

COLUMNS

Flipboard and Pinterest drive interest-driven content and customized newsfeeds. Is it enough?

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"The fundamental stumbling block of the social Web to date is that it has conflated social graphs with interest graphs. But in reality, who you know does not always translate into what you will like." David Rogers, author of The Digital Transformation Playbook

Unlike Twitter and Facebook, Pinterest and Flipboard at their core are focused on individual user interests not on who they know.

While Pinterest serves as a search and discovery service and Flipboard acts as a personal magazine, both have grown legions of users 100 million and 82 million active users, respectively who gravitate towards the applications because the content is relevant and personalized to them specifically based on where their interests lie.

These platforms are strong aggregators of interest-driven content and are used by brands and publishers as drivers of qualified traffic to be properly monetized and converted.

In fact, Pinterest is known for its users having the highest per order average when they shop.

Flip side

While both Pinterest and Flipboard succeed at targeting users by interest, thus far they have not delivered on the promise of creating vibrant communities that come together based on shared interests.

Instead, they operate more like broadcast television experiences with single-file content pushed into a scrolling newsfeed.

With consumers calling for more innovation with their social experiences represented by the popularity of ad blockers indicating a desire for greater relevance there is a demand for interest-driven, customized newsfeeds that will evolve to new forms of multi-format, content-driven experiences that draw in consumers as well as relevant advertisers and publishers.

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other platforms with a single channel newsfeed architecture keep twisting the knobs on the content consumers see in their newsfeeds, which is usually just making sure they see content from

close friends or people they follow most religiously.

But these algorithm tweaks do not fully adjust the newsfeed to align with user preferences. Often times, people "Like" posts they do not really like.

Algorithms are flawed because the intelligence behind them is inherently human employees at the social network giants are the ones deciding what data you see and what they can do with that data which in the long run, only benefits them and not the consumer, brand or publisher.

But, first, let us go back to what consumers really seek in a social experience.

Ante social

First, they are overwhelmed by the amount of apps vying for their attention.

At the same time, they are tired of cluttered newsfeeds on most social platforms that are littered with disorganized search results, irrelevant ads and information choice overload.

With all the innovation in social networks and online content distribution, many consumers wonder, "Why can't I have an intelligent newsfeed based on my specific interests?"

These consumers want personalized, premium, desirable content from trusted providers and curators that is organized by relevance, context and convenience.

Most importantly, they want a newsfeed that is based on their specific interests, not the interests of others a newsfeed that does not care about who you know or what they "Like," but one where content is shared based upon what they are interested in.

Interest-driven, personalized newsfeeds benefit advertisers and publishers as much they help consumers.

First, this approach allows brands to immediately target communities of people who are already interested in their product category a captive audience that can be wooed with desirable content, not in-your-face ads.

Hard-core product shilling on social networks is not successful for most brands, but delivering valuable how-to and educational content is typically welcomed with open arms.

Furthermore, publishers have struck out by just putting content on mobile apps.

With an interest-driven newsfeed, publishers have one central place where they can contribute content and consumers can access it immediately and easily without wading through excessive clutter or irrelevant content.

Ultimately, this approach makes it much easier and cost-effective for both publishers and brands to find those enthusiast consumers most likely to embrace what they have to offer.

A new type of interest-driven network will emerge essentially mobile ecosystems where members create, join, and contribute to user-curated community destinations based on their interests, not on who they know.

Communities on this ecosystem achieve a new level of relevance featuring curated collections of news and lifestyle content built around members inspirations.

Selected content flows to members' personalized newsfeeds, enabling micro-communities with shared passions to form around mutual affinities. This allows consumers to tune out unnecessary social clutter and instantly connect only with what they care about.

To prepare for this approach, brands and publishers need to evolve their approach to social media marketing.

Likeminded

First, they must go beyond the "Like" to drive a more fruitful path to ROI. They must create meaningful metrics that focus how engaged consumers actually are, rather than counting passive "Likes."

Observed actions such as time spent, made a post, commented or shared content are more meaningful metrics.

Deeper social behavior requires a more committed user willing to invest time and effort, making behavioral metrics good indicators of customer affinity for a brand.

Or better yet, focus on real value-creating activities such as Web site traffic and conversions.

Remember: not all consumers are equal. The ones that really care about your brand matter most and will show it with actions.

Next, they need to focus on interest and relevance when targeting consumers.

Rather than casting a wide net, they must focus on reaching a better-qualified community based on interests.

BRANDS MUST create content that offers something of value to the consumer.

The content should not be about the brand. Rather, it should offer advice or ideas on how to approve aptitude or an experience with a specific interest.

Lastly, they should take advantage of the communication channels that social media enables, on both a one-to-one and one-to-many basis to help foster a community of people with shared interests that aligns with their brand.

This creates a win-win situation for brands, publishers and consumers alike a perfect storm where users connect around relevant content and community, content creators have confidence that their content is seen by their most desired consumers, and brands can better reach an engaged community composed of their ideal target audience.

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