Get started: Deploy Your Fans

We know that social media users are motivated by seeing what's important to their friends and family. We also know that Facebook's algorithm favors posts made by individuals over posts made by pages. It stands to reason that encouraging our followers to share our posts with their networks is a good way to get those posts seen, increasing our reach and ultimately growing our audience.

But how? Tacking "please share this" onto each post isn't the answer. (But sometimes it actually works!) Here are some steps to take.

START WITH DATA: The first step is understanding what posts from your page your users already share. Download a few months' worth of your Facebook Insights. In the Excel file, look at the tab called Lifetime Talking About This, which has a column dedicated to shares. Sort the spreadsheet by that column, and start by focusing on the top 20 percent. You can do a similar look at retweets on Twitter. Look for patterns in topics (do users tend to share leisure information? crime?). But also look for patterns in these factors:

- Emotion. How do the posts make people feel? Outraged? Proud? Excited?
- Reputation. What does sharing the posts say about the person doing the sharing? Are they knowledgeable about the news? Snarky? Good citizens? Advocates?
- Voice. Does the brand have an easily discernible personality? How are the posts written?

Then take a scan through the bottom 20 percent — the posts that aren't shared much or at all — and ask those same questions.

THEN LOOK AT THE ACTUAL SHARES: Go to a post that had high share numbers. Click on the number of shares, and you'll be able to see the shares that were public (as opposed to private to the user's network). What did the users say when they shared the post, and what can you learn about their motivation for sharing?

122	Top Comments ▾
60 shares	19 Comments
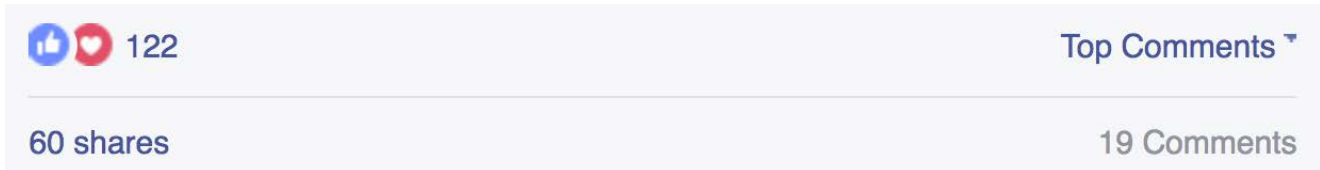
Also look at your website analytics. For stories with high social referrals, take a look at the posts that prompted the clicks. (If your analytics tool doesn't give those to you, try pasting the story's url in the search bars on Facebook and Twitter.) What can you learn about the posts that drove people to care about the content?

ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS: Talk them through with your colleagues. Compare what you learned to what you think you know about your audience.

Our followers like to share posts that are about
_____
_____

Our followers like to share posts that make them feel
_____
_____

Our followers like to share posts that make them look this way to their own networks
_____
_____

Try this on your own

Here's a list to consider when thinking about whether a post is likely to be shared, based on what has worked for other newsrooms. (Don't trust this blindly. Compare it to what you know about your own audience.) Consider posting it for easy reference.

People in general are likely to share posts that help them:
- ☐ Express pride or thankfulness
- ☐ Express outrage
- ☐ Fulfill their civic duty or contribute to the good of the community
- ☐ Make their friends better informed
- ☐ Make their friends healthier or safer
- ☐ Invite their friends to participate in something fun
- ☐ Tag specific friends who might be interested

People in general are less likely to share posts that:
- ☐ Feel like complicated school assignments
- ☐ Are too general to inspire reactions
- ☐ Are late to the conversation
- ☐ Are about things too personal for public conversation
- ☐ Emphasize the journalism ("share this great story") rather than the topic
- ☐ Are written formally rather than with personality or humanity

Want people to share? Try these ideas for wording your post:
- ☐ Help educate people by sharing this …
- ☐ Help spread the word about this (exciting, scary, hopeful) news …
- ☐ We know there's confusion about this. This link helps explain …
- ☐ We've seen a lot of questions about this. Here are some answers. (Or a specific group … Parents, are you still confused about …)
- ☐ Let's make this conversation bigger. Share with someone you know who …
- ☐ We can't be the only ones who think this needs more attention …
- ☐ Share if you wish more people understood …
- ☐ Share if this issue has affected you …
- ☐ Share to raise awareness about …
- ☐ You may not be a public figure, but you still have a microphone. Help us keep our community informed and accountable.
- ☐ Wouldn't it be great if the facts of this story were shared as widely as the finger pointing?
- ☐ In the middle of the hype around this issue, the facts seem to be getting lost. Help us fix that.
- ☐ Who do you know who needs to read this?
- ☐ Who do you want to share this cool this with?

Questions? Ideas for further work on trust? Tips to share from your work? Contact project lead Joy Mayer at joy@joymayer.com.