Our team worked on the following two questions, which respectively applied, to Reader Engagement and Brand Extension.

Q1: READER ENGAGEMENT - In what ways can we get our readers more engaged with our brand for the benefit of ("the spirit of" the community, the brand and) our advertisers?

Q2: BRAND EXTENTION - Are there any viable (profitable) brand extension opportunities for the Syracuse New Times in the market place? If so, what are they? (Publications to other niche reader groups? Other media outlets (broadcast media, on-line media programs, etc…)?

So before giving any hasty recommendations, we followed the "A-I-D-A" marketing funnel model to examine the Syracuse New Times operating status and gained the findings as below.

Environment: US Newspaper Landscape vs. SNT Current Status

According to the Publication Audit Report from 2011 to 2012, the average net circulation of Syracuse New Times (Print Edition) is 34,683. The newspaper can be found at over 1050 various local spots in Central New York area, such as restaurants, nightclubs, local businesses, universities, retail stores and supermarkets. Advertising accounts for 55% of the content. In October 2012, the distribution is about 38,350 copies, which has increased by 23.1% compared to that of last year.

The reader demographics study shows that educated and affluent people in their 21 to 54 accounts for the main readership of Syracuse New Times. Sixty-three percent of the readers have an annual income over $50,000, and seventy-six percent of them are college graduates compared to the market average of fifty-five percentage.

Most of the print newspapers are suffering from severe loss of readership. According to PEW Research Center (http://www.people-press.org/2012/09/27/in-changing-news-landscape-even-television-is-vulnerable/), the newspaper industry has gone through a decline since 2002, whereas online news embraces more and more popularity. Moreover, it is demonstrated that young people tend to get news from Internet instead of newspaper. However, the industry trend does not affect SNT's growth in circulation, partly due to its expansion in distribution area.

Despite the overall downfall of the US newspaper industry, Syracuse New Times still managed to keep a 23.1% increase on circulation. However if SNT is targeting to extend the brand in the market place, meanwhile expecting a more engaging reader group, a scrutiny to its Operating and Marketing status is still necessary. We'll examine as follows from the AIDA funnel view.

Awareness: Syracuse New Times advertising coverage

Examining SNT advertising coverage through Adforum, a database that covers U.S and international advertisements (1999-present) on all kinds of media, we found no advertisement that is related to SNT. It is understandable that a non-paid newspaper cannot afford an agency. Therefore, we turn to examine its self-produced ads both online and offline.

The outcome turns out disappointing. No flyers, no posters, the only thing people can find about SNT in their community is its newsstand, piled with other newspapers. A random interview in Syracuse University suggests that only one-fifth of the students have heard about SNT, and most of them cannot provide a three-word description about it. As for online community, we examined syrgove.net and syracuse.com, two sites with the highest-ranking result for local people on Google Search, neither of the site did we find links to syracusenewtimes.com. Above results indicates that SNT does not spend enough efforts on branding itself. Though of little capital, under modern technology, there are ways of branding that cost little (such as pay by per click) or barely anything (such as Search Engine Optimization).

Awareness: Social Examination (as of Dec 3rd, 2013)

	Twitter	Facebook	YouTube	Instagram
Account Summary	1353 tweets/ 2649 followers	6270 likes/ 443 talk about	No Accounts	46 posts; 306 followers
Update Frequency	3-10/Daily	5-7/Daily	N/A	1/weekly

Syracuse New Times literally has a footprint on the mainstream social networks, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and even Foursquare. However after a second look into these accounts it's easy to say that SNT is only "Acting Social" by just opening accounts and posting, which is far from being "Real Social". Referring to the table above, we will examine the SNT social print in details:

Only Facebook and Twitter are still timely updated. Per Twitter, the average daily post can range 3 to 10, however, the content strategy is simply syncing articles from the website, which means reader got no other excitement on its Twitter page. The Retweet and Reply are not a lot either. So is the case of Facebook. But FB usage and execution situation is a bit more satisfying. Observation from Facebook showed that readers are relatively more active here. For Twitter: Followers increased 15% over the past 2 months; whereas Following numbers increased 28%; Facebook likes only increases 4%. This number indicates that the current content is not engaging enough. Per Youtube there isn't an official SNT account, the button appeared on SNT homepage only connects to Youtube homepage. Meanwhile, the update frequency on Instagram is only once in a week, which we believe is a big waste of our rich content resource on our website.

