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 **SenseMakerReport**

# **What Publishers Need to Learn About Using Social Media Effectively**

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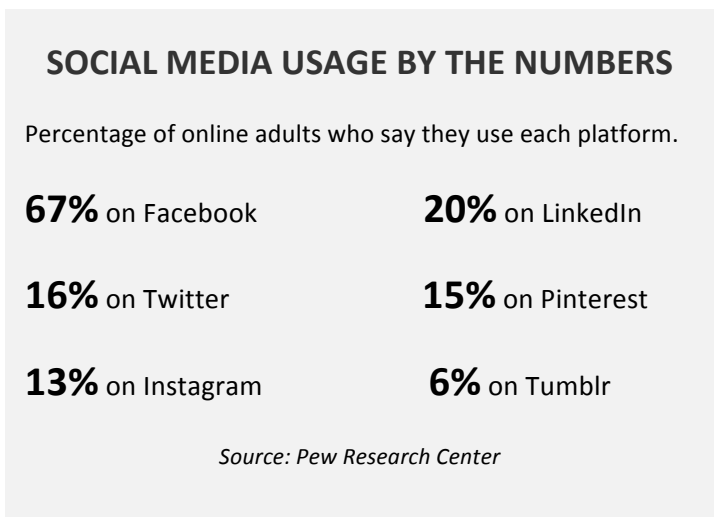
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# What Publishers Need to Learn About Using Social Media Effectively

By Dena Levitz

Patrons at D.C.'s Woolly Mammoth Theater have a reason to arrive early. The lobby is now home to a large magnetic board featuring words and phrases from a current show at the playhouse. The blocks of text are moveable. Patrons are encouraged to rearrange the lines from the play into new phrases and then photograph their word creations and share them on social media using their smartphones or nearby computers.

In a Washington Post article about the project, local residents said the interactive word display makes them feel more connected to the Woolly Mammoth. It transforms them from audience members into active participants, even writers. They said they want to come to more performances and let their friends know about the exhibit. And they enjoy the lead up to the show. The staff at the Woolly Mammoth also see the display as a way to appeal to less traditional, more youthful customers who are most active in social media.



The project is part of a larger shift in how content producers and audiences relate with one another. With consumers having a growing array of choices over how to spend their time, all businesses – from the arts, sports, groceries and everything in between – are trying to learn new ways to engage more deeply with customers. At the same time, technology is giving consumers more ways to share information with one another – turning the group formerly known as the audience into a bigger part of the distribution and marketing network of content.

For those who consider social media to be an ancillary activity, consider one statistic: In June 2011, time spent online in social media began to surpass the amount of time Americans spent on all other websites portals.

This NAA SenseMaker Report offers a sense of the state of the art of how newspaper media have learned to use social media to connect with consumers about news.

## JUST HOW BIG HAS SOCIAL MEDIA BECOME?

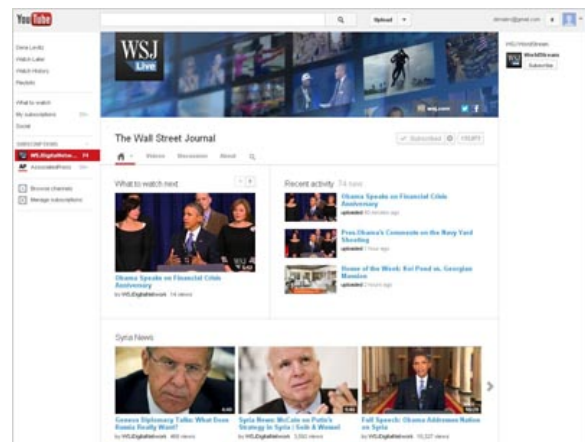
Collectively, social media now has enormous penetration. According to Experian Marketing Services, 91 percent of online adults use social media in some form. [Data from the Pew Research Center](#) puts the number a bit lower but still substantial, indicating that almost 70 percent of online adults use social networking sites. Women skew higher than men. And social media participation is especially high for younger users. According to Pew, more than 80 percent of teens use social. Facebook remains the largest platform with 1.1 billion worldwide users, including 665 million active daily users, as of July 2013. That population, according to company data, generated a daily average of 4.5 billion “likes” in May, up from 2.7 billion daily in August 2012. Even as the number of users continues to grow, in other words, engagement is growing even faster.

Twitter, launched in 2006, is the second-largest social media platform, and as of early 2013 the 140-character microblogging site still [ranked as the fastest-growing platform](#) in social media, according to Global Web Index, a syndicated market research service. In July, the number of users stood at 500 million, with 200 million of those considered to be active users.

