HOW TO TELL STORIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

A Newsroom Survival Guide
Publishers still remain the ultimate destination for all things newsworthy—they just need a NEW EXECUTION STRATEGY.

Social networks and news aggregators have shaken the publishing landscape to its very core, permanently changing the face of publishing. Today, people can access all their news from a single place without having to bother with a stack of papers, magazines, numerous websites, and legions of popups.

How are publishers supposed to compete for attention when their audiences get their news from social networks?

Why would people ever leave the walled gardens of Facebook and Twitter? Luckily for publishers, 57 percent of consumers say they mostly see news while checking Facebook and social sites for other reasons. This cloud has a silver lining: People aren’t setting out to use social for news—they simply stumble upon news on social sites. Publishers still remain the ultimate destination for all things newsworthy—they just need a new execution strategy.

Audiences and content are evolving:

- **85%** of marketers are under pressure to create assets and deliver campaigns faster than ever before (IDC 2015)
- **73%** of marketers say creating more engaging content is their top priority for 2016 (Forrester Research)
- **28%** increase in audience engagement when exposed to both professional and user-generated content (comScore)
PUBLISHERS MUST create more engaging content to match that alluring, social network pacing.

Reporters need to work together quickly to publish the stories that draw in readers and make them come back. It might sound strenuous, but today’s technologies and audiences make this incredibly simple.

All you need to do is make your readers part of your team of reporters and editors. Not only will you break that next story with more authenticity and engagement, you’ll beat your competitors to the punch (and the deadline). Here’s how.

Create content faster  Engage your audience  Collaborate anytime, anywhere  Extend the life of your story
Create content faster

By far, the most pressing demand publishers are up against is the need for more content. A few quality, long-form stories a day aren’t enough to stay on readers’ radars. With strapped budgets and declining resources, this is a tall hurdle to clear for many publishers, regardless of a reporting team’s dedication, agility, and size. But with over 2.5 billion pieces of digital content uploaded every day, publishers are sitting on a gold mine of user-generated content. UGC is an underutilized, valuable asset that tells the most authentic visual stories. Car crash across town? Forest fire a few hours away? Your readers are already tweeting and posting Instagrams about it, and those posts stand head and shoulders above professionally crafted collateral. Technology makes it possible to search, filter, and publish social content from across the web for any story, from creative evergreen narratives to on-the-ground coverage. Tweeted reactions are the new norm for source commentary. Editors have the power to pull entire stories together, quickly constructing and managing everything in one central place. Crowdsourcing social posts weaves visual, engaging narratives from both your readers voices and your own editorial tone. Everyone can be a reporter and help your publication tell more stories as they happen, on the fly.

With over 2.5 billion pieces of digital content uploaded every day, publishers are sitting on a gold mine of user-generated content.
Using the hashtag #Ferguson, Mashable’s community of readers and reporters livetweeted the 2014 Ferguson protests. Mashable had quick and easy access to real-time social content directly from their audiences, helping them report breaking news using snapshots of protester experiences. With tagged social posts rolling in, editors crowdsourced the best ones into official, visual stories.

RESULT
Mashable produced more engaging, authentic, dynamic coverage that made readers want to follow along and revisit.

EXAMPLE
Mashable: Placing power in the hands of its community

Mashable: http://mashable.com/2014/08/18/ferguson-live-updates/#bqPvoOZy5aq9
Engage your audience

Suppose you have the best of both worlds: quality content in large quantities. Now what? Audiences want a place to engage with newsworthy content without the usual barrage of Kim Kardashian pop-ups spamming their Twitter feeds. After setting up a method for aggregating authentic, relevant content, you’ll need a strategy to bring it to life. Focus on what matters. Make it easy for viewers to see what they want, when they want it. Create an at-a-glance view of key events to help readers jump into any part of the narrative and share opinions. Encourage social sharing by letting people share specific parts of their favorite stories. By creating an option for your audience to voice their opinions within your story and across social channels, you’ll gain the social magnetism that will keep readers on your page longer. That’s pretty much the definition of loyalty. Your site has the potential to be as real-time and interactive as any social network, without all the added personal noise. Instead of beelining for Twitter, people will go straight to your site for the latest updates and interesting stories.