Awareness: Search engine performance

Nowadays search engine becomes the most powerful tool to acquire people's awareness. Google ranks web page on its quality score, and we know that quality score is proportional to page's word-space: text proximities.

We therefore examined word-spaces of SNT's homepage and "Art" column page.

Word-space of Homepage

Word-space of "Art"

We found a high likeness of those two pages. The brand name "Syracuse New Times" dilutes the word-spaces, resulting a low quality score for other keywords. The search result for "local Syracuse life" (ranking 8th on search result page) also suggests a loose keyword structure.

Interest: Website and app on mobile platform

The mobile version of the website is the same as the computer version. However, mobile phone's screen is much smaller than that of computer. The same platform on mobile phone would lead to inconvenience in browsing the website.

Syracuse New Times provides its app on iOS, which is identical to a printed version without any functions. Furthermore, Andorid phone users (the largest group of mobile users) cannot get access to its app.
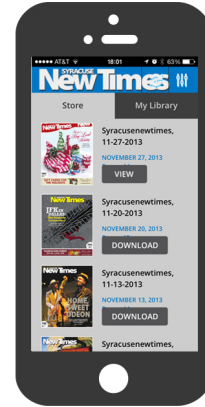
Customer Personas

To increase reader engagement, we believe that Syracuse New Times current approach, a one-size-fits-all strategy that one-directionally pushes content to readers, won't work well. Instead, we recommend a strategy that personalizes around customers, focusing on what they are looking to understand, what they need, and when and where they require.

Thus, this strategy requires us to have a better and deep understanding of readers. After carefully examining the readership study posted on syracusenewtimes.com and over 2,000 follower profiles on Twitter, we divided the readers into 5 segments according to their age, profession and interests. In order to give it a better visual demonstration and make it more clearly, we generalize the five segments into five personas.

Moreover, we also conducted in-depth interviews on people who best fit the requirements of each persona. Each interview took about 20 minutes. The findings are presented as follow.
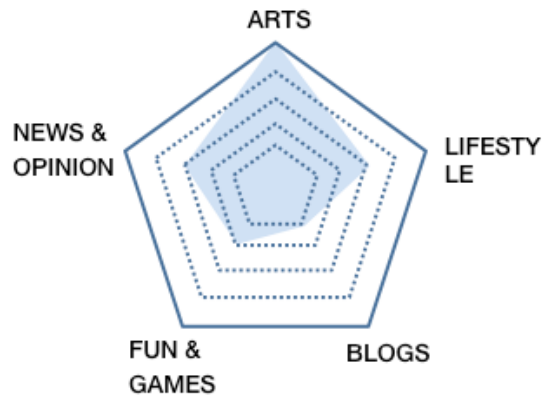
Persona 1 Local Students

We designed this persona as young people. This is the segment that Syracuse New Times most desires to reach and engage. They are either university students or people who enter the society not for long. Internet is the most dominant way for them to get information. Their most conspicuous feature is that they are very familiar with social media and use them regularly everyday. Thus, we chose a local graduate student as the delegate.

Zebediah Gallagher, majored in Advertising in S.I Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. He spends half an hour everyday on Facebook, Linkedin and Tumblr. He almost never reads Syracuse New Times, only once in a while in a local store. However, he has noticed that the newspaper can be found in many places both on campus and in local stores. What he needs is well written articles with controversial topics and about wonky locals. The keywords that he is interested in are art and life. Although he often reads news online, he never heard of SNT website. The biggest hurdle is that these young people are rather digitally beyond reach.