The most powerful new dynamic in social now, however, may be photo and video-based platforms. Pinterest, a virtual pinboard for photos that likens itself to a digital scrapbook, has surpassed 70 million users. Instagram, another photo sharing site, now has 130 million active users who have shared some 16 billion images since the service launched in 2010, according to co-founder Kevin Systrom. Instagram, which describes itself as a way to “capture and share moments,” allows users to post photos, change their look and share them on its own platform and others.

Vine (owned by Twitter) and Instagram (owned by Facebook) are also short-form video sites. Each allows users to post clips that last just a few seconds – in Vine’s case, six, and in Instagram’s 15. Both are seeing early traction. In four months Vine had attracted 13 million people to sign up, according to the company. And 5 million videos were uploaded on Instagram in only the first 24 hours of the service’s debut.

YouTube remains the most popular site for video on the Web. The Google-owned platform reached a milestone of a billion unique monthly users in 2013. Users collectively watch more than 6 billion hours of video monthly, which equates to almost an hour a month for every person on Earth, according to the company. What was once a space for mostly amateur footage has become a destination where brands host channels and run sophisticated campaigns. This includes news organizations such as [Reuters](#), [The Wall Street Journal](#), [The Associated Press](#) and [Al Jazeera](#).



In addition to these name brands, new social media platforms are emerging every month. Among the most-talked about at the moment is Snapchat, which was singled out by analyst Mary Meeker, the general partner at the venture capital giant Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, in her [most recent presentation on digital trends](#). Snapchat, which launched in 2011, stands out for its real-time picture chatting capabilities and the fact that items sent between users are shared, yet not saved. Friends send each other Snaps (which can be text, image, video, etc.) The fleeting messages only last as long as it takes for the recipient to view the Snaps. The item then disappears. Snapchat has fewer users – 5 million daily active users in spring 2013 – but the user base is younger and shares an astoundingly high number of images per day.

“Images make the world go ‘round,” Liz Heron, editor of emerging media at The Wall Street Journal, said during a 2012 Online News Association session on the power of social media. “Visual storytelling has become the language of the Web.”

While it may seem daunting to keep up with all of these social platforms and the rapid pace of their adoption by consumers, the numbers also mean that social represents a powerful new opportunity for news publishers that cannot be ignored.

How, then, should newspapers and other news media companies think about social media?

### **USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO PUSH CONTENT OUT — NOT JUST PULL AUDIENCES IN**

Initially news publishers tended to use social media platforms largely as a way to draw people to their Web content – focusing on posting links to articles and encouraging users to follow those links to their website. That, data increasingly show, is insufficient. While social, like search, still has a role to in driving traffic to websites, its potential is more varied than that and the most successful use of social media goes further.

Instead, experts say, social media represents the conversation consumers are having on their own. Publishers need to be present in that conversation to be relevant and top of mind. That means doing more than posting links to drive people to your site. It also means being present on multiple social media platforms at the same time.

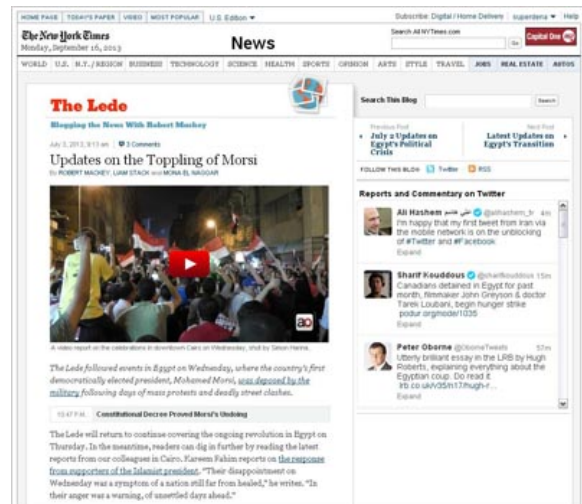
Michael Maness, vice president of media innovation at the Knight Foundation, advised editors last month that users should be able to “run into your brand” wherever they are on online – and, more and more, that’s in social media.

Each social media platform has its own distinct user base and is a different ecosystem. By being present on multiple social media sites, not just the biggest ones, a news organization can broaden its overall audience and attract different users to its content mix that may have never been exposed to the brand otherwise.

