

# DATA CONTINUES TO DRIVE **SOCIAL** PERFORMANCE

*Installment #2 of the Benchmark Study  
on Organic Publishing to Social Networks*

**JUNE 2015**

Despite concerns over declines in organic (unpaid) reach, companies continue to publish significant numbers of posts into the feeds of fans and followers on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google Plus

(yes, still), and now Pinterest. Installment #2 of our Benchmark Study on Organic Publishing to Social Networks analyzed 8 million of these organic posts made by SocialFlow clients from January 2014 through March 2015. This Study builds on the

findings of Installment #1, which was issued in August 2014 and can be found at <http://trib.al/952331r>.

This Study delivers key findings and recommendations that companies across a variety of industries can apply to their own social strategies.

## OVERVIEW

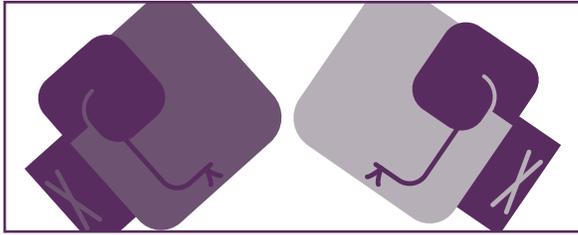
The commercial distribution of content on social networks has changed significantly over the past 18 months. Reaching consumers in their social feeds has become more difficult for marketers, who increasingly must resort to paid placements. At the same time, publishers and media companies are finding increasing success distributing their content into social feeds.

Our analysis of over 8 million organic posts clearly demonstrates that despite the challenges, it is still possible to reach and connect with large audiences via social media channels. These **8 million** posts generated more than **116 billion** impressions and nearly **7.3 billion** total engagements.

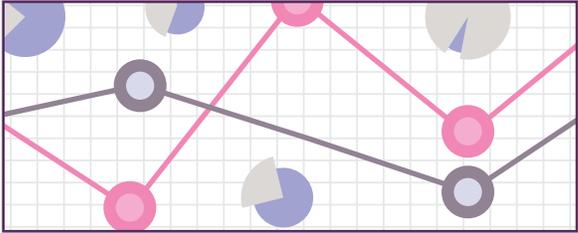
	No. of posts	Reach	Engagements
	1.75 million	116.1 billion	5.44 billion
	5.60 million	-	1.80 billion
	629,000	-	27.8 million
	25,400	-	4.5 million
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8.01 million</b>	<b>116.1 billion</b>	<b>7.28 billion</b>

*As social networks continue to see growth in usage and volume, the competition for consumer attention will only become more intense.*