For the purpose of reaching younger generation, we recommend a smarter way of using social media which will be illustrated in our strategic recommendations.
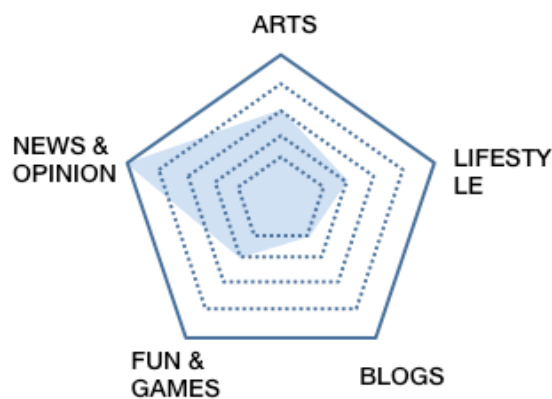
Persona 2 Mid-aged Professionals

This persona features mid-aged professionals, who has lived in Syracuse for a long time and who loves and cares this city. We chose a well-off mid-aged man as our delegate.

Sonny Zhan, who lives in Manlius, a small city near Syracuse, is an attorney working for Corporate Counsel at Welch Allyn. He also uses Facebook, Twitter and Linkedin. Though

reading online news everyday, however, he only checks syracusenewtimes.com occasionally. What he needs is local news and national sports news. The keywords that he is interested in are news and sports. The hurdle of reaching him is that Syracuse New Times is not as famous in neighboring cities as in Syracuse.

We found that mid-aged professionals are extremely interested in local/national sports. However, Syracuse New Times does not provide enough articles around that. Publishing more sports news will increase the web traffic.
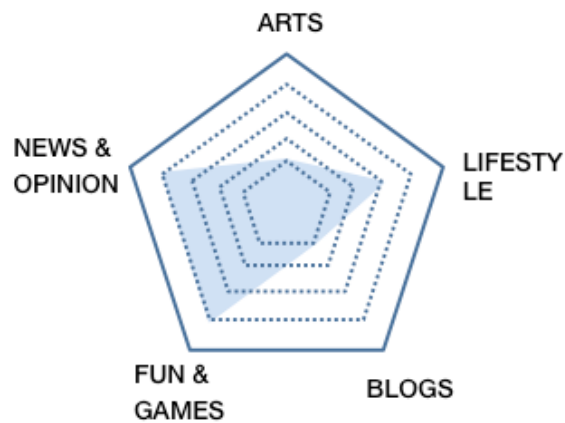
Persona 3 Aged Retired Residents

We designed this persona to be a woman from middle class family, who has kids and a happy family.

Joan Grant, who works as a property manager at Newbury Apartments in Syracuse, NY. She doesn't use any kind of social media. She sometimes picks up Syracuse New Times at grocery stores and diners when waiting in line. What she needs is coupons, sports news, current events information and weather. The keywords of her interests are coupons and news. She thinks there's no significant difference between local newspapers. The hurdle of reaching her digitally is that she seldom read online and hasn't heard of SNT's website before.

We recommend Syracuse New Times provide more coupons as well as kill-time recreations as Sudoku in their printed version.
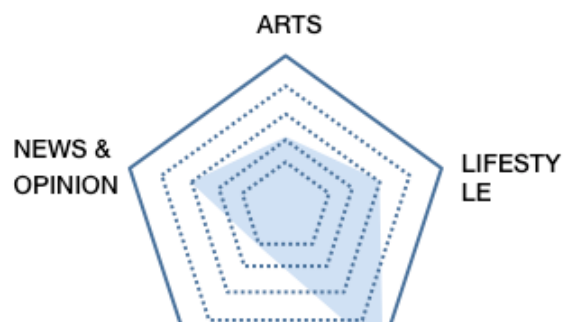
Persona 4 Local Bloggers

Since we found that there are a lot of Central New York based bloggers and writers, this

persona is about local bloggers as well as people who comment or post online frequently.

