

PR News

Building the bridge between PR and the bottom line.

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Evolving YouTube Model Creates Opportunities for Communicators

YouTube is getting more like a broadcast network every day. More than 800 million unique viewers watch a total of 4 billion hours of video on the platform each month.

It's addicting all right, which is why *PR News* has been espousing for years the value of organizations creating compel-

ling video content and loading it up on YouTube, **Vimeo** or other video platforms.

And now there's an interesting new development that could—should—change how PR pros look at YouTube and its opportunities. Last month, the **Google**-owned company announced that it is preparing to launch paid subscriptions for individual channels on its video platform. The move is intended to lure content producers,

eyeballs and ad dollars away from traditional TV formats.

So it could be "YouTube all the time." While brands most likely won't get involved in this paid model, it's a new and important reason for PR executives to reevaluate and supercharge their YouTube presence and grab a few million more eyeballs.

There is no better time to do this, says Michael Samec, director of digital strategy at

communications agency **Gibbs & Soell**. Whereas production and distribution costs once made the use of videos scarce, "Today you can take a 30-page e-book, boil it down to a two-minute video and deliver it cheaply," he says.

But setting up a YouTube channel for that delivery isn't the first step. Gibbs & Soell uses the AIMM model: Audience, Intent, Message

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(DID YOU KNOW?)

Seven Things You Will Learn in This Week's Issue of *PR News*

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Content Creation

Social Media

Strategies for PR Pros to Create Content That Has High Potential for 'Spreadability'

[Editor's Note: Content creation is one of the biggest challenges facing PR pros right now. In this book excerpt from "Spreadable Media," (spreadablemedia.org) a trio of authors explains how communicators can both create and sustain quality content.]

Content creators do not work magic, nor are they powerless. Creators don't design viruses, nor do they simply wait for something to happen.

Successful creators understand the strategic and technical aspects they need to master in order to create content more likely to spread, and they think about what motivates participants to share information and to build relationships with the communities

shaping its circulation. They cannot fully predict whether audiences will embrace what they have designed, but a creator—whether professional or amateur—can place better bets through the listening process. In addition, creators consider elements of media texts which make them more likely to spread.

This chapter explores the strategies, technical aspects, audience motivations, and content characteristics which creators might keep in mind to create content with a higher potential for spreadability.

Many of our examples here are from marketing initiatives. However, as we will explore later, these principles apply to PR pros, civic groups, non-

profits, and independent media makers.

THE UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE

The creative industries have had a long struggle with predicting and measuring their products' success.

Economist Richard Caves argues that uncertainty of demand is an everyday reality within the creative industries. These questions are exponentially harder to answer in today's spreadable media landscape, where many longstanding models for understanding media audiences no longer apply. However, there are a few sets of considerations that can help producers better

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Editor, Scott Van Camp, 212.621.4693, svancamp@accessintel.com
Group Editor, Matthew Schwartz, 212.621.4940, mschwartz@accessintel.com
Editorial Director/Events, Steve Goldstein, 212.621.4890, sgoldstein@accessintel.com
Community Editor, Bill Miltenberg, 212.621.4980, bmlitenberg@accessintel.com
Conference Content Associate, Sreyashi Kanjilal, skanjilal@accessintel.com
Director of Marketing & Event Logistics, Kate Schaeffer, 301.354.2303, kschaeffer@accessintel.com
Marketing Manager, Laura Snitkovskiy, 301.354.1610, lsnitkovskiy@accessintel.com
Associate Publisher and Brand Director, PR News Group, Amy Jefferies, 301.354.1699, ajefferies@accessintel.com
General Manager, Tony Silber, 203.899.8424
SVP/Group Publisher, Diane Schwartz, 212.621.4964, dschwartz@accessintel.com
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 4 Choke Cherry Road, Rockville, MD 20850

Client Services:

Phone: 888.707.5814 • Fax: 301.309.3847
 e-mail: clientservices@accessintel.com

New York Editorial Office:

88 Pine Street, Suite 510, New York, NY 10005
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Research

BY LOUISE M. POLLOCK



Maximizing Surveys to Create News And Strategically Generate Publicity

Surveys have been a mainstay in public relations because they are tried and true, and most important, when done right they are newsworthy. A well-thought-out survey can help reveal new information, expose the latest fads and provide fodder for a winning news story.