## EXPLOIT THE BREVITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN REAL TIME

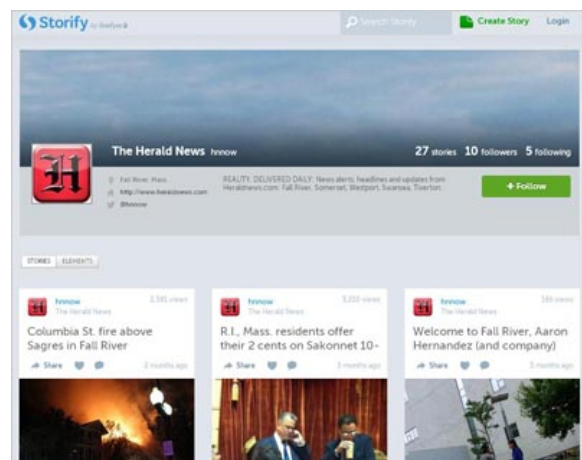
Users also don't just want to see the finished product – the story that is running in the paper or online. Social media is a powerful way to offer a glimpse into how information is developing in real time –especially given its orientation to quick brief content.

In the case of a breaking news story, that may mean posting the story iteratively, in items from reporters as they come in. Sometimes, that curated social media content becomes a new kind of narrative on its own. When the military deposed the President Mohamed Morsi in Egypt, for instance, The New York Times ran a story on its website about the overthrow, but in using its blog, The Lede, it also ran a real time account of the latest developments, made up mostly of the latest tweets from Egypt curated by Times journalists.



Storify has also become a way for news organizations to gather insights from across the web and display them together. The platform makes it possible to curate tweets, images and other items shared socially and then turn them into a new story form. The combined content can either be housed in the Storify architecture or embedded elsewhere.

Several small newspapers owned by GateHouse Media, for instance, used Storify in commemorating the 10-year anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Jon Root, digital editor for the [The Herald News](#) in Fall River, Mass., mined social media for local reaction to 9/11 and then combined community members' tweets and Facebook posts into a single Storify remembrance. The result was a powerful and highly localized tribute to a major news event.



In the midst of reporting a story, journalists also are taking advantage of Google Hangouts as a way to talk about their subject matter expertise and interview sources in a live format that readers can watch to supplement their understanding of issues.

Maness sees the article that comes together at the end of this reporting process as a completed garment. Readers don't just want to be presented with a shirt, he said. They want to see how the shirt comes together. "The threads of the work are as important as the finished article," he told editors at the annual convention of the American Society of News Editors.

In addition to a way of delivering content, social media can also be a valuable tool in finding out what an audience group is curious about, particularly in the moment. For instance, a reporter heading to an interview with an important local leader can ask the public over Twitter what to ask the interview subject – and then tailor some of the questioning accordingly. Or, in the context of a developing breaking news story, editors can monitor what users are saying about the incident in question on their social media accounts. In that way, they can gauge which aspects of the event are resonating with the community and hone in on this part of the event.

Sree Srinivasan, Columbia University's first Chief Digital Officer, uses an analogy from Jim Rosenberg, head of social media for the World Bank. If you think of your website as a home country's government, social media accounts are the equivalent of embassies. The social media accounts are versions, or stand-ins, for the main site.

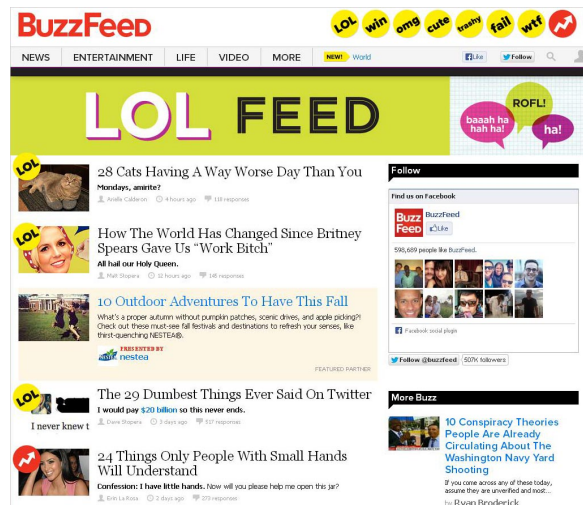
In that sense, a brand can maintain a presence all over the Web and be easily discoverable to users across an array of networks, Srinivasan continued.

"You can't just rely on people coming to you," he said.

## CONTENT THAT'S MEANT TO BE SHARED

Buzzfeed, in its seven-year existence, has become influential for more than posting witty lists and amusing images of pets. The startup has reimagined the concept of social content as something that designed to be shared—the user as marketer and distributor—whether its a funny slide show, BuzzFeed's news reporting or even its longer-form writing called BuzzReads. The information is created because it will be passed around. Sharing is integral to the metric of whether that content really has demand.

