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Why you should change how you think about Facebook

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By Karen Kazmierczak Altes, IREMMany real estate companies have a Facebook business page; it's practically required in today's digitally-focused communication environment. We've been told time after time that we should engage our customers and potential customers where they are, and where they are is Facebook.

Social media professionals - myself included - have repeatedly advised that for your Facebook presence to be successful, it's all about the content. Build an active and interesting Facebook presence and they will come. Be engaging and relevant to your fans and they will not only stay, but spread your content to their friends and family - for free!

Of course, all of this effort wasn't truly free. Many businesses have invested significant time, energy, and money restructuring their marketing and communications processes and creating new teams of staff to churn out quality content on social platforms.

But recently, many brands have seen a steep decline in the impressions for any given post on Facebook. Our own IREM Facebook page has over 4,600 Likes, but our posts are typically only seen by about 200 - 800 people. And we're not alone. Why is this happening?

Brian Boland, from Facebook's Ads Product Marketing Team, explains in a blog post:

* On average, there are 1,500 stories that could appear in a person's News Feed each time they log onto Facebook...

* People only have so much time to consume stories, and people often miss content that isn't toward the top when they log on. This means they often do not see the content that's most valuable to them.

Facebook's response has been to use a complex algorithm to determine how valuable content may be to an individual user, and display only that content in a user's news feed.

Boland claims that Facebook has not decreased organic reach for brands in order to make money. However, the fact that the leader of the Ads Product Marketing Team is the one who is responding to the criticism, and that his solutions all involve purchasing ads, suggests otherwise.

What does this mean for your company's Facebook page and strategy?

1. Content still matters. You should expect lower impressions on your posts, no matter how well-crafted. However, continue to create engaging content, because the more your posts are liked, commented on, and shared, the more people will see them.
2. Don't get mad, get even. While it's frustrating to feel like Facebook is strong-arming you into paying for ads or sponsored posts, don't dismiss the idea without considering the pros in addition to the cons. Start thinking of Facebook as an advertising platform rather than for free content distribution.
3. Be realistic and goal-oriented. It was always unlikely your Facebook post would organically "go viral", and rarely does virulence correspond to reaching your business goals.

4. Experiment. Change up post formats, structure, timing, and paid reach strategies, and see what works for your business processes, goals, and budget.

5. Measure what actually matters. Are you using Facebook to drive traffic to your website, provide a space for your tenants and residents to interact with you and build loyalty, or reach new potential customers? Base your metrics on what matters to you (referrals to your website, comments/engagement on your posts, or non-organic impressions), and focus less on those sometimes disheartening organic reach numbers.

6. Diversify. If you're depending heavily on Facebook (or any other communications platform that you don't control), you run the risk of sudden changes having large negative impacts on your business.

Ultimately, Facebook is still the 900-lb gorilla in the social media room. Since taking the company public, the company needs to generate revenue and will continue to encourage brands to purchase ad products. Rather than using outdated and ineffective strategies, or giving up on Facebook entirely, companies will need to adjust their Facebook tactics to ensure continued success on the platform.

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