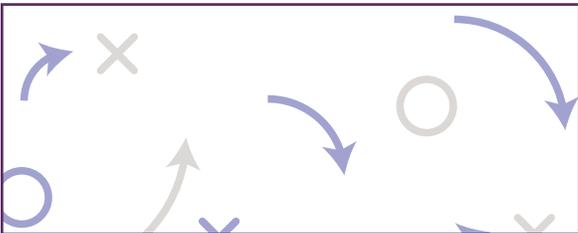
# KEY FINDINGS



**1** Media companies are winning the battle for attention on social networks.

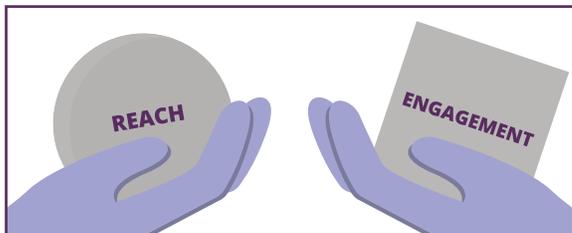


**2** A data-driven publishing approach gives you the best chance to compete for audience and attention.

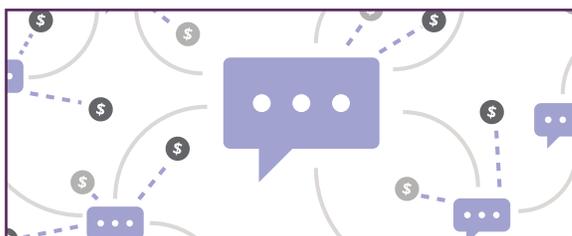


**3** Some Marketers are finding effective tactics to combat reduced organic reach.

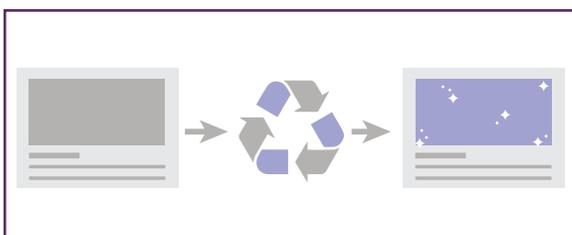
# RECOMMENDATIONS



**1** Media companies should monetize the reach & engagement they deliver.



**2** Now more than ever, you need to take a data-driven approach to social publishing.

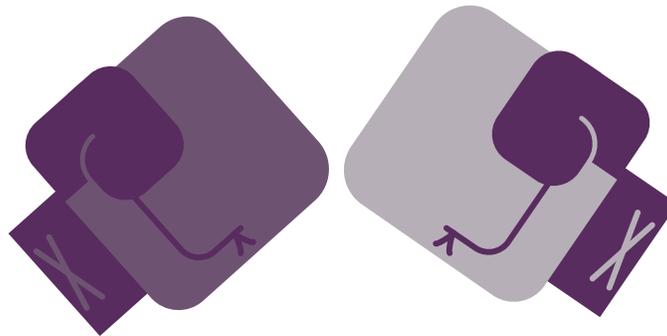


**3** Marketers should develop an effective post-recycling strategy.

# KEY FINDINGS

## FINDING 1:

Media companies are winning the battle for attention on social networks.



While many verticals continue to see a decline in organic reach, media companies are seeing significant growth. This is especially true on Facebook.

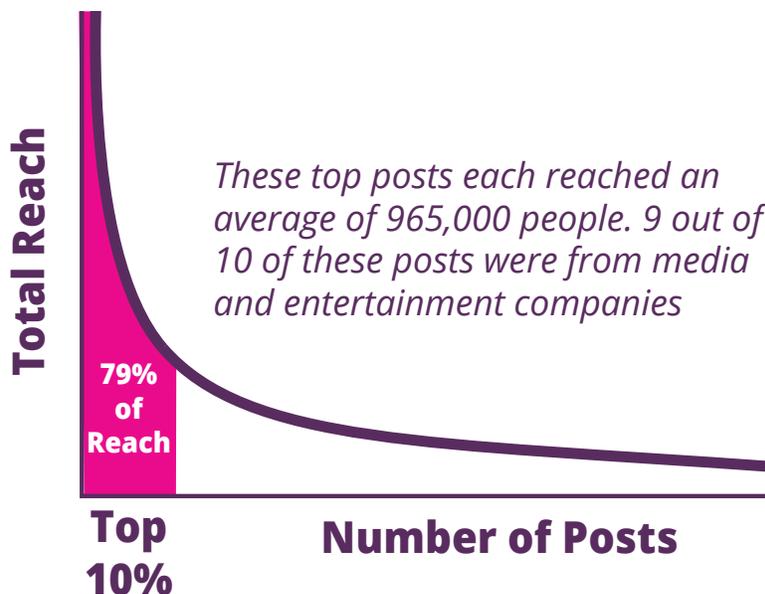
Average reach per post for media companies using SocialFlow to publish to Facebook increased 67% from March 2014 through March 2015 (we chose a year-over-year slice of the data for this part of the analysis to reduce the effects of seasonality). In that same period, total reach for our media companies grew by 236%, revealing that Facebook is not only allocating more reach to each post, but growing overall reach for media companies as well.

We saw a similar jump in engagement. In that same twelve-month period, average engagement per post on Facebook for media companies was up 44%.