Brian Kingsley, a blogger of Syracuse New Times Online Edition of the Buy Local Blog. He uses Facebook and Twitter a lot daily. He reads Syracuse New Times online two or three times a week, but only flip through the print version a few times a week, sometimes in bathroom. What he needs is local, independently owned businesses coupons, which can be printable online. The keywords that best describe his interests are blogs and life. However, he is not satisfied with the insufficiency of classified ads online.

As word of mouth is the most effective way of branding, we suggest Syracuse New Times establish relationship with the local bloggers.
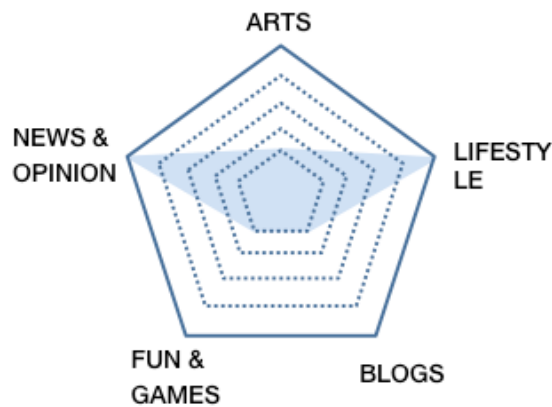
Persona 5 Local Business Owners

We also discovered that a lot of local business owners prefer to get local news and information from Syracuse New Times. Thus, we found a local business owner as our interviewee.

Charlie Hatem, who is the owner and cook of Kind David (Middle East Restaurant), in Syracuse, NY. The only social media network he uses is Yelp. He picks up the newspaper every Wednesday when delivered to his store and he reads the newspaper every week. What he needs is local business information, especially about restaurants. The keywords that best describe his interests are Ads and business. Though Syracuse New Times do provide insertions, Charlie doesn't seem to know that, as he said he prefers Orange Daily because they have insertions which could contain a full menu of his restaurant.

Therefore, Syracuse New Times should inform all local business owners that they are welcomed and encouraged to put insertions, which we believe will boost its advertising revenue.

Strategic Recommendations:

Adding on what has been described in the previous part, also based on the five personas that we categorized from the current Syracuse New Times reader group, we have developed three key strategic recommendations. Moreover, with the belief of using minimum investment for a maximum return, all the tactics recommended here actually are of no cost or at least could be a reuse of current resource.

1. First is to Embrace Social, Visually. There's a noticeable trend that is the rise of video and photo usage among the entire social media emergence. We would rather call it the trend of visualization and story telling in content marketing enabled by technology and device. From the listed social media's annual growth chart compared from Y2012 to Y2011, the Top 4 winners are "Instagram, Tumblr, Google+ and Youtube". It's not hard to conclude that this phenomenon was due to the engaging interaction format these platforms are offering. Instagram is changing the way people photographing like never before. Nowadays, chances are most of the travel photos were left forever in the SD memory cards. They never got the opportunities to be viewed in a family gathering. When was the last time you did that? No clue, right?

Syracuse New Times are now factually acting social but not real social so the enhancement would be to shift the battlefield to visual social website like Instagram and Youtube.

For Instagram we suggest increasing the update frequency from once a week to at least once daily. The hash tags could be consistent with the website navigation. Also SNT could have daily focus, say Monday on #SyrRestaurant , Tuesday on #SyrMusical . A systematic content structure will attach the customers more closely to the platform.

For Youtube we suggest opening up an account and using it as a local event-reporting channel. Sub channel set up could reference the website structure as well. Due to the compatibility of video content and sharing attribute of Youtube, more video content should be curated catering for multiple social platforms. One video clipping could be edited and used on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube as well as Instagram.

