

CREATING VIRAL CONTENT



The Principles of Great Content Creation. Everyone wants their content to go viral, but crafting posts that spread doesn't happen by magic; it requires understanding your audience and what drives them to engage.

Set Expectations.

No one can anticipate their content going viral like the #MeToo movement, which sparked a worldwide conversation around sexual violence, with survivors courageously telling their stories. We are all envious of viral content that succeeds, like Nike's, with an ad campaign honoring the 30th anniversary of their "Just Do It" slogan featuring Colin Kaepernick addressing racial inequality and police brutality.

But here's the thing: Going viral is a great goal, but it rarely happens. Instead, focus your efforts on reaching your target audience. If your target audience is everyone, then you likely aren't reaching anyone. Instead, focus on creating good content that will inspire the target audiences you aim to reach.

Ask Yourself:

1. Who is my target audience?
2. What do I want them to do once I have their attention?
3. How will this content add to or support my digital and communications objectives?

[Spitfire Smart Chart@](#) helps you think through these questions and incorporate your content into your overarching communication strategy.

What Makes Good Content?

Once you have established your audience, consider what will inspire them to act. Consider these general principles of good content creation:

Tell authentic stories. Your content should feature stories with a genuine message. If your audience feels that you are trying to pull one over on them, they are likely to skip over your content, or worse, stop following you. People are also more likely to share and like your content if they can empathize with your story. It pays to humanize your content and make it personal.



Include an emotional ask. Emotion makes content powerful and empowers your supporters to act. Think about what emotion that you want your piece to evoke. If you are looking to motivate your audience to act, consider using a tone of anger or hope. If your issue is heavy, beware of depressing your audience. Depression rarely generates action. Using geolocation data to provide tailored information, such as a city name, makes a difference because it hits close to home. Do not use ALL CAPS or too many punctuation marks. Include a call to action when necessary, but keep in mind that you'll lose subscribers' interest if you exaggerate the urgency.

Address your audience's barriers, but don't reinforce them.

Identifying your target audience allows you to tailor your message to reach those that you want to engage. Think about your audience's barriers: What might keep your audience from participating or agreeing with your position? Then address those obstacles in your message. But make sure that you don't repeat the barrier. Stay away from "myth vs. fact" posts because studies show that mentioning the myth only reinforces it.



What Makes Good Content Spread?

Now that you have a great piece of content, how are you going to make it circulate around the web? Planning how to distribute your content is just as important as creating the content. After all, if no one sees the content, what impact will it have?



Cultivate influencers. Analyze your supporter network and organizational contacts to identify where you have relationships with influencers. Look for those individuals or organizational partners that you can tap to help circulate your brilliant content. Ideally, these folks will not only have big followings, but also will be trusted sources of information about the topic.



Think beyond celebrities. While many celebs have an enviable number of followers, do their followers actually care about your issue and are they credible messengers for your audience? Your time may be better invested in nurturing a relationship with someone who has more credibility and fewer, yet higher-quality followers.



Let go of control. If you have created good content that inspires your audiences, they will want to make it their own and share the content with friends and family. Embrace your online community and let them see themselves in your content. Letting go of control is hard for organizations concerned about their brand and identity. Don't let this worry limit the reach of your brilliant content.



Luck favors the well prepared. Create a calendar of your organization's priority events. Then include external events that you can leverage to generate buzz online and get more attention for your work. These events could be related to the legislative cycle, a commemorative month or a holiday. Use that calendar to plan ahead.

Listen to Your Audience

You've created an inspiring piece of content, sent it out through your digital channels and recruited influencers to help you give it an extra boost. So now what? Your job is not done.



It's time to evaluate how you did. Think back to your initial strategic framework and assess how this content supported your overall objectives.

- How did your audience respond?
- Did you recruit any new supporters, petition signatures or donors?
- Was it a success that you would want to share with your whole organization at the next all-staff meeting? Or did it flop?



Think about what worked – and what didn't work. Examining your metrics and drawing conclusions about how you may improve is important.

- Could you have posted at a more opportune time of day?
- Did you release the content after the news cycle had expired?
- Could you have used a more compelling image?