

MARKETING

UGC, influencers boost storytelling on visual-centric social media

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Image courtesy of Dolce & Gabbana

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK Long-form video is effective at engaging consumers on a brand's site or social channels, but the expense of producing this content is causing marketers to seek alternatives.

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With film production a time consuming prospect, brands are turning to influencers or shorter, snackable clips to get the same effect on a smaller budget, according to panelists from Four Seasons, Tacori and Olapic speaking at Luxury Interactive 2016 on Oct. 17. Beyond video, brands are turning to outside parties to help tell their story on social media, requiring careful curation and management to ensure that the message matches the brand.

"It used to be, we had our videos very high production it was our television commercial, it was our campaign film very elevated, extremely high collection value," said Alessa Martin, director of marketing for Tacori.

"And what we're seeing is, that's fantastic, but we also then have Snapchat, so we're trying to find the place in the middle that is not just this surface level story that allows us to dig deeper into telling different kinds of stories... We're really trying to be less precious about our video, because being precious is very very expensive," she said.

Selling a story

The panelists during the "Not Just for Entertainment Hard Social Selling" session agreed that marketers are migrating away from Pinterest as they see declining engagement, favoring alternative channels to provide top of funnel inspiration or calls to action.

Going where consumers are, brands are turning to other platforms, leveraging a combination of their own content, influencer posts and user-generated content to present a complete picture.

Different channels serve different purposes. Four Seasons' Olivia van Eyk explained that the hotel chain uses Facebook to push direct campaigns with a link, while Instagram is more of a space for top level inspiration, since consumers are less inclined to click and leave the app.

One place that Four Seasons is investing in is influencers, whom it looks to for video content and blog posts. The hospitality group looks beyond travel bloggers to those in the fashion, beauty and lifestyle space to tell stories of its

own lifestyle.



Post by influencer @margoandme for Four Seasons

When working with content producers who are not within the brand, managing the relationship is imperative.

Four Seasons briefs influencers on its brand to ensure that the content fits its image. Ms. Martin said Tacori works with the same individuals a number of times, establishing a connection.

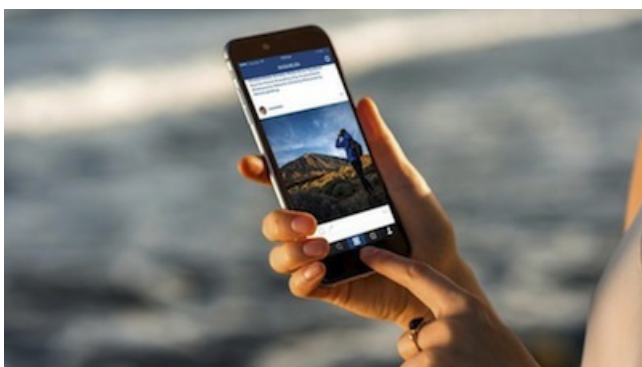
Beyond influencers, brands are seeing success with spotlighting consumer posts.

With the proliferation of engagement ring selfies, Tacori encourages its followers to look beyond the generic via UGC campaigns. Four Seasons encourages its properties to spur UGC through the promotion of a hotel-specific hashtag, whether on an amenity or as part of a contest.

The hotel chain also keeps things in focus with its visual education series.

"Focus on Four Seasons" will offer tips to take the perfect photograph and curate the best images captured at Four Seasons hotels by professional photographers and the average Instagramming consumer alike. Meeting consumers on a platform they enjoy in a rewarding fashion helps keeps a brand visible and attractive to consumers ([see story](#)).

Panelists shared the view that social content can benefit from a boost.



Instagram's new algorithm is making it harder for organic content to reach eyes

"If you're not putting dollars behind your post these days, people are not seeing it," said Ari Wolfe, account director for North America at Olapic.

However, paid may be best for certain forms of content. Ms. van Eyk noted that while Four Seasons does run promoted posts, UGC sees better results on organic than paid.

Personal touch

With social media blurring the boundaries between brand and consumer, marketers need to consider the ways in which they communicate with individuals directly.

Olapic's Mr. Wolfe said that in his experience, most consumers are thrilled to be contacted by a brand wishing to use their post. However, while consumers are for the most part aware of CRM, he said this approach has the potential to come across as creepy.

Twitter's fast pace and visibility make it ideal for CRM, and Burberry and Louis Vuitton have accounts purely for customer service. This potential is largely untapped, however, with many brands seeking to maintain distance and exclusivity on the platform despite its function being designed for precisely the opposite ([see story](#)).

Panelists pointed out that one-to-one communication has to serve a purpose and be of value for the recipient.

For Tacori, since it does not operate its own retail outlets for its bridal, social media provides a means for the brand to hear from and interact with consumers.

"Nothing is too personal For us, as long as we're serving them something that's relevant, they want to hear from us," Tacori's Ms. Martin said.

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