

To 'like' or not to 'like'? Is that the new question?

Ron Evans explores how arts and cultural organisations are adjusting their outlook on social media measurement

‘How is our social media doing?’ It is a question (hopefully) asked in thousands of arts organisation board meetings each month. The marketing director usually has prepared some statistics on the number of new ‘likes’ to the Facebook page, and the number of new Twitter followers, along with an explanation of ‘a new social network we’re trying out, called (fill in new social network here)’. These answers usually satisfy the team for this meeting, and we are on to other agenda items. But what is really happening with your social media? Is it worth the time you’re putting into it? Are you happy with the results you’ve achieved? And by what criteria are you measuring those results?

To answer some of these questions, in 2010 I created a measurement system called *Social Media Audit*. Organisations in a community receive a personalised report scoring the current use of their online marketing channels. The organisations then attend a half-day workshop covering best practices, and then are scored again at an undisclosed time sometime in the next three to six months (since they never know just when we will be scoring again, this ‘secret shopping’ leads to increased consistency in implementing the new methods they have been taught). Several communities have now been through the process, and I have picked up some interesting trends along the way.

Positive trends in arts organisation social media use

- **Arts organisations have grown more savvy about the technical aspects of using online marketing.** This is likely driven by the fact that arts administrators at all levels have had time to use social media in their personal lives, and this has lowered the barrier to participation. This is also leading to increased experimentation with new social media channels.
- **More organisations are assigning a dedicated person to manage social media content.** The most successful organisations have a person who is there for the long run doing this work. It may be tempting to just use interns, but the constant turnover of interns tends to slow down social media momentum.
- More photographic, video, and other media content is being captured on easy-to-use mobile devices and shared on social channels. Audiences are now much

more likely to see rehearsal photos, a quick back-stage video clip, or other media piece shared on social media. Videos inspire the most engagement with social media audiences, followed by photos, and then links to content on outside pages.

Negative trends in arts organisation social media use

- **Many organisations have not developed the skills to decide if a new social media channel is a good fit to their organisation.** We are all attracted to the new, hot thing. But we need to think about why we want to be on a new channel, how it may benefit us, how will we measure that benefit, and how are we going to keep it going. Consider each new social media channel like getting a new puppy. It is OK to have five puppies (and quite good fun) but they all need to be fed and exercised every day. If you can’t effectively run five social media channels, you should shut some down. There is no shame in doing this – keep what is working and ‘find the rest a good home’.
- **Consistency in updating online marketing channels continues to be a large challenge.** ‘Burst posting’ is rampant – a lot of posts for a short period of time, and then ages of nothingness. You know you should exercise every day, but it is difficult to get in the habit, isn’t it? Most social media problems can be fixed with 1000+ connections, a consistent, relevant posting schedule, and quick personalised response to patron comments or questions.
- **Organisations are often hampered by staff members who don’t want to be cute, funny, or interesting in any way on social media because of fear of hurting the brand.** I have not run across one patron who has felt that a purposeful social media post made an organisation look bad. But this fear continues to hurt many organisations, especially symphony, opera, and ballet companies. You have heard this before, but social media cannot be treated the same way as traditional marketing. If you do not allow the voice to be playful, informative, funny, and especially non-marketing, it is likely that you will continue to see mediocre results likes, shares, and other interactions.

Focus on interactions as a guide to what to post

It seems like just yesterday that the number of ‘fans’ or followers your pages had was the only measurement game in town. Today, it is all about interactions – ‘likes’,



Cartoon: Jason Love www.jasonlove.com/funny-cartoons

(Left) A perfect social post for a jazz organisation.

shares, comments, re-tweets, etc. When you think about it, having a lot of bodies at a fundraising event is not what is important – it is how much they give. On social media these days, it is what your connections do with your content that is the best measurement of engagement, because it is easily quantifiable, can be adjusted through experimentation, and brings you the benefit of visibility to new eyeballs. You can see how many interactions you've received though Facebook Insights for example, but go deeper – which specific posts got the most interactions? What made those posts so special? My research shows that posts that have the highest interactions:

- Communicate or inspire feelings of strong emotion,
- make us smile or laugh in some way,
- ask us to 'share' or 'like' to show our support for a specific cause or idea,
- allow us to be distracted by whatever else I should be doing at work by something that is interesting, witty, or just plain cool and weird.

And 'marketing' posts about tickets that are on sale now and going fast for Friday night? Not even on the radar. In general, *the more of a marketing voice or message a post has, the less interaction response that post will receive.* This is a 'gift of the magi' hard proof to accept. But the

interaction measurements do not lie.

So experiment. Be risky. Post a cartoon about your arts genre. Poke fun at yourself. Shoot a video of yourself talking about what opening night meant to you, arts organisation marketing person, and post it (and artistic staff, let them do it). Look at the interactions, and go with that measurement. Let the likes, comments, and shares guide your experiments – if you are getting them, what you are doing is ok artistically, and your social media connections will interact and appreciate you in new, wonderful, and measurable ways. ■

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