

MARKETING

WeChat Channels: Will the new feature disrupt short-video incumbents?

February 13, 2020



Consumers on WeChat. Image credit: PARKLU via Luxury Society

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Some people may have noticed a new feature in their WeChat "Discover" tab called "Channels." With WeChat Channels, users can now explore media accounts, and videos from stars and bloggers all from users who are not in their WeChat contact list.

What does this mean for the industry?

At the start of the year, **WeChat** founder Allen Zhang (Zhang Xiaolong) [reviewed the way WeChat official accounts had developed over the years.](#)

Mr. Zhang said his one big regret was how Public Accounts ended up being dominated by long-form content such as articles.

"We can't expect everyone to write articles every day," he said. "In terms of official accounts, we lack a vehicle for everyone to create."

With the launch of WeChat Channels, users now have the ability to create sub-one-minute videos or photos with a short blurb and for public distribution.

Traditionally seen as a rather closed ecosystem, Channels will open WeChat up as a platform and allow users to discover and follow other users. They will also be able to like and comment publicly on videos on Channels as well.

At present, videos can only be played within the Channels feed itself users are not able click through to view the video on a separate landing page.

The platform also does not support pausing or scrubbing functions yet. However, users can share the said content with friends via the Moments timeline and chat functions.

As the feature is still in beta testing, only certain users are able to view this function at the moment.

Users in some regions will see the WeChat Channels feature listed under "Discover" after updating their applications to WeChat 7.0.10 for iOS or Android. The rest of us will just have to sit tight and wait for the next phase of rollouts.

How can I create a WeChat channel?

Because Channels on WeChat are currently undergoing internal testing, publishing privileges have only been extended to key opinion leaders (KOLs).

But for those really keen on starting a Channel, WeChat is accepting applicants for beta testing via channels@tencent.com.

Interested parties will have to include a personal introduction such as your WeChat account, along with a personal introduction or an introduction to your institution, as well as proof of his or her influence.

WeChat will then confirm whether or not the applicants have been approved for internal testing privileges based on an evaluation of the applicant's creative ability.

At present, both individuals and businesses can apply. However, interested users should note that only one Channel can be activated for each WeChat account.

Additionally, it is not possible to change a Channel once it has been tied to a specific WeChat account.

After the application is approved, you can create a channel by going to "My Channel" on the "Channels" personal page.

What is the point of Channels on WeChat?

According to third-party research, the short video industry was valued at \$6.7 billion (RMB 46.71 billion) in 2018, with a growth rate of 744.7 percent, and projected to be worth \$28.7 billion (RMB 200 billion) by 2021.

Short videos are undoubtedly a shiny new toy capturing the public's imagination.

In the short video industry, big names that come to mind are Douyin and Kuaishou.

Compared to these other video platforms, WeChat's core advantage stems from its influence in the realm of messaging.

As the largest messaging app in China, WeChat had more than 1.15 billion monthly active users in 2019, which suggests that a function such as Channels could experience high amounts of traffic in its initial stages. But will it be able to retain these users?

The truth is, WeChat has been experimenting with the short video format in recent years.

In December 2018, it launched a Moments video function with WeChat version 7.0. Users were able to view video updates from friends within their Moments feeds for a limited period of 24 hours similar to Instagram's Stories function.

In June 2019, WeChat and Weishi launched the 30-second Moments function. Later in August, WeChat teamed up with Kuaishou to launch Kanyikan.

Following that, WeChat started internally testing a video creation function for public accounts.

Throughout this process, WeChat has been trying and encouraging users to create short videos and getting them used to this content format.

With all that in mind, the new WeChat Channels feature seems like a great leap forward.

Being able to access video content directly inside the Discover section, right below Moments, attracts more attention. It almost feels like WeChat embedded a short video app embedded within the application.

Of course, it remains to be seen whether WeChat can successfully combat short video platforms such as Douyin and Kuaishou.

WHILE THERE may be some focus on the short video format, the presentation of content on WeChat Channels is not limited to video.

The new function promotes short-form content in general, including news, articles and other easy-to-consume content formats.

In this sense, it is quite different from other dedicated short video platforms.

Will this mark a new chapter for WeChat and content marketing for brands?

Only time will tell.

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