Media engagement per Tweet on Twitter has increased by 3%, even as the volume of Tweets from our Media publishers has increased by 98%. Given the sheer number of tweets in this study (3x that of any other network), seeing this growth in interactions per tweet indicates a meaningful lift in overall engagement for media companies on Twitter.

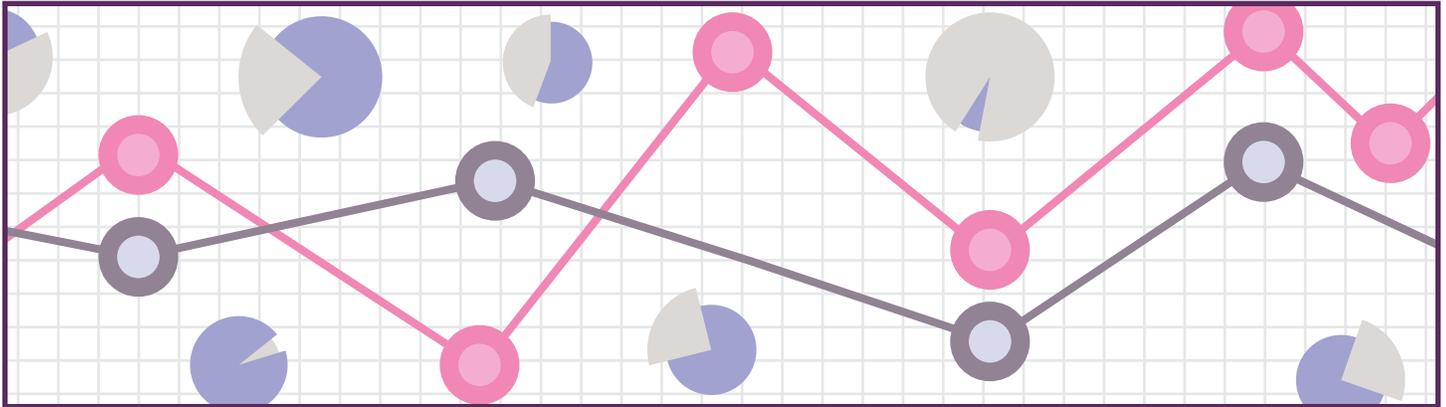
Additionally, our data shows that the top-performing 10% of posts on social drive 79% of the total reach. And of those top-performing posts, nearly 9 out of 10 (87%) come from media and entertainment companies.

The average organic post in the top 10% for these verticals reached over 965,000 people. Organic reach is most certainly not dead for media companies.



## FINDING 2:

A data-driven publishing approach gives you the best chance to compete for audience and attention

