

A newsletter designed to help you build strong member relationships, retain supporters and improve communication with your patrons.

April 2016

The Future of Social Media: 5 Trends to Watch in 2016

Early adopters of the social media phenomenon were the young and the tech savvy. Today, however, it touches every strata of society; even a good percentage of grandparents are now counted among the regular users. Its importance as a shaper of our cultural mood and values cannot be overstated.

This broad and influential reach has made social media impossible to ignore for companies, for causes, and *undoubtedly for associations*. It's no longer a question of whether you're going to use social media in your marketing, but only what your strategy is going to be.

Things are moving quickly. We can only speculate where this great social experiment is *ultimately* taking us, but the following 5 trends are clear and at least give us a roadmap to plan for 2016 and the next few years ahead.

1. VIDEO! *More of It ... and Livestream.*

YouTube has succeeded in shifting online content consumption patterns from text to more and more video; their audience alone watches up to 500 million hours per day, having grown at more than 60% annually.

Predictably, the other social platforms have been chasing them for market share, developing their own video features. Add to that the newcomers like Periscope and Snapchat who have added the next level of *LIVE* video, and what we are seeing is the future direction of social.

This year Facebook is set to raise the bar on everyone when they roll out their own version of livestreaming, as well as 360-degree videos and even (with the acquisition of *Oculus VR*) virtual reality.

The Takeway: Association marketers who want their content to be noticed will need to find ways to include more video in their social media strategy. **The Good News?** Video is cheaper and easier to produce than ever before.

2. Changing Algorithms.

Facebook has led the charge on this. Until recently, anything you posted would immediately appear in the feed of all your friends and fans. That's no longer the case. The algorithm has been rewritten so that if you want your post to get maximum

reach you have to pay to "boost" it.

Both Twitter and Instagram have been testing, and are set to introduce similar kinds of changes. Essentially this means that the future of social marketing is being intentionally moved toward paid advertising. This was inevitable given that these companies now answer to shareholders.

The Takeway: Get used to the idea that social media advertising fees will become a budget item. **The Good News?** The data collected by social media platforms provides unprecedented targeting ability, and is extremely cost effective. Paid ads will also accelerate your access to a wider audience than you could build organically.

3. Social Media Users Prefer Private.

The increasing use of messaging apps (like Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Line, etc) means that the trend is toward private conversations and groups. Mobile users now spend more time on these apps than on their public social media feeds.

The Takeway: Expect to see marketers increasing the presence of their brands on these channels, and also creating exclusive content accessible only to those with permission to see it. **The Good News?** Social media is making real time personal interaction with your audience more achievable than ever before.

4. Not Just the Big Three.

The growth rate of Instagram has now passed that of Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. But you also have to consider several other contenders yapping at their heels: Pinterest, Snapchat, Google+ and Vine to name a few.

The Takeway: Some platforms are more popular with particular demographics than others (see the *Social Media Chart* we've included on page 2). Becoming familiar with these nuances will help you decide which platforms are most important for you. **The Good News?** The variety of channels presents opportunities to find your audience and communicate with them in unique ways, and the competition between platforms will continue to drive innovation and keep advertising costs down.

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SOCIAL MEDIA CHART

FIND THE SOCIAL NETWORKS THAT FIT YOUR AUDIENCE

FACEBOOK

Pretty much everyone, a nonprofit must

TWITTER

Users looking for quick, personal interaction

PINTEREST

Mainly women of all ages sharing the things they love

GOOGLE+

Tech-savvy individuals escaping the clutter of Facebook

INSTAGRAM

Mobile users sharing and viewing beautiful photos

LINKEDIN

Professional exploring causes to share skills

Courtesy of Georgetown University. www.georgetown.edu

Better Content by the Numbers

Everyone wants to create content that stands out, adds value, gets shared and builds engagement. Many have been frustrated in trying to do this and have come to think that the process of achieving it is a mystery – that those who do it consistently must have access to a secret and divine content reservoir not available to the rest of us mere mortals.

Now there are obviously a few extremely talented and creative people who rise above the pack on the strength of their ability to produce what is extraordinary. But there are a great many others of more average gifting who seem to have cracked the code and get consistently strong results. *How?*

More often than the gurus would care to admit, it comes down to basic principles and simple math. The folks at Siege Media have compiled broad research and came up with the following numbers that can help YOU crack the code:

50 characters – The average length of URL's that rank #1 ... *Keep them short.*

9 images – The average number included in content that ranks #1 (Note: custom images are far more effective than stock photos) ... *Keep it graphic.*

2416 words – The average length of content ranking #1 ... *Keep it longer.*

2x better conversion rate – When you include graphics, animations, interactivity or video ... *Keep it engaging.*

An average score of 76.5 – URL's ranking #1 achieved this on the Flesch Readability Scale, indicating the content could be easily understood by 13-15 year olds ... *Keep it simple.*

78% of the time – How often content ranking #1 included a bulleted list ... *Keep it well structured.*

15.8px – The average font size for pages ranking #1 ... *Keep it large.*

27% more social shares – Just by using floating share buttons ... *Keep it convenient.*

50% more outbound links – The average difference between position #1 and #10. Including 3-5 links to others mentioned in your content can increase shares by 3-5x ... *Keep it generous.*

3 seconds – How long you have before 40% of people will abandon your content if it hasn't loaded ... *Keep it fast.*

How to Make Your Social Media Content More Engaging

Getting your content out there and read is one thing. Getting your audience to engage with it and open up dialogue is a whole different ball game. Here are some simple practices that can make a big difference:

1. Ask Your Audience Questions

We've all been in real world conversations where someone has remained quiet, just listening, until you asked them a question and drew them in. We are conditioned by life to respond on cue when we are asked something – it's a psychological trigger. It simply may not occur to your audience to interact with your content until they are specifically asked to do so.

