

Why the 90-9-1 Rule No Longer Exists



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I recently met with a company that told me over half of their users are creating multiple pieces of content everyday. And while it's a relatively small sample size (I am primarily meeting with seed stage companies), that engagement is staggering and led me to tell that team I believed the 90-9-1 Rule is virtually obsolete and why I thought so. And then to ensure I held myself accountable to blog about this topic, I Tweeted:

What follows are some of those thoughts I shared with this team — and a little extra now that I'm not on the spot in the middle of a meeting. (*Note: for certain content with higher friction in the production process — YouTube and SoundCloud, for example — I think the rule still holds.*)

First, **the sheer ubiquity of smartphones is the foundation for the dismantling of the rule. When everyone has a device for creating content of all types in their pocket, the barrier to making something has been dramatically reduced.** Previously, it took a concerted effort to create a piece of content; now it's almost second nature.

And it has become second nature for an increasing number of people for a variety of reasons. The rise of messaging apps and a greater acceptance of short form material (thanks, Twitter) have helped with this dramatically by lowering the bar for creating content. People are “writing” more than ever because of the rise of messaging products, which are increasingly replacing phone conversations. These messaging products are essentially serving as training for creating content on other services. Furthermore, there are a preponderance of tools for self-expression, many of which start as creative networks, such as Tumblr, Instagram, and Pinterest, with many more on the way, as outlined in my previous post on creative vs. social networks. Users have never had so many outlets to create content in a variety of media.

Lastly, there's never been such an opportunity for an unknown creator to go from the long tail to the mainstream in such a short period of time (for myriad reasons outlined here). The allure of going from an Instagram account with a small cult following to Fuck Jerry or from random Vine star to Shawn Mendes entices that many more people to start sharing content with the hope that it goes viral or may catapult their career.

A report from April of last year highlighted that 23% of Twitter users had sent a Tweet in the last 30 days. While many viewed this negatively (probably because they don't understand how Twitter can be valuable without Tweeting), it was a clear sign that the 90-9-1 Rule had started to fall by the wayside for certain types of communities. And I suspect it's a trend that will only continue to accelerate for other networks going forward.

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