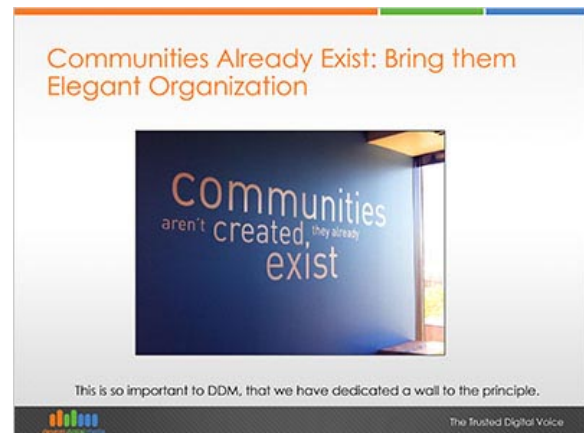
That is part of the demand of the site. People come to BuzzFeed to find something to share with others, founder Jonah Peretti explained in an [interview with tech blog PandoDaily](#).



This philosophy of sharing-first is taking hold at other news organizations as well, among them The Wall Street Journal. The paper's social media chief, Liz Heron, said BuzzFeed has altered collective thinking so that WSJ reporters are creating content that audiences will want to pass around, discuss and send on.

### **LISTEN FIRST, CREATE SECOND**

In some cases, media companies are monitoring the conversation on social channels before they create content. Nathan Gwilliam, director of strategic verticals for Deseret Digital Media, suggests keeping an eye on trending topics on Twitter and other social platforms in order to be aware of what's on peoples' minds. If a topic is generating enough conversation, enlist a journalist or photographer to report on it further and bring the audience to you.



The idea is that social media is a window into what people care about, and news companies want to be a part of the conversation.

This approach has helped Deseret gain an incredible number of social media followers – 500 million people across its social channels. Deseret is less intent on getting users to come to a social page focused on a media brand. Instead the company's verticals are organized around passions that Deseret has identified as being critical in the lives of its desired audience.

Then, in gauging success, Gwilliam said the single most important measure is how shareable the content is on these verticals.

“There are a lot of ways to fudge a page view number, but I have to really like an article to share it,” he said during a recent [American Press Institute workshop](#).

With social sharing also comes high search engine optimization and page views to the core site, according to Gwilliam.

### **SOCIAL AND MOBILE'S COMPLEMENTARY PAIRING**

The varied capabilities of social media pair in a powerful way with the growing fields of mobile technology and local news. A new term of art has even emerged — SoLoMo, for social local mobile. The connection comes from the fact that people are increasingly inclined to use mobile devices to access social media than they are desktop and laptop computers.

According to Nielsen, time spent on social media increased by 68 percent year over year on mobile devices versus a 24 percent increase on desktops. The market research firm Lightspeed Research reports that 73 percent of smartphone owners access social networks through apps at least once a day, according to the company's data.

## DATA AROUND FACEBOOK, TWITTER USAGE BY NEWS ORGANIZATIONS

How well are media companies taking advantage of social media to engage audiences? The research firm Frank N. Magid Associates in August 2012 examined about 260 media organization's social media practices. The Magid data found that by and large many news organizations are behind the curve.

On Facebook the study found, newspapers with more sizable followings were much more likely to ask questions and use "calls to action" that encouraged users to do something tangible. The sweet spot of Facebook posts is between five and 12, which researchers gauge is "frequent enough to gain notice but not so frequent as to bore readers." Only a small fraction of newspapers studied, though, hit the sweet spot.

Newspapers were more active on Twitter than Facebook, the Magid data found, but much of that activity was still fairly limited. On average, newspapers examined send 24.4 tweets a day. But a large majority of those tweets, the data revealed, continue to fall in the most basic category of use – standard news headlines with accompanying links back to the core website.

Twitter and other social media sites are beginning to work with news organizations to train them about how to use their platforms more effectively. Several companies have even hired staff dedicated to work with news publishers.

Mark Luckie, formerly The Washington Post's social media editor, is the creative content manager at Twitter. "If you are only talking about your own stories, you're missing part of the equation, to talk with other people, to see what other people are saying, and using that as feedback or possible story ideas," Luckie said in an interview with PBS MediaShift.