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Collaborate anytime, anywhere

What’s timely now could be completely stale in an hour. If your story goes up late (meaning any time other than in the moment), who’s going to read it? They’ve already gotten the memo on Facebook, seen the tweet, and posted it to Instagram. Creating more content is important, but consistency is an even more important challenge. And while publishers need to be cognizant of turning out fresh stories, they can’t afford to lose any quality along the way. This is where collaboration comes in handy.

The push for a more consistent stream of quality content doesn’t mean journalists’ voices aren’t needed. On the contrary, this new set of rules gives them more freedom and authenticity than ever before. With new technology, reporters and editors can collaborate with each other in real time, pulling together top stories from all sorts of disparate sources and locations. Reporters and broadcasters can report directly from the scene, while editors in the newsroom can curate and blend those posts to ensure timeliness and quality in the finished product. Publishers get a winning combination: dependable and real-time, holistic story coverage boasting a host of reliable voices, photos, and updates.
EXAMPLE

Quartz: Real-time collaboration

When Apple’s third-quarter earnings were reported in July of last year, Apple shares entered a sharp decline. Quartz editors, reporters, and data analysts worked together to report the real-time fluctuations in the hours after the report, drawing up charts and reordering pieces of the story with drag-and-drop tools as new information came to light.

RESULT

An illustrative, easily digestible timeline that incorporated real-time news coverage and made sense of the numbers, visually

Quartz: http://qz.com/460154/were-live-charting-apples-third-quarter-2015-earnings/
Extend the life of your story

The average tweet has a life span of 18 minutes before it disappears into a sea of fresh content, unlikely to ever be revisited again. Like social posts, stories are only relevant for so long. With so many publishers jumping on the real-time content bandwagon, readers have seemingly endless choices when deciding between new stories and old favorites. What if you could save and store those real-time moments for later?

What if it only took your team a couple of minutes and a few clicks? In extending the life of a story, you’re saving time on content creation and giving your audience an exciting opportunity to travel back in time to their favorite stories. Repurposing your most popular stories is a springboard for more audience engagement, building evergreen content from what you know already worked.

Instead of the average 2.6-day lifecycle, it’s possible to increase a story’s relevance and longevity weeks or even months after publication. Every publisher has this same opportunity—all it takes is a little brainstorming. Ask yourself: How can you make a story interesting to readers long after it’s considered news? Providing an innovative platform for people to engage with earlier content could be as simple as:

1. Repurposing your most popular older posts and connecting them to relevant and timely stories.
2. Creating a timeline of tweets posted specifically for your publication, a syndication of the week’s top articles or a visual Year in Review
3. Reusing your best content in a new visual experience (example: reference using best Instagram posts to quickly create an image carousel)


Get creative! Anything that lets users contribute to their favorite pieces again will help build a loyal readership. Give your audience an incentive to stay and look back on what stories resonated with them. Everyone loves a little nostalgia—that’s why #TBT is so popular.
News outlet Al Jazeera put together a Year in Review to recap 2015, bringing the year’s most popular stories back to life. Twitter account @AJStream asked users to submit their favorite hashtags, the social media campaigns they tweeted solidarity with, as well as the stories they thought the publication should have covered.

RESULT
Al Jazeera built a central space where readers could relive the moments, memories, and stories that resonated with them most this past year.
Publishers aren’t going anywhere. It’s just time to start telling stories differently.

The journalist’s voice is, and always will be, critical to reporting the news. In order to meet the ravenous demand for constant, hot-off-the-press stories, publishers must broaden their definition of publishable content and allow readers to aid storytelling efforts. Drive audience engagement with compelling content, collaborate across the newsroom to bring stories together, and develop strategies to tailor past narratives to the present—weeks, months, or years after it originally went live. In-depth, long-form stories are still well and good, but the power-packed value readers want now requires a full, digital experience. These tactics make for a smooth transition from a one-dimensional publication to a multifaceted, all-consuming experience (and arguably less labor). The returns are enormous—more quality content, more time on-site, and a stronger connection with the readers who keep you afloat. Publishers will always be the first source for the news people can count on, but it’s time to let readers hold the proverbial pen.

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