In addition to publicity, at Pollock Communications we often use surveys to help better understand our clients' business needs, as well as keep our finger on the pulse of industry and consumer trends.

Most recently, we commissioned our second annual survey of the nation's registered dietitians to help uncover the Top Diet Trends for 2013.

These invaluable insights made headlines in media outlets across the nation, and helped form the basis for a variety of marketing initiatives for the agency and for our clients.

We've used relevant statistics and data across all social media channels, we've incorporated nuggets into presentations, and we are sharing the information day-to-day in meetings, at events and at trade shows with a variety of audiences.

What's the recipe for a successful survey? It's an assortment of ingredients that mix together to yield the optimal results. Here are some tips for how communications pros can make the most out of surveys:

1. Choose a newsworthy topic.

A hot news topic right now might be old news by the time you craft your questions, field the survey, and analyze and disseminate the results. So be particularly careful in choosing the topic of the survey. First and foremost, it needs to be able to effectively communicate

your key message, but it must also be newsworthy or it will never gain legs.

Beyond that, it should appeal to a variety of your target audiences, if you really want to stretch its life and viability.

Try to think ahead to what an upcoming trend might be, or create your own news by uncovering a trend or new data that will underscore your key message with your target audiences.

2. Ask the right questions.

Consider what you want the outcome to be, so that you can ask the right questions. Aside from the obvious newsworthiness of the data, how else will you maximize the results? What other audiences do you want to reach, and what questions will help you provide a fresh perspective, reveal new statistics and uncover valuable data?

Factor in questions that will help you effectively achieve all of these objectives. And sometimes it is useful to ask the same question in several different ways to ensure you are capturing your desired response.

The same question asked in different formats—open-ended; choose one answer; choose multiple answers or rank the answers—can yield very different results.

3. Select the right spokesperson.

A spokesperson will help you amplify your message to your target audiences. Choose one who resonates with media, your consumer demographic and other key stakeholders, such as sales representatives, clients, retailers and industry professionals. Identifying a spokesperson who has credibility

across your desired channels of outreach will help you drive your message and extend the reach of your survey results.

4. Use the data. Once you've nailed down the topic, questions and spokesperson, it's imperative that you utilize the data in all of your initiatives.

Of course, a press release and media dissemination is key, but think beyond the usual outlets to spread the news throughout all marketing and communications channels.

Take each key survey finding and develop a series of blog posts further expanding on each discovery to provide fodder for your Web site. Share a new daily, weekly or monthly statistic on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Create a video with your spokesperson summarizing the results for YouTube and find images that relate to the results to pin on Pinterest or upload to Instagram.

Offer your spokesperson to provide commentary on the results at meetings with key stakeholders (e.g., sales representatives, retailers, trade shows and industry professionals).

Translate the data in a compelling way to reach target audiences and maximize your results. **PRN**

CONTACT:

Louise Pollock is president of Pollock Communications, a New York City-based PR agency specializing in food and nutrition communications. She can be reached at lpollock@pollock-pr.com.

U.S. Consumer Confidence Rises to Three-Month High; Social-Media Users Conflicted Over Brands Listening In

► **Outlook Gets Rosier:**

Consumer confidence in the U.S. rose in February to a three-month high, which may help communicators and marketers to better build awareness and increase sales of their products and services. The **Thomson Reuters/University of Michigan** preliminary index of consumer sentiment climbed to 76.3 in February from 73.8 in January. Index highlights include:

- Increased property values, a strengthening job market and stocks at five-year highs are providing a boost to Americans' balance sheets. An increase in earning power and wealth would help make up for the recent spike in gasoline prices and the two percentage-point increase in the payroll tax.
- Factories regained their footing after taking it on the nose in January. Industrial production at factories, mines and utilities fell 0.1% in January after a 0.4% increase. Manufacturing, which makes up 75% of total production, dropped 0.4% last month after the biggest two-month advance since 1984.
- The index of current conditions, which assesses how Americans perceive their financial situation and

whether they think it is a good time to buy expensive items, rose to 88 from a six-month low of 85 in January.

- Consumer expectations for six months from now, which more closely projects the direction of consumer spending, advanced to 68.7 from 66.6 last month.

