

COLUMNS

5 emerging trends in digital publishing and content

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By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

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Digital publishers have a greater array of tools to play with than ever before, but a handful of trends will help creative teams produce content that truly stands out and keeps audiences engaged.

Get ready for Facebook Instant Articles

The launch of Instant Articles was one of the hottest talking points in 2015, and Facebook just opened it to all publishers.

The mobile-first platform promises Facebook users a better content experience with articles that load ten times faster than the standard mobile Web.

With the growth of distributed content, media properties will have to adapt to publishing directly to platforms that they do not control.

Publishers' relationships with social media platforms, especially Facebook, will have a huge effect on how and where audiences consume their content.

Consumers have become accustomed to articles that load quickly and painlessly, and it is going to be impossible to resist the lure of Instant Articles and similar direct publishing opportunities.

No host, no problem DIY video gets super simple

This year, more publishers will embrace producing do-it-yourself (DIY) content.

The majority of successful food and DIY videos are now hostless, shot from overhead showing hands only.

With 38.8 million likes on Facebook, BuzzFeed's Tasty channel leads the pack, posting recipes for mouthwatering treats several times a day. The clips are short and overlaid with easy-to-follow text instructions, so they work great on mobile. And since it is all on Facebook, videos can be shared with friends in seconds.

Hostless video is a jackpot for content creators: it is fast and easy to produce, and there is no need for an expensive set or a famous face.

With relatively low production costs, hostless video is also easy to scale, making it possible to deliver a steady

stream of fresh content.

Major food networks have been slow to adjust to this quick and dirty style of production and they are missing out on a huge potential audience. Budding chefs and DIY enthusiasts just want to learn something new. They do not care about who is in front of the camera.

Short and sweet, but satisfying

Shortform video, such as the DIY clips described above, will continue to dominate consumers' screens.

Video producers are ditching the one- to two-minute standard in favor of much snappier durations of 30 to 75 seconds, and successful viral videos will be truncated to 30 seconds or less.

Consumer appetite for snackable content is not going to wane, so publishers have to deliver videos that are fun and engaging, but do not demand too much time and focus.

The challenge for publishers will be to pack those bite-sized chunks with enough flavor to keep people entertained.

Caption struggle is real

Native Facebook videos autoplay on mute, allowing users to decide when to turn the sound on. This is less intrusive for consumers, but without audio to set the tone and pique interest, content creators have a tough nut to crack.

A line or two of text has to communicate enough information to grab a viewer's attention. The right words will drive engagement, but audiences will scroll past videos that seem boring or akin to click-bait.

The fun part is that text captions leave room for uncertainty. If done right, hinting at the content of a video can be more intriguing than explaining it.

Stock in a rut? Original artwork is the way to go

Stock photography is a relic, and it is time to let it go. It is possible to find high-quality stock images, but most are so hilariously bad that they have inspired memes and parodies.

Stock photos seem like an easy fix, but people can instinctively tell when they are looking at generic images.

Shifting focus to original artwork empowers content teams to flex their creative muscles. And it helps build a consistent brand, teaching consumers to associate a publisher with a recognizable visual style.

Illustrations produced by in-house designers not only lend an authentic touch to storytelling, but they also tend to perform better with both consumers and platforms.

WE ARE WELL into 2016, and these trends point to an exciting year ahead as publishers continue to vie for attention.

With so many opportunities for creative experimentation, content creators who are willing to be bold, innovative and authentic are going to have a fantastic time.

Which of these trends are you most excited about? Let me know on Twitter.

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