



FACEBOOK'S 'FEED-POCALYPSE': GET OVER THE DOOM AND GLOOM

Social media specialist Kryshla Salaris explains how, contrary to popular belief, Facebook's algorithm change can spell benefits for small businesses.

Recent events – such as Mark Zuckerberg's much documented appearance in front of the US Congress – have somewhat eclipsed Facebook's 11 January announcement of an algorithm change. The platform, according to Zuckerberg, has shifted from "helping you find relevant content to helping you have more meaningful social interactions".

In the cluttered universe of shared content, this was good news for users – no more endless scrolling through sensationalist posts about 'what happened next (which) will blow your mind(!)'. But for small businesses and publishers who rely on Facebook for marketing and content sharing, the algorithm change was looked at as a 'feed-pocalypse', another blow to their already flagging organic reach.

Once the most important indicators of a successful post, 'likes' and 'shares' will no longer be the basis on which Facebook promotes content on newsfeeds. Instead, posts that 'perform well' will be the ones that spark a real dialogue as opposed to emojis and sharing by way of tagging. Kryshla Salaris, social media manager and founder of Shall We Social, believes that, ultimately, the change is a good thing.

"The old algorithm used to equate a large number of follow-through comments with value and engagement. Now it's a lot smarter than that, more discerning about what meaningful interaction entails. It notices valuable content and is preventing businesses and pages from churning out forgettable, dime-a-dozen content. This is great because it means companies need to challenge themselves to be more personal, more real. So if you can publish content that really means something, you'll be rewarded for it. That's guaranteed."

Shall We Social is a Melbourne-based provider of social media services, primarily to small businesses and not-for-profit organisations and, although Salaris remains positive about the change, she understands that the fear of losing audience isn't entirely unfounded. "I have seen small business owners struggling with a drop in their Facebook page reach; they're not getting as many interactions and likes or engagement on their posts. But the situation is definitely not hopeless."

Aside from her work with clients, Salaris provides one-on-one social media training for entrepreneurs who can't afford a budget for social media. Talking to grow, she shares some of the principles and approaches she swears by.

Budget isn't everything

Larger businesses with a social media (SM) manager or a dedicated team will, if they haven't already, tap into the ultimate benefits of the algorithm change. An SM manager who is up-to-date with the changes will know what the best content requires and deliver it, but must go through a longer approval process to comply with an overall style of communication, resulting in a more professional, formal tone.

In contrast, small businesses can be far more agile with their content. "If you are the face of your business, you can just get in front of a camera, share your story and show that you're passionate about your work, and that's a huge advantage," she says. "The ones who do it well are doing exactly that. They're willing to take a risk in terms of what they're putting out there. It's about a conversation starter, so it doesn't have to be perfect, and sometimes it's the imperfect content that can spark a fun conversation."

People tend to be so nervous about making mistakes, but mistakes can be more real and relatable, and the audience is generally forgiving about things like that. There's an appeal in that level of in-the-moment content."

Plan to be spontaneous

Smaller businesses could take longer to recover from the change, due not to social media budget constraints, but because of limited time. Especially with entrepreneurs, the struggle with time means that often social media is at the bottom of a daily to-do list. "They may post something randomly when they have a little time, and they often don't seem to think it through. That's where they run into trouble in not seeing their targeted page reach or where they see a drop in page engagement."

This is where the contradictory concepts of spontaneity and planning go hand in hand – the whole daunting process becomes less overwhelming when broken down and scheduled. It is possible to schedule content to be published at a peak time when you know your audience is online and there's a greater chance of the post being viewed and interacted with. It allows you to look at content objectively so that you're not swamping your audience with similar messages too regularly. So it makes sense to map it out rather than free-styling."

While being a firm believer in scheduled content, Salaris points out times it went horribly wrong.

"Just after the Bourke Street Mall incident [in January 2017 when a car was driven into pedestrians in the Melbourne CBD resulting in six fatalities and over 30 wounded] – there were posts going out that had obviously been pre-scheduled, but should have been pulled. It wasn't that the content was inappropriate; the problem was the timing. So, essentially, you don't simply schedule content and leave it at that. Before each post is about to be published, take stock of what's happening to make sure the post is still relevant (or maybe something has just changed in your business), and that it isn't inappropriate or insensitive. Postponing or removing scheduled content is as easy as the scheduling itself, so it pays to make sure that the content isn't coming out at a time when it wouldn't be appreciated."

Facebook Live is your friend

Bearing in mind that 85 percent of the video content on Facebook is viewed on mute

and videos with captions are watched for 12 percent longer, captions have more value than ever before. And it's no longer a cumbersome process – Facebook Live videos come with the option of automatic closed captions; simply enable the function in Settings. No matter how rough, a video that has some great content will always get the audience's attention. The important thing is to be real, and they'll appreciate you for it.

Stop using a one-reaction-fits-all

As with follower numbers, 'likes' are a bit of a vanity metric. In looking to promote meaningful interaction, Facebook's message to content marketers is that simply notching up 'likes' will no longer be enough to make sure their content is promoted. That's not to say they don't matter. You may be publishing some great content, but it loses some value if you're not certain that people have seen it.

Also, while 'likes' and 'shares' are important, they should be looked at in relation to the objective of the post. For example, if you've only got three 'likes', but more than 100 people clicking the link and checking out the website, that's great because you've generated some action."

Don't forget existing fans

Spend time responding and conversing with your existing followers rather than running the risk of disengaging them by always keeping your eye only on follower numbers. If you've got 100 people following your page, make sure that you appreciate them – they could be 100 really loyal followers who end up becoming brand advocates for you.

Salaris concludes that, sometimes, it's as simple as just being present, responsive and a good online citizen. It counts to see information about the poster such as 'very responsive to messages' or 'usually responds immediately'. People looking to get information set a lot of store by these response times. It doesn't do to post and run; you have to make sure you are available to engage with your audience when your content goes out.

"It's easy to look at it as a time-consuming venture, but if people are looking at your content and posting questions on it, that's fantastic, because it's an opportunity to tell them more about your product and company, or simply to build trust and relationships. Sometimes, just the simple act of connection is enough." ●