Source: Thomson Reuters/University of Michigan

► **Study Indicates Users Split on Whether Brands Should Listen In on Social Media:**

The public appears to want it both ways when it comes to brands listening in on its social conversations, according to study released in February by **NetBase**. While 51% of consumers want to talk about companies without being listened to, 58% want companies to respond to their complaints shared

on social media. Specifically, the NetBase survey found:

- 32% of consumers of all ages and 38% of Millennials (18-24-year-olds) had no idea that companies were listening to what they said on social media.
- 43% of consumers thought listening online intrudes on privacy. Boomers put up the biggest fight (36% said they don't want brands listening to what they say online), while

only 17% of Millennials said the same.

- At least 20% of each age group (and 25% of 18-24-year-olds) don't yet know how they feel about brands listening.
- Nevertheless, 48% said companies should listen to improve products and nearly 58% wanted companies to respond to complaints. **PRN**

Source: NetBase

Why Do Facebook Users Take Breaks?

Was too busy/Didn't have time for it	21%
Just wasn't interested/Just didn't like it	10
Waste of time/Content was not relevant	10
Too much drama/gossip/negativity/conflict	9
Was spending too much time using the site	8
Only an intermittent or infrequent user	8
Went on vacation/trip/deployment	8
Just got tired/Bored with it	7
No real reason/Just because	6
Concerns about privacy/security/ads/spam	4
Did not have computer/internet access	2
Prefer other ways to communicate/Facebook not "real life"	2
Health or age issues	2
Took a break for religious reasons	1
Didn't like posting all the time/Didn't want to share	1

According to the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, nearly two-thirds (61%) of Facebook users take significant breaks from perusing the social network. The top reason for Facebook fatigue: Just too busy or didn't have time for it. Interestingly, privacy and security concerns placed low on the list.

Source: Pew Research Center

PRNews

Digital PR Next Practices Summit

SOCIAL MEDIA REPUTATION SEO MEASUREMENT INFLUENCE



Feb. 27

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PR, Marketing Agencies Work With Artists in Multichannel Campaign Linking Fair Trade and Green Mountain Coffee

Company: Green Mountain Coffee Roasters Inc.

Agency: Cone Communications

Timeframe: Dec. 2011 - Nov. 2012

For many consumers, the concept of “fair trade” is fuzzy at best. Various studies around the term find that generally, only between 30% to 35% of the public really understands what fair trade means. (For the record, the fair-trade movement sets standards intended to ensure that farmers in developing countries are justly compensated and have sustainable businesses that positively impact their communities.)

For the last two years, **Green Mountain Coffee Roasters** (GMCR) has sought to increase understanding of the term with its Great Coffee, Good Vibes, Pass It On campaign. Actively supporting the fair-trade movement since 2000, the company and its PR agency, **Cone Communications**, looked to

make the 2012 campaign wider in scope—fully integrating retail, social and PR elements like never before.

“We were trying to optimize and refine the message, making sure we learned from what worked really well on the last effort,” says Justin Ballheim associate brand manager, GMCR.

The two main objectives of the campaign:

- Make fair trade relevant to the mainstream consumer.
- Create awareness of the Green Mountain Coffee brand’s commitment to fair trade by reaching more than 150 million consumers with the campaign’s message.

The challenge, says Jonathan Yohannan, executive VP and leader of Cone’s sustainable business practice, was explaining a complex issue such as fair trade to the public in a way that’s relevant, intangible and emotional. The simplified

message: fair trade means quality coffee and a positive impact on people in other parts of the world.

To drive the latter part of that message home, Cone and GMCR continued from 2011 partnerships with musicians Grace Potter and Michael Franti to promote the benefits of fair trade. This time the relationship would go one step further.

Both Potter and Franti would go on “source trips” (Potter traveling to Popayan, Colombia, and Franti to Sumatra, Indonesia,) to witness the coffee-farming process and benefits of fair trade first hand. The tactic would not only cement the two stars’ commitment to fair trade, the trips would be a content goldmine.

But why pick musicians to carry the torch for fair trade? Before cementing deals with Potter and Franti, Cone looked at how the issue was being tackled in the U.K. and Europe. “Musicians played a big role there in fair trade,” Yohannan says. “And certainly the idea of the coffee-house experience, which often includes live music, played well with the brand.”

