback. Or, if you see a friend who has joined a Facebook event for the upcoming "Blossom Kite Festival" at the National Cherry Blossom Festival, you are more likely to attend this event based on how much your interests align with that specific friend.

Going into your posting schedule with this mindset is also a great way to get added media exposure. Taking content that you would distribute in a press release and giving it a great graphic, along with removing some of the uptight structure that would be necessary for a press release will encourage social sharing. More often than not reporters from local television stations, newspapers and other publications will "Retweet" posts

from organizations. While this is not a story on the 5:00 news, it is a respected reporter sharing the content you have posted with their personal audience. In this day and age, that is sometimes more valuable than 30 seconds on a broadcast.

TIP #4 – See What All of the Chatter is About

There is so much conversation happening online that it can be difficult to track it all. While you receive notifications on your profiles when someone tags your business page or comments on your profile, it is also important to use each social platform's search tools to see the full spectrum of what people are saying and not interacting with you directly on. By doing this you will potentially be talking with people that didn't even know you had a social presence, as well as driving their user traffic to your official page for updates, and hopefully a "Follow" or "Like" for that long term investment.

Not only should you be searching the exact name of your organization or event, but also commonly referenced names. For example, the Kentucky Derby Festival has such events as the "Kentucky Derby Festival Pegasus Parade" and the "Kentucky Derby Festival Marathon & miniMarathon" – these events are often referenced as the "Kentucky Derby Parade" and the "Derby Marathon" online. There's an entire world of feedback that lives online that you won't see if you don't look in the right places...low hanging fruit, my friends.

TIP #5 – Treat Your Graphics Like They've Come Straight From Your Cell Phone

Our audiences have gotten smarter over the years. Like in many traditional print publications, we often find ourselves (and our advertising agencies) creating graphics that have very professional stock photos and high resolution pictures from our events that include logos and a lot of text. When these graphics are posted online, audiences have begun to treat these just like advertisements in the pages of the nation's top magazines...and they will very quickly flip past them.

What we have to do is make the audience feel like we are just another one of their friends online. After all, that is where social media started; as a place for friends to connect and share photos and stories with each other. Sometimes your best post is one that comes straight from the camera roll on your cell phone. One of my favorite fast food chains, Wendy's, does a great job of this. They will post pictures of a product they are promoting directly from the location where most fast food lunches are consumed...the front seat of

the car. More specifically, they will take a picture of a lunch combo, unwrapped in someone's lap, with a drink in the cup holder (and potentially a little ketchup on the console). When flipping through social media I'm more likely to stop on this picture because I am led to believe it is one of my friends eating lunch versus a business advertisement. In turn I am more likely to engage with the post. That's a win for Wendy's (and a win for me, since I don't have to figure out what I want for lunch anymore).

TIP #6 – #Hashtag Your Way into the Conversation!

Have you ever walked into a party and felt overwhelmed by all of the conversations that have already started? How can you insert yourself into these conversations without appearing awkward? Hashtags are an easy way of joining the overall topic, and in the case of your Festival it is your opportunity to be the one starting the conversation.

There are a few important things to consider when creating a hashtag for your event. First, you want something simple. When your hashtag is too long there is *#toomuchopportunityforerrorwhentypingitinyourtweet* -- It's difficult to remember! Secondly, you want something that is obviously connected to one of your events. ANYTHING in the world can be a hashtag. Make sure the hashtags you promote are not being used to promote other events or products. You can do this by searching the hashtag on social media. Lastly, you want to create something that could exist inside of a sentence that someone would already post online. An example of this is "Can't wait to start training for the #IndyMini." Some social platforms, like Twitter, limit the amount of characters that can be used in a message, so make sure your hashtag isn't taking up too much space in the user tweets.

Every brand is different. Each voice speaks at distinct levels and to very diverse people. There is not one structure out there that will work for every festival and event in existence. But there are roadmaps that you can follow that will help you drive in the most beneficial direction. Always be willing to take a turn that you're not familiar with, in hopes that the return will be an overwhelming success. And if it doesn't...at least you tried something new.

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