



Contact: 512.582.2197, info@nvcnetwork.org; www.ncvnetwork.org

Tara Hunt, blog January 11, 2013

Let Me Wave my Magical Content Wand



It usually starts something like this:

Hey! Everyone I know is on Instagram! We should start an Instagram for the company!

The suggestion in itself isn't wrong per se, it's just not made with much of an understanding of how these social platforms work. It takes less than 5 minutes to set up an Instagram account (if you have an iPhone or an Android). That's the simple part. But then the real work begins.

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People who rarely use social networks love platforms...even when they, themselves, admit to not having enough time to use them. That's pretty much what they see: platforms and the numbers. "Why aren't we on Pinterest/Foursquare/Tumblr/Google+/You Tube/Instagram/etc?" they'll ask. They'll tell you about all sorts of other companies who have set up multiple accounts on multiple platforms and how they read about it on Mashable. They'll hint at being concerned about your expertise or ability to execute because you haven't created accounts everywhere. They may even say, "It takes 5 minutes to set it up!"

But what people who don't use social networks much fail to understand is that **picking a platform means that you need to create ongoing content for that platform**. Content requires a strategy and ongoing production of said content. And monitoring, measuring and tweaking of that content (and strategy). And community management of the inbound reactions to that content, especially if, heaven willing, you do a great job of the content and your account on said platform gets very popular. And all of these things take a lot of time and deep understanding of your audience, your competitors, your product, the overall trends, current events, knowledge of the industry (and surrounding industries), analytics, what are best/worst practices, gathering of ideas, photoshop skills, camera skills, editing skills, a good eye for a shot skills, writing skills, translation skills, people skills and technical skills.

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Creating content for a brand (company, organization or individual) is like running a news room...but even more complicated because it needs to be interactive. You need to plan out a certain amount of content (ideally daily for weeks in advance) for each platform like you would for each segment, then you also need to be on top of current events and issues to be able to switch it out on the fly to seize opportunities in the moment. You need to keep people entertained and continue to grow with your audience. You need to be relevant and entertaining, but create enough deep engagement that you are building a solid loyalty base.

In addition to this, you need to achieve your own goals through the content. If you are selling something, it's number of sales leads. If you need sign ups to your app, you need to drive people to your site (off of whichever social network) to sign up. If you are raising money for a cause, you need to compel your followers to go and give money. There are several things you need to balance: building an



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audience and driving people to your goal (often off-site) and the two are mutually dependent. If your content isn't entertaining, you'll lose your audience, and have nobody to build loyalty and long term sales with, but if you only entertain and never convert them to buyers, you are wasting your time. And the balance is tricky.

Each platform needs to be approached from a different angle with unique content strategies.

And I haven't even started to talk about how each platform needs to be approached from a different angle with unique content strategies. Cross-posting content between platforms rarely works. There are different rules (Twitter, for instance, is limited to 140 characters, while blog articles can go more in depth to make a point). There are different tones (Tumblr is fun and casual with a hipster flair for design, while Google+ takes a more information sharing and analytical tone). There are different audiences (Pinterest is dominated by women, while Reddit is male-heavy). There are different functions (Foursquare is great if you have physical locations to promote, while Quora is a fantastic way to show your expertise in an area). Different platforms work better with different media (YouTube is all videos, while Instagram is all images). And some platforms are richer than others (Sure Twitter allows for posting images and video, but the real time rapidity means you should focus on the text, while Facebook posts thrive with images and other 'sharables' and text falls flat).

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All of this is to say: content doesn't just appear magically out of thin air with a wave of a magic social fairy wand. And there have been [many of mycolleagues beating this drum for years](#), but their message is more and more prescient over time as every brand is expected to be on practically every platform, but have no idea what that means. Why they hire interns or outsource to people to create this crucial content that is SUCH a crucial part of their marketing and customer relationships is beyond me. But part of it is education and part of it is the plethora of '[gurus/ninjas/polkaroos](#)' who know the buzzwords and how to copycat content, but not how to create relationships. People, you get what you pay for. But why should I be surprised? Companies spent decades outsourcing their customer service – the point of the best opportunity to create a lifelong loyal customer and

evangelist – and have focused on new customer acquisition over the more lucrative current customer retention and growth opportunities for as long as I've been on this earth.

/rant

There is a specific skill and finesse to doing content well that may seem like magic to most people.

What I mean to say is: **CONTENT IS IMPORTANT**. And there is a specific skill and finesse to doing content well that may seem like magic to most people. It requires left/right brained people with sharp critical thinking skills. The type of people who have big libraries of books (that they actually read) and are constantly checking their mobile phones for the latest news and world events. This person consumes more content in a day than most people consume in a year. S/he has so much knowledge in her/his head from so many different industries and disciplines that s/he will connect dots you would NEVER think to connect and sometimes the connection is only clear in her/his head (but it is usually innovative). This person studies people and networks and gets giddy when the data uncovers counter-intuitive evidence. Her/his instincts are sharp even though s/he can't fully explain where her/his idea comes from. This is not a full or completely accurate description of this person. But it's a start. And that person should really be internal to your organization.

The thing is, it IS magic, but in the Arthur C. Clarke way ("Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."). It rarely takes years of school to hone this skill. It's not brain surgery or rocket science. But it does take **years of life*** (and some severe ADHD). And most of all, it takes a huge amount of respect...for the customers, the importance of content, the brand and the media. There is a magic content wand, but most of the world are Muggles, and those of you with the magic should understand that it's not so simple to describe magic to a Muggle. (so if you circulate this post, remove this last bit)

* I, by no means mean years as in one has to be older to be good at this. I know lots of 20-somethings that have 'the knack'.