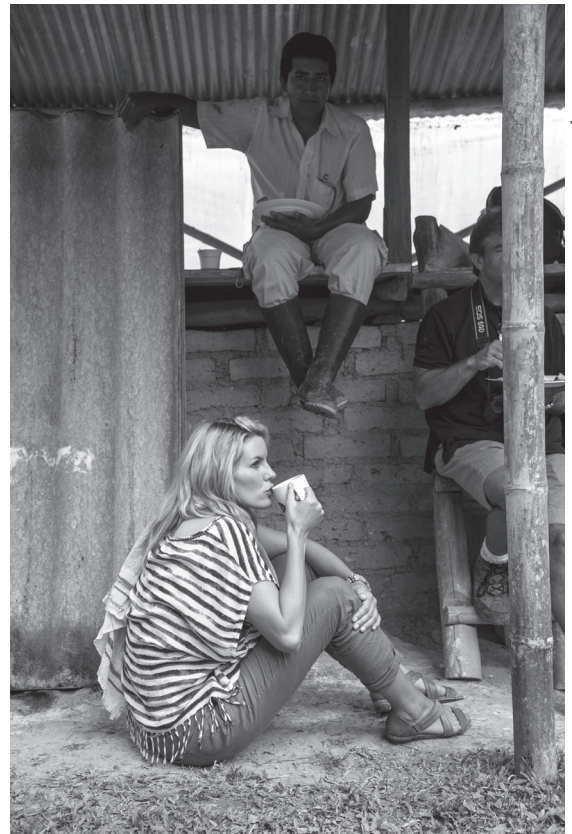


Photo courtesy of Cone Communications

Musician Grace Potter’s trip to Popayan, Colombia—where free-trade beans are grown—created a treasure trove of content for the Green Mountain campaign.

To say this campaign featured a bevy of agencies working as one is an understatement. **Y&R** would handle media/advertising (including digital) component; **Vayner Media**, social media; **Marketing Drive**, customer marketing; **Spotlight Marketing**, product integration; **BzzAgent**, influencer marketing; and Cone, PR and CSR.

Working together, this diverse group of agencies crafted the following strategies:

1. Position fair trade as contributing to a better quality coffee and a better life for farmers.
2. Utilize celebrity networks to build awareness and engage

Leveraging Celebrities’ Personal Social Platforms

For the **Green Mountain Coffee** Fair Trade 2012 campaign, agency **Cone Communications** put the Twitter accounts of musician spokespersons Grace Potter and Michael Franti into play, driving thousands of social conversations about Green Mountain and fair trade. Mark Malinowski, senior VP of brand communications & entertainment at Cone, offers some tips on best leveraging celebrities’ social accounts.



Mark Malinowski

- Make sure his/her following is strong (musicians tend to have larger social followings than TV/film celebrities).
- Ensure his/her social “voice” is like-minded for your brand so that there’s seamless integration between both communities.
- Effectively cross-promote (posts, links, RTs) between the celebrity’s owned channels and the brand’s.
- Use incentives/rewards to engage both communities (e.g., coupons for brands and downloads from a musician).
- Don’t over-do-it. Most celebrity followers don’t like it when he/she over communicates branded messages (so pulse and regulate branded tweets and posts).

- consumers.
3. Drive celebrity content through all Green Mountain Coffee brand channels.
 4. Secure earned media coverage with consumer media.

Beginning in August, the team then executed the following tactics:

► **Celebrity Fair Trade Videos:**

The team planned, scripted, filmed and produced two videos with Potter and Franti on site during the source trips, discussing their passion for fair trade and Green Mountain Coffee. The videos would be used on the brand Facebook page. Not only did the trips yield great video and still images, the experience opened the eyes of the two musicians, Ballheim says. “You could see they really got it, and their belief in fair trade became that much stronger,” he says.

► **Fair Trade Facebook Pages & Sampling:**

Created content for artist-specific pages on the GMCR Facebook page, which included an online sampling campaign that tied the company’s products with the issue. Every consumer who “liked” the Facebook page received a free sample.