The cost of this recommendation is almost zero since no additional workforce of social media maintenance is needed. SNT just has to shift the content focus to Youtube and Instagram. We believe the reader engagement will improve a lot if more video content is available.

2. The second recommendation is to provide On-demand content. In the digital age, the choosing power has shifted from portal website content provider to customers. To success, Syracuse New Times should provide content catering to personal needs. Based on the five reader personas, we developed an "outside-in" content strategy which we believe is more appealing to the customers.
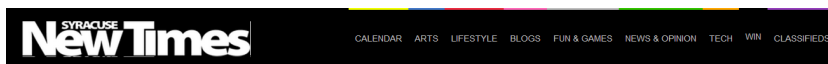
The readership study provides us interest area of each persona. By estimating the degree of preference for different content, we suggest the following persona tags to Syracuse New Times. Editors are required to add persona tags to every article posted.

Content	Tags
Arts	Student
Lifestyle	Business Owner
Blogs	Blogger
News Opinion	Business Owner Mid-aged Professional Senior Citizen
Calendar	All
Coupon	All

Suggested persona tags to content

Considering of budget limits, we suggest two ways of utilizing the persona tags.

The first way is to add a filter function on the website which enables readers to sort the content by persona. Such approach provides customized content based on persona but is not literally personalized. The advantage of this is economical, as long as editors attach the tags as required.

SEARCH RESULTS FOR: NEWS   Sort by | I'm a student |

To provide a more personalized content, SNT needs customer data from its improved customer relationship system (CRM). Combining the persona tags with personal information, SNT could introduce a new column "My Feed" that push personalized content to each customer.

Hello, **William**
MY FEED   CALENDAR

The second method is the advanced version of the first one, but it needs structural change which costs more.

3. Last one is about Data. Needless to emphasize how important data is for any business runs nowadays. Using data to get better customer insight and make smarter business decisions. With technology now infused into every aspect of commerce, the entire craft of marketing becomes

more instrumented, interconnected and intelligent. This leads to profound changes in ways the discipline is understood, led and practiced. The onus of this evolution has landed on the doorstep of the Chief Marketing Officer, aka, Marketing Department in SNT. Starting from aligning all the data generated from customers, SNT should instrument all key touch points to gather the right data about each customer.
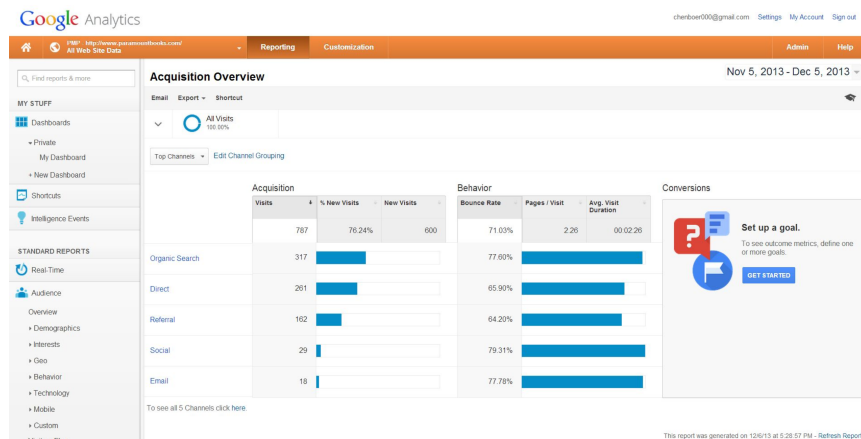
1) Website wise, we recommend embedding Google Analytic tracking code to the whole SNT site. In this way we could get tracking report from Google at anytime or in any format we want. Data in multiple angles such as Page Views, Unique Visitors, Bounce Rate and Referral Source will all be displayed in that report. The next step is to run the right analytics at the right time on the right customer to generate new ideas about whom to serve and how to best serve that person. From the click analysis we will have a clear understanding of the customer content preference. Pages with highest click through rate should be promoted at homepage however pages with fewest clicks should be optimized. This is a one-time deployment and Google will support the data for free.

