

The Brilliance Behind the Buzz by Megan Burpo

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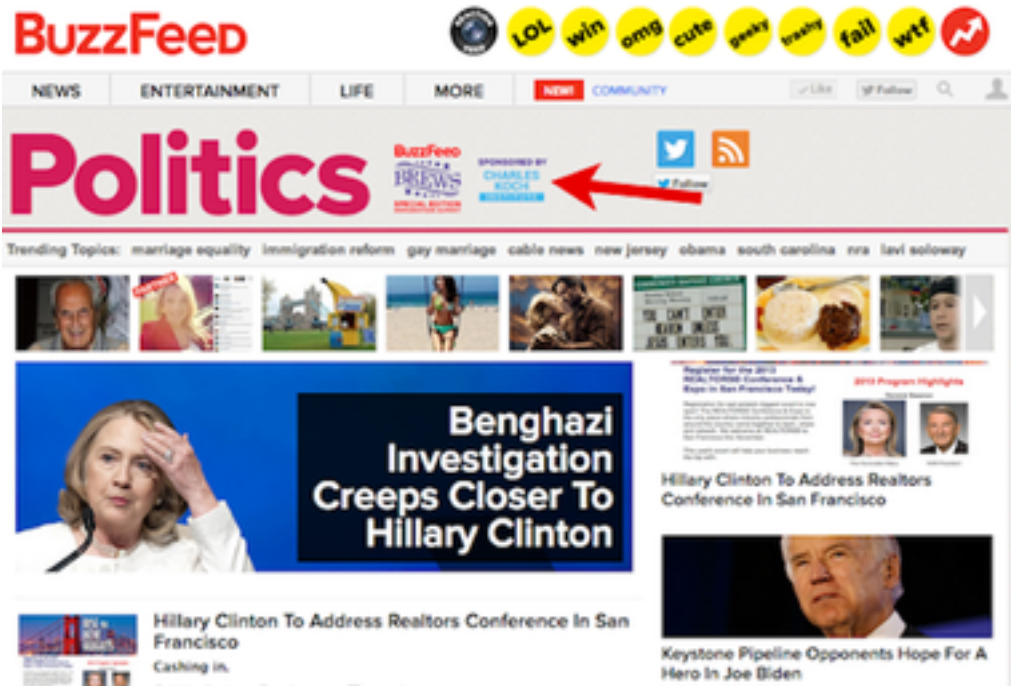
As the ticking time bomb of print journalism quickens with each millennia’s twitter update, the media field is left to answer the daunting question: how to stay relevant? The answer lies in one small word: BuzzFeed.

The joke of the website lies in those who don’t see the genius and strategy behind the internet site that has built it’s foundation on cat memes and pop culture quizzes. The media giant launched by Jonah Peretti was the first of it’s kind in 2006 as a starter Internet site. Though the site filtered into mainstream popularity appearing on every Facebook newsfeed, it wasn’t until former Politico Editor, Ben Smith, took over as editor-in-chief that the website started to gain the respect it deserved. Now globally hosting a news, sports and video section, BuzzFeed’s success is undeniable.

But what makes BuzzFeed successful? What makes a teenage time-waster site turn into a growing news source?

Peretti knew he wanted to create an online news site but he also knew that to be successful he needed attention. It starts with a share, not a view. Unlike most Internet sites that focus on their search engine optimization, Peretti focused on how to get his name seen with the help of his users. Topics needed to be funny enough to be read while also being appropriate and relevant enough to be publically shared. Flashy headlines were a must to nail, as they are the catalyst to someone opening one article and ending up sitting in the same spot 30 minutes later.

BuzzFeed’s use of lists is not to appease lazy writers, but rather to encourage lazy readers. Creating visually simplistic stories encourages BuzzFeed’s readers to continue get past the headline in a way a block of text wouldn’t.



As BuzzFeed’s name gained popularity their context started to gain credibility. The 2012 presidential debate provided the material for BuzzFeed to step away from their light-hearted content and comment on a serious topic while still using their infamous sarcastic wit. The company credits this as the turning point in their organization’s transition into a credible news source. A live commentary on Clinton vs. Obama sparked many a pantsuit joke and interest in politics from the young readers. As BuzzFeed’s permanent news section is updated live, they are reporting alongside credible leaders such as NBC and CNN.



The question still stands though; how did BuzzFeed get readers to use them for material other than ‘90s memories and Game Of Throne quizzes? How did they make the transition from the frame they so solidly built for themselves?

Peretti’s plan worked all along. Get the people to open your site on a regular basis by giving them what they want, and then slowly start giving them what they need. Very few people think breaking news and type in BuzzFeed. They think entertainment; open the site, get distracted by BuzzFeed’s inner marketing, and find themselves on serious articles. Some, I dare say, even take the form of full paragraphs with few pictures. It’s safe to say that it won’t be long before the website we casually read news stories on, becomes one we have bookmarked alongside the Post.

The classic tale of the little engine that could, BuzzFeed is doing all the laughing now. A mega hit that is making its way into the news team has taught media a valuable lesson. The way we view marketing, PR, and online media is outdated. Our problem isn’t how to be online; it’s how to succeed online. You can bet that BuzzFeed has not only accomplished this goal, but also done so with such ease that its yellow LOL sticker looking out at us is completely deserved.

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