► **Franti Pop-Up Coffee Shop & Concert:**

Cone worked with Night Vision entertainment to transform an empty retail space in West Hollywood to a GMCR brand-themed pop-up “coffee shop.” The space was open for two days in a high-traffic area and welcomed people inside for free samples as well as a chance to learn about fair trade.

► **Potter Concert Event:** This planned and executed fair trade-dedicated performance, exclusively for media and influencers, was held at Joe’s Pub in New York City. Cone worked with Livestream to webcast the performance live exclusively on the GMCR Facebook page. This event was one of the most effective tactics in garnering earned media, Yohannan says.

► **Social Media:** While Vayner managed the social process, Cone worked with both artists to leverage their social-media networks to spread the word about fair trade.

► **Media Relations:** To seed fair-trade discussion, Cone issued press releases and conducted aggressive media relations around GMCR’s position as the world’s largest purchaser of Fair Trade Certified coffee for 2011.

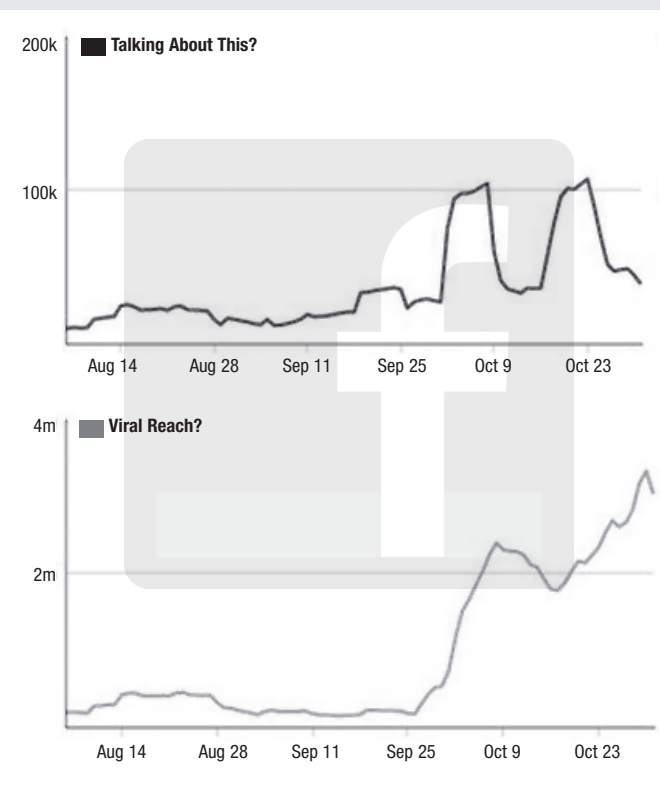
► **Paid Media:** Optimized effectiveness of outreach and rounded out a fully integrated approach by coordinating a radio buy in L.A., direct mailing to 150,000 Ahold Shoppers, a Yahoo! Widget and Daily Buzz segment.

Of course, the bottom-line metric for Green Mountain was sales, and while the company wouldn’t reveal specific details, Ballheim says one product-oriented data point was particularly impressive: “We blew through 150,000 coffee samples in 48 hours online.”

For Cone, the key measurement was awareness, via earned-media impressions. Secondary metrics were sales and social impact, that is, “the effect the campaign is having on farmers,” Yohannan says. Specific campaign results included:

- Generation of 222,111 new Facebook likes of the Green Mountain Coffee Facebook page—a 33% increase from the prior year.
- Securing more than 15 celebrity Facebook posts and tweets spreading the message about fair trade, reaching more than 600,000 combined Facebook fans and Twitter followers.
- Positive consumer Facebook posts and tweets applauding artists’ support of fair trade. Example: “@GreenMtnCoffee LOVIN’ the show and all u are doing! Like @michaelfranti just said

Facebook Insights Tracks Shares



Using Facebook Insights to monitor activity around Green Mountain’s 2012 Fair Trade campaign, Vayner Media tracked both the number of people who shared campaign content (shown at top) and the number of people who saw that shared content. Spikes were around live concerts by Grace Potter and Michael Franti.