Twitter has also examined individual journalists' Twitter habits. According to the analysis, journalists who tweet 20 percent fewer links and 100 more mentions – a tweet which includes a fellow user's Twitter handle and is used to address





them or single them out – grow their following by 17 percent long term. Being a part of the conversation, rather than just trying to drive clicks, tends to boost followers and engagement with the account.

The conclusions of Magid and Twitter’s data are reinforced by others. [Dan Zarrella](#), social media scientist at market research firm HubSpot, has found that as self-reference increases on Twitter, follower count decreases. Zarrella has looked at millions of Twitter accounts to ascertain patterns around optimal engagement. Unlike Magid’s suggestions, Zarrella’s data suggests that almost without exception, there’s no such thing as tweeting too much.

“And if you’re wondering how often you should tweet, the answer is generally more than you currently are,” he wrote in his book “The Science of Marketing.”

Zarella also found that time of day makes a difference. People are most likely to share your tweet by retweeting it between 3 and 5 p.m. eastern time. Overall Twitter activity tends to be highest early in the business week, yet retweeting peaks on Fridays, according to his data.

### **SOCIAL’S PLACE IN A NEWS ORGANIZATION**

Not long ago, social media editors represented the newest new job title in many newsrooms. At some news organizations these staff members played an integral role in pushing content out to every social channel in which the media company had a presence. At other organizations, the role was more tied to advanced decision making around strategy and how best to optimize social in growing a brand’s reach and relevance.

There are certainly still social media editors and people at news outlets whose job is devoted to social media. That’s changing, however. [A heavily debated and widely circulated piece](#) by Rob Fishman – a former social media editor himself – argued that the role of a separate social media editor is now dead. “Once the province of a single point man, social media responsibilities are now frequently dispersed across the newsroom,” he wrote.

Fishman’s piece evoked a strong response, in both directions. Some critics strongly disagreed, insisting that many news organizations still need a dedicated individual to evangelize social media and lead staff in using it. Either way, it’s hard to argue with the reality that social media is becoming a bigger part of how news publishers need to engage. Editors size up how often reporters tweet. They consider how shareable an article is as they assign it. And webpages are fashioned with social media buttons so that this sharing is allowed to flourish.

Social media is, in other words, more fused into the very being of a news organization than it ever has before – and needs to be treated with this level of importance.

Brian Solis, a principal analyst at Altimeter Group and an author who has studied the effects of social media on business, argues that social platforms give companies the “gift of feedback and an opportunity to listen and equally engage.”

“Adoption of social media isn’t just important; it’s now becoming homogeneous in its incorporation into the enterprise,” he wrote on [his blog](#). “But what most fail to recognize is that social media is a series of channels that facilitate a more dynamic form of person-to-person connection and discovery through a powerful undercurrent of two-way engagement. Social isn’t just technology; it must become part of the corporate DNA.”

### SOCIAL MEDIA’S POWER TO ENGAGE

**Share Your Moment:** Richard Deitsch, a writer for Sports Illustrated, found a photo of two brothers celebrating Yale’s hockey national championship. The celebratory image gave him an idea. He tweeted a simple question to his 87,000 followers: How many of you have a photograph of the single best moment of your life? [Hundreds of photos were tweeted](#), showing everything from cancer patients beating their illnesses to weddings and births.

**You Provide the Caption:** National Geographic has a huge presence on Facebook. [Its main brand page](#) has upwards of 15 million likes, and the news organization is hugely successful in keeping fans engaged. A regular feature asks the public to caption National Geographic’s renowned photos; Recently, a photo of a red-eyed tree frog from Costa Rica generated 48,000-plus likes, nearly 3,000 comments, and 9,300 shares.

**The First Person Pronoun In Real Time:** The host of National Public Radio’s “Weekend Edition” pushed the limits of Twitter when he [live-tweeted the final days of his mother’s life](#). From her bedside in the ICU, Scott Simon sent widely retweeted messages explaining his thoughts and feelings. Some were sad, others funny and often messages showed his mixed emotions with his mother.

**Reality TV Journalism:** The Wall Street Journal introduced a video documentary series called [“Startup of the Year”](#) on the newspaper’s YouTube channel. The series matches 24 innovative startups with a team of world-class mentors and tracks them over the course of five months, during which the entrepreneurs are given weekly tasks and go through a series of eliminations.

**The Making of a Magazine:** [Dance Magazine has used Pinterest](#) in a number of creative ways to give readers behind-the-scenes access to the making of their print issues, and to showcase beautiful images. One of their boards features outtakes from a cover shoot. The photos, though not used in the newsstand issue, are still interesting and shareable for users.