

Poynter Social Strategy Notes

Taylor Blatchford / June 25, 2018

Introduction

I examined the past six months of Poynter's social analytics, from Dec. 1, 2017, to May 31, 2018. Here are some observations, quick suggestions of things that could be better, and ideas for the future.

In short:

- Our posts could be written more clearly and consistently.
- We're missing the opportunity to engage with people on weekends, which we could easily do by scheduling ahead.
- We haven't gained as many new followers recently as we have in the past, and should consider ways to boost that.
- Our social profiles should make it clearer how to get in touch with us.
- We have tons of evergreen content, and we should be conscious of sharing that more frequently.

Facebook

Changes in likes: from 66,118 to 66,686; net gain of 568 with 1,514 unlikes = 2,082 total likes

- That is a lot of unlikes. Facebook tells us more than half of those were deactivated accounts, so maybe people are increasingly getting rid of Facebook? About 10 percent were "suspicious account removals."
- By comparison, in the 6 months before that (June 1, 2017 to Dec 1, 2017), we had a net gain of 2,249 likes, with 1,168 unlikes = 3,417 total likes. There was a 39% decrease between those two 6-month periods.
- A standard ad promotion inviting people to like our Facebook page could help increase this and combat the "unlikes."

Top ten posts (by unique users reached):

- [April 29](#) (video): "Stand for democracy by supporting journalists. Donate to The Poynter Institute on #GiveDayTampaBay #GiveDayTB18. <https://bit.ly/2HEL1Gg>"
 - Reached 50,117 people; 613 engaged users
- [May 11](#) (video): "Don't get fooled by fake videos on Facebook or Twitter."
 - Reached 37,231 people; 835 engaged users
- [March 28](#) (video): "Are we living in a "post-truth" world? See what people around the world think. Learn more at factcheckingday.com."
 - Reached 33,946 people; 819 engaged users

- [April 4](#): “When people voluntarily leave journalism, it’s not because they’re less dedicated to covering their communities or protecting democracy. It is, often, because you can’t buy groceries, pay bills or save for college with ideals.”
 - Reached 30,369 people; 2246 engaged users
- [May 30](#): ““Something like this in the Middle East is extremely dangerous.””
 - Reached 30,107 people; 513 engaged users
- [April 16](#): “The winners of the 2018 Pulitzer Prizes have been announced.”
 - Reached 27,538 people; 2807 engaged users
- [May 10](#): “Catch up on the latest misinformation and fact-checking news.”
 - Reached 25,672 people; 372 engaged users
- [May 23](#): “As France readies a law against misinformation, one lawmaker said “freedom of expression” remains pivotal.”
 - Reached 21,045 people; 407 engaged users
- [April 6](#): ““In the past few days, our students and our grads called us seriously freaked out by what they have seen about Sinclair.””
 - Reached 17,002 people; 1366 engaged users
- [April 27](#): ““We dropped the previous rule that two objects must be in motion before they can collide. The entry has been deleted.””
 - Reached 15,460 people; 1382 engaged users

Median reach: 1,847 users

Median engagement: 3.87%

Facebook post best practices:

- Write posts in a way that encourages authentic engagement and invites people to share their experiences (but in a better way than “what do you think?”). The mysterious Facebook algorithm values posts with comments and shares — the more we invite people to have a conversation on our posts, the more people will see them.
- Be concise; keep posts to one sentence, or maybe two short ones. This especially applies to marketing/event posts, which are sometimes really long.
- Write posts with clear details that invite the reader into the story. Sometimes our posts are too vague and don’t provide any information.
 - Not great: “He did not want a long obituary.” or “Advice from 10 smart women.” or “What will next week bring?”
 - Better: “Longtime Pittsburgh Post-Gazette editorial cartoonist Rob Rogers was fired on Thursday after several cartoons critical of the president were rejected.”
- If you use a quote in a post, make it clear who said it — the author of the piece, or another source?

Quick suggestions:

- Every Friday, schedule at least one post each for Saturday and Sunday, so we’re not silent for two days.

- The strongest pieces of content should be shared again a few days after publication (with a different post) to give them another boost.
- Buying a simple ad promotion could help increase our page likes and readership, and balance out the “unlikes” that are stopping our audience from growing as quickly.
- Contact information on the page (email, etc.) should be more clear to redirect people away from the Facebook inbox, which doesn’t get checked regularly — we typically get about one message per week, but no one responds.

Twitter

Changes in followers: 4,836 new, from 188,889 to 193,725

- In the six months before that (June 1, 2017 to Dec 1, 2017), we gained 8,421 followers — nearly twice as many. There was a 42% decrease between those two 6-month periods.
- Similar to Facebook, we might try a sponsored ad promotion and see if that boosts our Twitter following.