Source: Vayner Media

- “we have to vote every day” and GMC does w #fairtrade.”
- The campaign reached more than 261 million people in October, generating key placements in *The New York Times*, Associated Press, Yahoo!, The Daily Buzz, Examiner.com, “Good Day LA,” “Good Day NY,” *People*, *Allure* and *Self* magazines.
 - The Potter and Franti concerts were Livestreamed by nearly 3,000 Green Mountain Coffee Facebook page fans, generating reaching 7,983,894 followers.

Planning is underway for a 2013 campaign that builds on the success of this one. One component that could be added: a tie to a specific Green

Mountain Coffee free-trade product, Yohannan says.

Regardless of what will transpire, the 2012 effort was all about teamwork, which is sometimes lacking in integrated efforts, Ballheim says. “Many times a campaign will be more ad-driven or PR-driven,” he says. “Our intent was to fit all of the pieces together, with overall goals in mind. We proved that we can be successful working as a team.” PRN

CONTACT:

Jonathan Yohannan, jyohannan@conecomm.com; Justin Ballheim, justin.ballheim@gmcr.com; Mark Malinowski, mmalinowski@conecomm.com.

Switching On a YouTube Channel

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and Medium. Only when you figure out the first three do you target a delivery medium like YouTube, Samec says.

DRAWING EYEBALLS

To Jeffrey Harmon, CMO at tongue cleaner company **Orabrush**, the medium (YouTube) and distribution are what his channel is all about. With 54.5 million views and nearly 200,000 subscribers, Harmon says that how you drive eyeballs to your videos is just as important as the content itself. Harmon knows of only two videos—from **BlendTech** and **Dollar Shave Club**—that were truly viral.

So don't bet on one of your videos being seen by millions of people. Orabrush instead takes an integrated approach, using e-mail lists, Facebook, a blog, media outreach and, of course, its YouTube subscriber base to attract views.

In organizing a YouTube channel, Harmon recommends

the 4 Cs: content, call to action, collaboration and consistency.

CONTENT

The first element of video success is finding the right content that fits your business. Harmon says your content must be unique, but production values don't have to be through the roof.

"Being too polished doesn't play well on YouTube," he says. "But if you spend a few thousand dollars on good equipment, your production value will improve." The content must be clear in purpose and relevant to the audience.

CALL TO ACTION

Harmon espouses the ability of consumers to click on a link and buy after watching a video. That's also true of B2B, Samec says, although in that context videos may point to a specialized white paper, a sales and marketing seminar or a more comprehensive video.



The Orabrush YouTube channel's irreverent videos on cleaning the tongue have attracted close to 4.5 million views and nearly 200,000 subscribers, proving how palatable the channel is.

COLLABORATION

This is really about distribution, Harmon says. "You've got to figure out how to get people to visit your channel to create a pipeline," he says. One way Orabrush does that is by collaborating with other famous (or infamous) YouTube producers such as iJustine, Tobuscus, Rhett & Link and Wheezy Waiter.

CONSISTENCY

This entails the management of the channel. The normal rule of thumb is to post a video every one or two weeks. "No other brand does that as well as **GoPro**," Harmon says. But as the Orabrush channel has matured, more videos are rejected than released, he says. "Our focus now is on conversion to sale, and that's a pretty good number—5%," Harmon says.

SOCIAL CHALLENGE

While the Orabrush numbers make YouTube sound like a breeze to master, there are

challenges, particularly with social media. In working with B2B clients, Samec says the social communication behind YouTube can put the fear in companies. "Putting a video out there to have people comment on it and share can change communicators' thinking," Samec says. "You can no longer brush word-of-mouth under the rug."

That's why PR pros must be careful to pay attention to the content and the message of their videos, Samec says.

Meanwhile, Orabrush has turned its video focus to Orapup, the dog breath brush. The "Bye Bye Bad Dog Breath" video has 4,017,311 views and counting.

It's clear the brand's YouTube channel has just as much bite as it does bark. **PRN**

CONTACT:

Michael Samec, msamec@gibbs-soell.com; Jeffrey Harmon, @JeffreyHarmon.