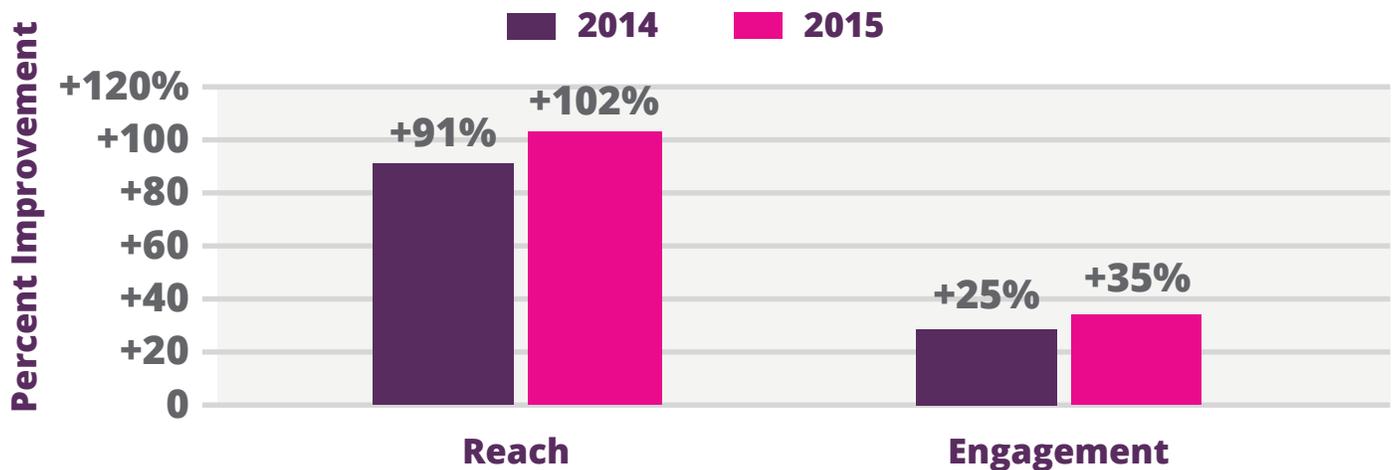


SocialFlow's August 2014 benchmark Report found that a data-driven approach to social publishing was

significantly more effective than scheduling posts. That difference is even more pronounced in this data set.

## Improvement in Reach & Engagement

*Data-Driven compared to Scheduled Posts*



*Comparing data sets from this June 2015 Benchmark Report to SocialFlow's August 2014 Benchmark Report*

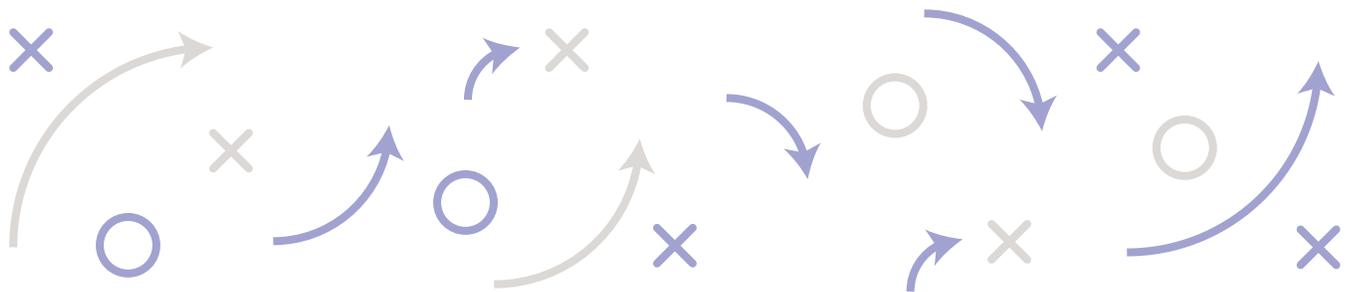
Companies that take a Data-Driven approach to their social publishing improve their effectiveness in two significant ways:

- They are able to publish more content to social networks—with little corresponding increase in overall effort.
- They are better able to match their posts to the types of content with which the audience is already engaging.

*The combination of these two factors makes the Data-Driven social approach more effective than a Scheduled one.*

## FINDING 3:

# Non-media companies are using effective tactics to combat reduced organic reach



While Media companies are garnering a greater share of reach on Social, non-media companies publishing through SocialFlow also saw increases. From March 2014 through March 2015:

- Entertainment companies publishing through SocialFlow saw an increase in reach per post of 18% while interactions per post grew by 35%. The same companies saw growth in interactions per post on Twitter of 79%.

- Retailers publishing through SocialFlow saw an increase in reach per post of 6%, and of interactions per post of 218% on Facebook and in interactions per Tweet of 99%.

- Fashion/Cosmetics brands saw an increase in reach per post of 28%, in interactions per post of 22% and in interactions per Tweet of 84%.

## How Marketers Are Succeeding

*We identified three specific attributes that were present for marketers who are achieving success with social media:*

### 1. FREQUENT POSTING.

The best-performing marketers publish frequently.

### 2. EFFECTIVE REUSE OF CONTENT.

Not all content has to be new. Marketers are identifying content recycling windows on the same day (making sure that a timely post is actually seen by a reasonable portion of your audience), within the same ~month (a post that performed well a few weeks ago may perform well again today) and within the same season (a post about summer entertaining from last year may perform well again this year).