The fact is that people want to give their opinions, to share their knowledge and experience. People like talking about themselves and their areas of expertise. They just need to be invited to do so, and you can do this in an almost endless number of ways:

- Ask your readers / viewers to add additional ideas to those you've shared.
- Pose a problem, and seek their advice.
- Poll your audience for their preferences on an issue.
- Take a side (carefully) on a controversial topic, and ask people to share support or an opposing view. Even disagreement is engagement if it's managed well.

2. Post at Optimal Times

If you create great content, and ask an interesting question, but it arrives on the social media feeds at a time that your audience either just aren't there, or are too busy, you're unlikely to get much engagement.

Optimal times do vary between different demographics and "tribes", so it requires some testing over time. Some research has been done, however, to determine the best *general* times to post on different social media platforms, and so the following should serve as a guide to get you started:

- Facebook: Thursday to Sunday, from 1-4pm
- Twitter: Monday to Thursday, from 12-5pm
- LinkedIn: Tuesday to Thursday, from 5-6pm
- Pinterest: Saturday to Sunday, from 8-11pm

3. Be a Discerning Content Curator

You probably don't have the time, personnel or budget to create all the content you need in-house. But even if you did, curation would still be a desirable piece to include in your strategy as it opens up worlds of interesting material that can add a variety of new and rich perspectives.

One of the great benefits of finding great content you can share with your audience is that, because it comes from a third party source, it can be used as a conversation starter with an even greater degree of freedom than content that comes from you. We're all naturally more willing to critique the work of someone not present than with an author themselves.

A general guide that is often suggested for hitting the right balance is to aim at posting 50% curated content, 30% of your own original creation, and around 20% promotional material and appeals.

4. Tap your audience for ideas.

Want to know what kind of content will be most interesting to your audience, and most likely for them to engage with? Here's a thought: ASK THEM.

By looking to followers and fans for their feedback, you are demonstrating that you care about their opinions and interests. In return, you'll get to know your audience better, and also you will have already entered into engagement with them.

It's Not Rocket Science

When you boil it all down to basics, doing social media engagement the right way is a matter of putting in the relational effort. As Mom used to say, *"To have friends you need to BE a friend."* If you will put in the time to reach out to people, start conversations, show your appreciation and ensure that no question goes unanswered, your clients and followers will start to take notice.

Try these 4 simple practices we've listed for starters. As you discover other ways to engage your audience, we'd love you to let us know! Maybe you already have found some effective ways – take a moment to engage and tell us about them by emailing sherene@grcdirect.com We'd love to share them with our readers.

MEMBER-CENTRIC COMMUNICATIONS

A newsletter designed to help you build strong member relationships, retain supporters and improve communication with your patrons.

The Future of Social Media...

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5. Less “Click Through” Content.

In the past, the common tactic was to post small extracts on social media with a link for users to click through and view the whole piece on a blog or website. The trend, however, is toward “instant articles”, where the content is contained entirely on the social feed. This is preferred by users, and it’s being actively encouraged by the platforms who want to keep users on their sites.

The Takeway: Strategies must be built around the reality that most users will not be consuming your content on your online real estate. **The Good News?** The once daunting challenge of having to “drive traffic” has become less critical now that you can get content out onto the flowing social media highways.

Stepping Forward with the Trends

With the playing field changing so rapidly, it’s easy to feel paralyzed; it’s tempting to ignore the shifts and carry on as you were. That, however, is a recipe for getting left behind.

Instead, focus on the new opportunities. You won’t be able to do everything, but make a plan to seize the ones best suited to your needs and strengths. And do develop your ability to capture metrics that will help you adjust and keep on improving.

About Us

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Book Review *“Likeable Social Media” (2nd Edition) by Dave Kerpen*

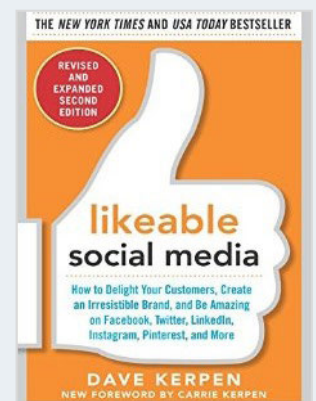
How to Delight Your Customers, Create an Irresistible Brand, and Be Amazing on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, and More

A New York Times and USA Today Bestseller.

Packed with brand-new case studies from today’s emerging social sites, this updated edition helps you harness the power of word-of-mouth marketing to transform your organization. Deliver value, excitement, and surprise, and most important, learn how to truly engage your audience and help them spread the word.

Dave Kerpen is the cofounder and Chairman of Likeable Media, an award-winning social media marketing firm named to the *Inc. 500* list of fastest growing private companies in the United States. Dave is a frequent keynote speaker at venues around the world and a contributing writer for LinkedIn, Mashable, Inc, Fast Company, The Huffington Post, Forbes, and The Washington Post.

Essential reading!



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