New Twitter App is a Vine Opportunity

Since Twitter introduced its mobile application Vine in January, PR pros have been abuzz about the possible benefits of employing video clips of six seconds or less for campaigns. Michael Samec, director of digital strategy at **Gibbs & Soell**, says there should be plenty of opportunities to use the tool. Here are some benefits:

- Vine is a service that is easily summarized and understood, much like Instagram.
- Vine will let you strip out the "hemming and hawing" that will encapsulate the meaning of a full two-minute video," Samec says.
- The integration with Twitter cannot be underestimated. "Twitter is evolving into the biggest social platform for B2B," Samec says. "People look to Twitter to get up-to-the-minute hardcore news."
- Vines are timeless; part of their cache is they can be reused in online conversation over and over.
- Vine is user-generated. While the production quality of the iPhone isn't high, the clips will be highly personal, Samec says.



Mike Samec

Editor's Note: Attend the Social Media for Nonprofits Workshop, set for March 11 in Washington, D.C. (prnewsonline.com/conferences/social_media_bootcamp-2013); hone your PR skills at our Bootcamp for Emerging PR Stars in Miami, Fla. on March 18 (prnewsonline.com/conferences/workshop-mar18-2013.html).

'Spreadable Media'

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The authors of "Spreadable Media" (left to right): Henry Jenkins, Joshua Green and Sam Ford.

create content that might resonate with audiences.

These include longstanding processes the entertainment industry has used to minimize this uncertainty, technical and strategic considerations that ensure content is made available in forms that audiences will most likely find useful, and approaches for understanding what motivates audiences to circulate content.

First, entertainment companies have long used models of overproduction and formatting to address this uncertainty.

As Amanda D. Lotz, a communication studies professor at the University of Michigan, discusses in our enhanced book, these traditional strategies for responding to this unpredictability carry over to a spreadable media environment.

Key to understanding the "entertainment-based media industries," she writes, is recognizing the degree to which success is unpredictable. The primary response has been overproduction, writes Lotz:

"Television, film, and recording industry executives all work in a universe in which they know full well that more than 80 percent of what they develop and create will fail commercially.

The key problem is that they don't know which 10% to 20% might actually succeed. So, while it is painful from a resource-allocation standpoint, the strategy has been to produce far more creative goods

than might succeed and then see what works."

Spreadable media might enjoy lower sunk costs of production, Lotz suggests, because audiences don't hold "the same high production-budget expectations that hobble established media" and because spreadable media's "circumvention of paid distribution reduces costs," allowing "creators to release preliminary content and then follow up on successes with sequels or extensions."

Second, in an era of digital sharing, there are a variety of technical and strategic considerations that can increase the chances content might be spread. Content is more likely to be shared if it is:

- **Available when and where audiences want it:** Producers, whether professional or amateur, need to move beyond an "if you build it, they will come" mentality, taking (or sending) material to where audiences will find it most useful.
- **Portable:** Audience members do not want to be stuck in one place; they want their media texts "on the go." Content has to be quotable (editable by the audience) and grabbable (easily picked up and inserted elsewhere by the audience).
- **Easily reusable in a variety of ways:** Creating media texts that are open to a variety of audience uses is crucial for creating material

that spreads.

- **Relevant to multiple audiences:** Content that appeals to more than one target audience, both intended and surplus audiences, has greater meaning as spreadable media.
- **Part of a steady stream of material:** Blogging and microblogging platforms emphasize the importance of a regular stream of material, some of which may resonate more than others in ways creators may not always be able to predict.

Third, and most important, success in creating material people want to spread requires some attention to the patterns and motivations of media circulation, both of which are driven by the meanings people can draw from content.

One thing that is clear: people don't circulate material because advertisers or media producers ask them to, though they may do so to support a cause they are invested in.

They might give someone a shirt with a designer label or even a T-shirt promoting a favorite film, and they might respond to questions about where someone could buy more shirts—but they are unlikely to stuff a catalog in a gift box.

When it comes to spreadability, not all content is created equal. Audiences constantly appraise media offerings, trying to ascertain their potential value as resources for sharing.

People appraise the content they encounter according to their personal standards and the content they share based on its perceived value for their social circle.

In other words, some of what is interesting to individuals may not be material they want to spread through their communities. **PRN**

("Spreadable Media, Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture," New York University Press, 2013, is available through Barnes & Noble, Amazon.com and NYU Press.)

Job One: How Organizations Can Prioritize Their Customers

By Sam Ford

Although every large company still has miles to go to prioritize customer service, the spreadable media environment has made listening to your audience job one for PR and corporate communication departments.