Top ten tweets (by people reached):

- [March 27](#): “Five years ago, the @denverpost took this photo after winning the @PulitzerPrizes - now, under a new owner, this is who’s left. Read about the ‘destroyer of newspapers’ in today’s @Poynter media roundup <https://t.co/uPQKYrfh0M> Image via @ByRosenberg, story by @NoceraBV <https://t.co/fW27OL1n6r>”
 - Reached 242,374 people; 602 retweets, 357 likes
- [January 3](#): “This tale of an underdog newspaper winning a Pulitzer was our most-read story of 2017. <https://t.co/CZz7afyKEz>”
 - Reached 193,895 people; 221 retweets, 568 likes
- [April 16](#): “Congrats to @nytimes and @NewYorker for winning the #PulitzerPrize for public service for their coverage of the sexual abuse of women in Hollywood and other industries around the world. <https://t.co/AnzVXw4DPk>”
 - Reached 168,959 people; 325 retweets, 446 likes
- [December 19](#): “Reminder: Get the name AND the breed of the dog right. <https://t.co/1WPZ1yM4GN> <https://t.co/8tP6KbZTdU>”
 - Reached 150,245 people; 203 retweets, 343 likes
- [May 18](#): “Best practices for covering mass shootings: <https://t.co/VDVsaKfmsJ>”
 - Reached 145,851 people; 105 retweets, 140 likes
- [December 26](#): “.@davidaxelrod had been waiting 20 years to ask @BarackObama this question. <https://t.co/iySjfxik64>”
 - Reached 113,767 people; 81 retweets, 328 likes
- [February 8](#): “Insightful look at the new owner of the @latimes by someone who has covered his vast business interests. <https://t.co/hhtP5IFuxs>”
 - Reached 101,046 people; 24 retweets, 31 likes

- [January 30](#): “#ICYMI: A really well-done graphic by @ProPublica examining @realDonaldTrump's job creation claims. Just in time for #SOTU tonight. <https://t.co/dokhb40VMx>”
 - Reached 75,954 people; 109 retweets, 152 likes
- [April 16](#): ““After years of being overlooked, The USA Today Network (Gannett) wins three Pulitzer Prizes <https://t.co/2uyXhFhDZQ> <https://t.co/ZnVHLiDp8t>”
 - Reached 79,537 people; 75 retweets, 119 likes
- [February 13](#): ““These stories are like old houses, rambling old houses... and you have to find the secret door into your story.” <https://t.co/9eGoWSJMos>”
 - Reached 76,088 people; 59 retweets, 131 likes

Median reach: 8,464 people

Median engagement: 0.76%

Themes that do well:

- Pulitzers! How can we capitalize on this outside of the Pulitzer announcement week and ceremony?
- Along with Pulitzers, recognition of news orgs’ projects (even if we’re sharing them directly without having written about them) — should we do this regularly?
- Industry job updates with layoffs, hirings, etc.
- Advice for interns, students, young people in the industry
- Humor (like the correction with the dog name and breed)

Twitter best practices:

- Tag news organizations and people whenever possible — this makes connections clear and encourages retweets or engagement from them.
- Write straightforward, clear tweets that don’t need too much thought to understand. Don’t be too vague.
 - Not great: “Never look at just one.” or “Keep this one handy. You’ll be seeing a lot of this later this year.”
- Use full sentences — tweets should be conversational, not just phrases.
- Be concise. Keep it to one sentence or two short ones. If you want to use a longer quote, use a social card instead!
 - A tweet that’s too long: “As more information becomes available, be careful to be accurate and contextual. Small details can take on inappropriate levels of importance in the early reporting stages. Those details can be harmful to the truth if they are inaccurate or out of context.”
- Attribute quotes! Did the author of the piece say it, or another source?

Quick suggestions:

- Similar to Facebook, we should schedule a few tweets for the weekend ahead of time; things that will be evergreen and don’t have a risk of becoming irrelevant as the news cycle shifts.

- We should decide whether we want to end tweets in a period or not, just for the sake of consistency when different people are tweeting.
- We don't need to attach photos to tweets just for the sake of having visuals — we should think critically about what helps add more information to the text. A graphic or quote card or interesting photo does that; a screenshot of the story or generic stock image probably doesn't.
- Our Twitter bio could have clearer contact information, like the info@poynter.org email address or the main office phone number.
- We could also buy a simple ad promotion to potentially reach more new followers.

Other notes

- In general, our social media is us pushing content out to our audience without much interaction or conversation. How can we listen more to people's responses, answer their questions and more authentically engage with them? This could be valuable in showing that we're not an "ivory tower" brand but a down-to-earth organization staffed by real people.
- Having some sort of simple schedule to know what's being posted when would help with continuity when we switch people throughout the day.
- We should collect the most "evergreen" posts from the archive in a document, spreadsheet, etc. to easily be able to resurface those when recurring topics come up (i.e. gun violence, natural disasters, ethics debates).
- Kristen said she'd thought about creating a Facebook group to connect local journalists — we should talk more about that, because that seems like it would have good potential for organic discussion.
- Instagram is basically run by the marketing department, and there probably isn't much value in the news team contributing to that. We could consider Instagram Stories for promoting projects or significant pieces, but would have to figure out a format for that.

