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# HOW TO DEVELOP A SOCIAL CONTENT STRATEGY THAT WORKS FOR YOU

**ONE OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES TODAY** is not how to promote content with social media but how to create content that really works on social media. This is especially true of magazines, many of which continue to churn out print and digital stories with the expectation that clever copy and a well-timed tweet will bring the content viral glory. A savvy social-media strategy is vital.

What's even better? A content strategy informed by your social media. If you're trying to engage a social audience then your content should invite participation. The best social media is participant media.

## SELFIE IS A WORD FOR A REASON

2013 was the year so many people took photos of themselves, the Oxford English Dictionary anointed "selfie" official language status. At no point in history have navels been so well scrutinized. What this means for your brand in the social media universe is competition from an unrelenting narrative of self—from your Aunt Mildred's vacation photos to the results of the latest internet quiz that will determine which *Games of Thrones* character/narcissistic rapper/dog breed you are. The challenge is catering to this culture.

If your content offers people a way to incorporate themselves in the story, you've created a compelling reason for them to share that content with gusto. They want likes and follows as much as you do. Does sharing your content provide them an opportunity to boost their social currency? Media that allows people to participate in the storytelling and tailor the message is gold (see Facebook's "A Look Back"). How can you find novel ways to encourage meaningful interaction?

## THE SCIENCE OF WHAT WORKS

Your publication has nothing whatsoever to do with adorable sloths or adorable babies napping with adorable puppies. So what lessons does BuzzFeed have to offer you? For starters, they are the masters of manufacturing virality. Right now, they understand our basic internet instincts better than anyone. They produce content according to a formula—literally (search "Big Seed Marketing" for the math). If you're like

me and calculus is the stuff that haunts your unconscious mind, consider the principles of shareable content outlined by Jonah Berger in his book *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*. You'll want to look at whether your content is useful, if it elicits an emotional response or affords social currency. Virality is often the Holy Grail of social media but there are other considerations—namely, your criteria for meaningful engagement. Traffic doesn't always mean money. Set your goals and fine-tune a formula that works for you.

## NEW LESSONS FROM OLD MEDIA

If you can create a version of the #drakeshake app that stars your brand instead of Drake, then you may win the internet. But there are ways to invite audience participation that don't require an app development team. Case in point: the contest. The contest has long been a magical tool in driving subscriptions and generating reader involvement—and it's only become more effective, fun and accessible with social. Well-designed, immersive contests drive submissions, web views and social sharing.

## DON'T FORGET YOUR MOST LOYAL AUDIENCE

In your conversations about supersharers and clickability, you may be forgetting some of the people who are most invested in your brand and the work you do: your employees. If your content is what it should be—authentic, emotive, useful—your staff will be the first people to spread it to their own networks. (If they're not, you may want to revisit your strategy.) The next step is to involve them in the ongoing dialogue on social media. The collected reach of your employees' connections might be one of your most undervalued assets.

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