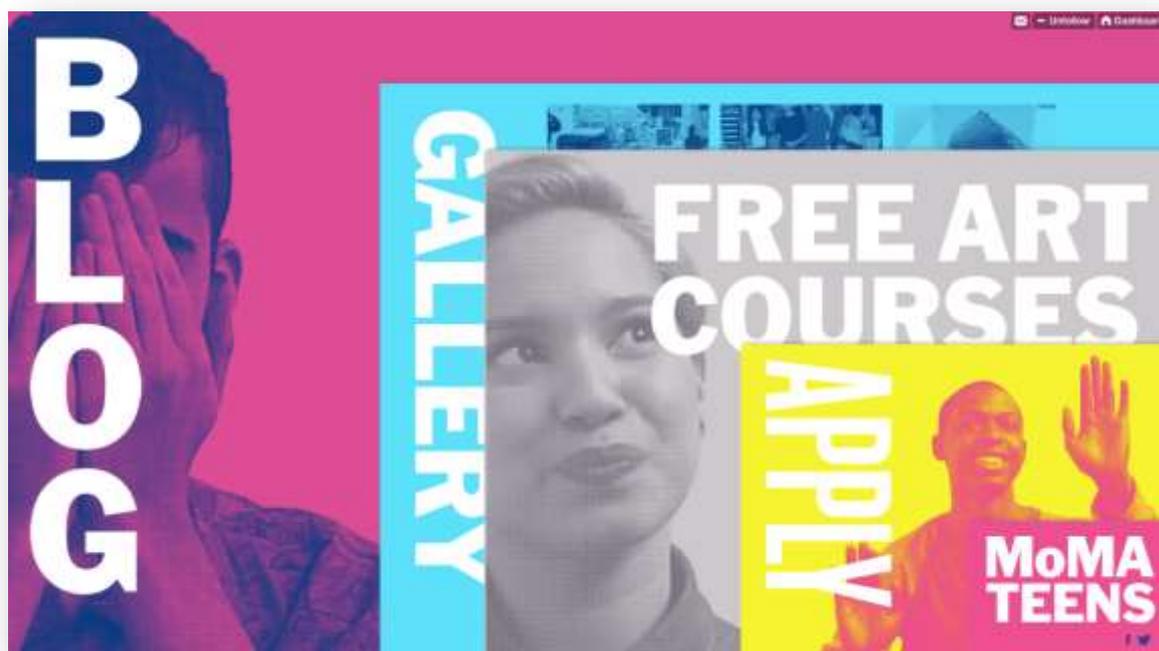


Finding an authentic voice with Tumblr



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A case study of teens.moma.org

The Museum of Modern Art in New York is in the enviable position of being an instantly recognisable name, regardless of whether you're an arts aficionado or not. Unsurprisingly the organisation also has a formidable online presence with large followings across many social networks. Key to success with digital activity is understanding which platforms are favoured by each of your target audiences and for teenagers and young adults, the online world is all about blogging platform Tumblr. In August 2013 after considerable research and development, MoMA launched 'MoMA Teens' a Tumblr blog that aims to introduce more teenagers to the world of MoMA.

Calder Zwicky, Associate Educator, Teen and Community Programs at MoMA explained the original impetus to set up a specific teens Tumblr:

"It's important that we have a teen centric online presence and we strive to have it reflect the dynamic style of what we do with our range of on-site teen programs. The goal with our online activity isn't necessarily to bring kids into our physical space because most of them that we connect with won't be physically near enough to come, the larger goal is to express the reality of what MoMA teen programming is all about. MoMA is so well known and comes with a whole load of expectations but MoMA Teens is completely different and in a sense we look to create a separate identity, while coming under the MoMA umbrella."

The team have had a separate Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/momateens> for a while and this has proved to be successful, with over 12,000 likes and high engagement on posts. However, more recently Calder had noticed that the audience for the page was getting older and the decision was made to look at using Tumblr. A local design firm called Arch & Loop helped them to set up the page so that it provided the necessary content but once set up, the day-to-day management is undertaken by 'teen editors' who have built up a relationship with MoMA through its classes and courses. Calder is clear that for it to work effectively, it has to be run by teens themselves, "Where possible you have to involve the audience you're trying to reach in the content production otherwise there is no authenticity. As a 32 year old I'm not the target audience so the kinds of things I would post would be unlikely to work."

They have no strict policy on exactly what content is shared through Tumblr although Calder is conscious that it shouldn't appear as overtly promoting the museum. "We post a mixture of original content and third party content because we don't want it to become just an advertising site," he said.

One of the current editors of the Tumblr is 19-year-old Alya Albert, who has been working with Calder and his team on various projects since she enrolled on one of their courses aged 17. It is clear that Alya is both passionate about MoMA and completely understands the organisational ethos. She explains how she came to be involved:

“I was attracted to their programming, specifically their non-traditional approach to arts education and I couldn't resist the weird course name. My first class was called A Class With No Name, in which we, the students, were given free reign of the curriculum, discussion, and even budget. I was hooked immediately, and upon the recommendation of my first teaching artist, Mark Joshua Epstein, I applied for their Cross-Museum Collective. At this point much of my life became centered around MoMA, all of my friends where my classmates and other alumni, I jumped at any opportunity Mark or Calder offered, and it greatly changed the trajectory of my career aspirations. This eventually led to another, semester of CMC, a couple of articles for the MoMA Inside/Out blog, and a spot in MoMA e!T3, their first ever digital advisory board, where we worked to create the online teen art course that MoMA is now offering. Because I had been working closely with Calder on the digital side, and contributing to the new Tumblr, he asked if I would be interested in being the curator.”

Alya doesn't just have a great understanding of what makes MoMA tick, she is also, like many teens, completely at home on Tumblr as she explains, “I jumped into this because I have personally been using Tumblr for two years, and it plays a big role in exposing me to art, media and culture as a whole which, before I began blogging, was just too laborious to seek out. Tumblr is instant visual stimulation, and I think that's why it brings art and teens into a happy union.” Although Calder keeps an eye on the blog, Alya is responsible for the content and she explained how she goes about deciding what to post, “I try to sift it through some questions. Depending on what the content is, I consider first if they would want to see this, or rather do they want this on their blog, because on Tumblr likes are nice, but reblogs are better. Usually it goes along the lines of: Would I want this on my blog? Would my friends want this on their blog? Are they learning anything from this? If not is it funny? Different? At the very least relevant? How does this connect to “art”? How does it correlate with what MoMA introduced me to? And lastly, would MoMA want this up here?”

The strategy for teens.moma.org appears to be paying off as only two months after launch the blog has 2,500 followers. Calder is clear that it's a work in progress and they are keen for it to grow organically as a result of genuine audience engagement with the content. In terms of measuring success, Calder believes it's important not to get too hung up on statistics: “Numbers are secondary to finding ways to create a true picture of what we're doing for teens here at the Museum”.

Additional information:

<http://teens.moma.org/>