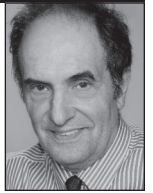
Comcast has learned the lessons of a spreadable media world, well illustrated by a 2006 video of a Comcast technician falling asleep on customer Brian Finkelstein's couch while on hold with the company's own help line.

Finkelstein's video spread rapidly and received coverage in a variety of traditional media outlets. Comcast received a steady stream of negative publicity online, as frustrated customers added their own commentary to the video.

Comcast listened to this and other incidents, one could argue, out of necessity; the company had created a specific department to respond to issues raised online.

That department now reaches out to bloggers, Twitterers and others engaged online with Comcast. In the process, this "Comcast Cares" initiative has addressed thousands of customers and simultaneously generated significant publicity.

Ethics Quiz (What to Ask Yourself Before You Act)



Most of us believe or want to believe that we are ethical and in most cases the belief is valid. Very few of us wake up in the morning with the pronounced intention of cheating, lying and stealing.

Yet “good” people make serious ethical mistakes all the time.

The constraints of time are major contributors to ethical lapses. As communicators, we are under pressure to perform, and we have tight deadlines.

To stop and think (which is what we should often do) seems to be counterintuitive to our competitive corporate lifestyle. We are all engaged in making hundreds of major and minor decisions every day in both our professional and private lives. Some of the decisions that we make may have an ethical dimension that we might not recognize.

Below are six questions PR execs might want to ask themselves before taking action. The answers to these questions could help us navigate between obstacles and clear pathways in our daily ethical decision-making process.

1. How would we feel if what we are about to do is published on tomorrow’s front page of the local newspaper or on the 6 o’clock news?
The fear of shame can be a good indicator that something

is wrong. If we cringe at the idea that what we are about to do is going to be made public, we probably should reconsider our planned course of action. In general, fear of shame provokes restraint and could be an indication that we are about to cross some societal boundaries that we better not cross.

2. What would your mother say or think?

Mothers represent conscience, and conscience can be an excellent guide to good moral conduct.

Most mothers have our best interests in mind, yet they will not allow us to take them for a ride. If we think a mother would disapprove, we are probably right. Listening to our mothers in most cases will keep us safe from wrongdoing.

3. Are we thinking of excuses that we will give in order to justify the action we are about to take?

We have an amazing capacity to rationalize our mistakes and to give excuses. However those excuses rarely justify our actions either in our own eyes or in the eyes of others. If we are thinking of excuses even before undertaking the action, we should think again.

4. Would it be okay if everybody did what we are about to do?

Applying Kant’s “Categorical Imperative,” we should imagine what it would be like if everybody did what we are about to do. If we conclude that societal life would be impossible under those conditions, we probably should refrain.

5. How would I feel if what I am about to do was done to me?

Hillel’s famous quote revised as the Golden Rule states, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” and it’s an excellent maxim that can help us determine whether a planned action is ethical or not. We may have some doubts as to whether an action is ethical or not, but we usually don’t hesitate to determine whether such action done to us would be harmful or not.

6. Will our action compromise our integrity?

If what we are about to do is a betrayal of our own values, such as honesty and fairness, then it would be advisable to abstain. A risk-benefit analysis may help. We should determine whether the risk of losing the trust that others have in us is worth whatever immediate benefit we anticipate from the proposed action.

Ethics deals with abstract concepts such as ideals, values and principles. However, it is

by our actions that we will be judged by both our contemporaries and by history. Hence, the particular attention we should give in deciding what to do and also what not to do. That decision is seldom easy to make, particularly when facing a conflict between two (or more) legitimate values.

Furthermore, PR execs can rarely be absolutely sure that their course of action is the correct one.

However, as communicators we have the comfort of knowing that based on the information we had and the time we took to come to the decision, we did the best we could. One should not expect more of oneself or of others.

On the cover of our company’s ethics guideline is the quote from Kabir that says: “Listen to the secret sound, the real sound which is inside you.”

We all have a moral compass. The problem is that we often do not stop long enough to be able to hear that “little voice” within all us. **PRN**

CONTACT:

Emmanuel Tchividjian is senior VP and ethics officer at Ruder Finn. He can be reached at tchividjiane@ruderfinn.com.

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