2) Customer wise, we think there are two actions that SNT could take. First is to continue collecting customer data on the website. We found the registration function are now removed after the new website update. As a pre-requisite of future content marketing based on customer behaviors, we believe a well-designed Customer Relationship Management system is necessary. SNT could reuse the former customer registration system and only partial optimization to the registration form is needed. When should customer register and what do customers get after registration? We believe content is not granted

for free on the website because of the cost of getting online is much less than the cost of getting a printed newspaper. Therefore, content like "Annual Recommendations List of Syracuse Restaurant" or "Printable Coupons" might not be directly downloadable any more. In return of getting our content for free, we might request the customer's email address as well as somewhat of personal information. The granular, the better. We might not be able to treat each customer as individual however this is SNT's ultimate goal of targeted marketing. In the long run, out of the customer data we collected, we might even be able to form a predictive model of what people are interested in; and possibly when/where would be the next purchase.

3) Partner wise, we think it's a win-win strategy to establish a Rewarding System. That means

customers could get somewhat discount or a certain kind of value added service when proving they come from Syracuse New Times recommendations. We have visited four listed places in Best of Syracuse 2013, Food and Drink session. However, none of the four displayed a welcome message or offered any kind of special treatment to us as potential customers recommended from SNT. We believe this is a frustration to both local business owners and customers; also a waste of SNT nomination credibility. A possible way of implementing this tactic would be a reference to Foursquare and Yelp. These two social sharks developed all kinds of encouraging mechanics to enhance offline-online interactions between business and customers. Digital badge and Online voucher are effective. Also this is a good way to extend Syracuse New Time brand when the blue award badge appears as much as possible in local restaurants, entertainment venues, beauty salons and shopping stores.

How our recommended tactics applied to the questions we worked on?

Tactic 1: Video Content on Youtube and Instragram → Q2 Brand Extension

Tactic 2: On-demand content by personas → Q1 Reader Engagement

Tactic 3: Google Analytics for website tracking → Q1 Reader Engagement

Tactic 4: Customer Database set up → Q1 Reader Engagement

Tactic 5: O2O Rewarding System → Q1 Reader Engagement + Q2 Brand Extension

Appendix:

Exhibit 1: Reader Persona Content Preference Scorecard:

1 – 5 Scale	Business Owner	Student	Mid-aged Professional	Blogger	Senior Citizen
Calendar	5	5	5	5	5
Arts	1	5	4	3	1
Lifestyle	4	4	3	4	3
Blogs	1	1	1	5	2
Fun & Games	1	2	2	1	5
News Opinion	3	3	5	2	4
Tech					
Win					
Classfieds					
Coupon					

Exhibit 2: Tactic Key Performance Indicators Matrix

Social				
Instagram	Post	Follower	Like	Comment
Youtube	View Time	Like	Share	
Facebook	Like	Talks About	Share	
Twitter	Tweets	Follower	Retweet	Favorite

Website				
SyracuseNewTimes.com	Page view	Unique Visitor	Review Time	Bounce Rate
	Source/Media	Keyword	New vs. Return	

Customer Relationship				
Customer Database	# Customer Base	# of New Customer	$ Cost per Acquisition	
Rewarding System	# of Partner	# of Offline Visit	$ Advertising Income	$ Discount Amount

Exhibit 3: Tactic Budget Estimation and Task Owner (Draft)

	Budget	Task Owner		Budget	Task Owner
Tactic 1	0	Digital Media Manager	Tactic 4	Reuse the CRM system	Designer Editor
Tactic 2	To be discussed	Designer	Tactic 5	0	Classified Sales/ Promotions
Tactic 3	0	Digital Media Manager			

Exhibit 4: The Strategic Planning Process

The Marketing Strategic Planning Process