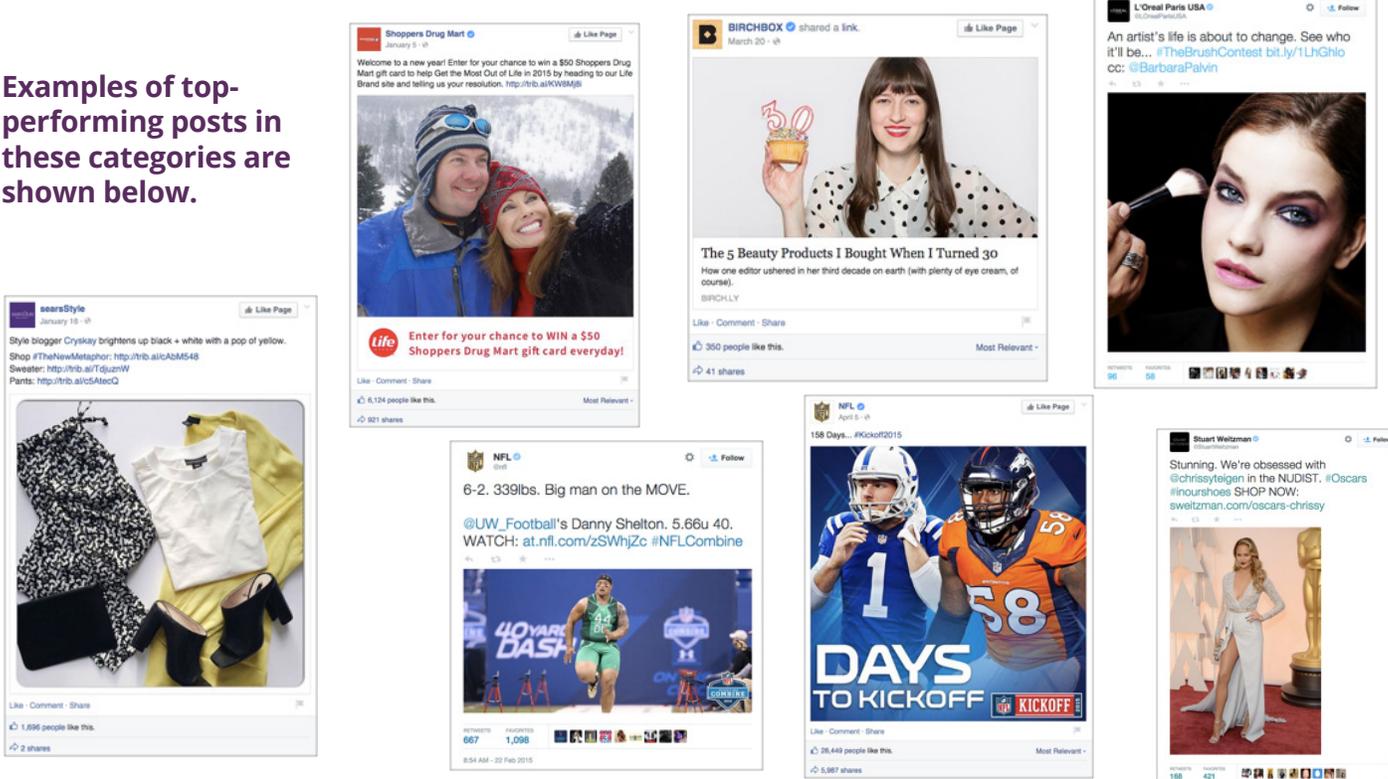
### 3. DATA-DRIVEN PUBLISHING.

With so much content competing for consumer attention, simply guessing about the best posting windows, or relying on a fixed schedule is a significant waste of your content assets.

Other categories saw a more mixed picture:

- *Travel and Hospitality saw growth of 94% in reach per post though declining interactions per post and Tweet.*
- *Technology saw a reduction in reach per post of 9% but an increase in interactions per post of 207%, indicating greater engagement among a more loyal audience.*

Examples of top-performing posts in these categories are shown below.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## RECOMMENDATION 1:

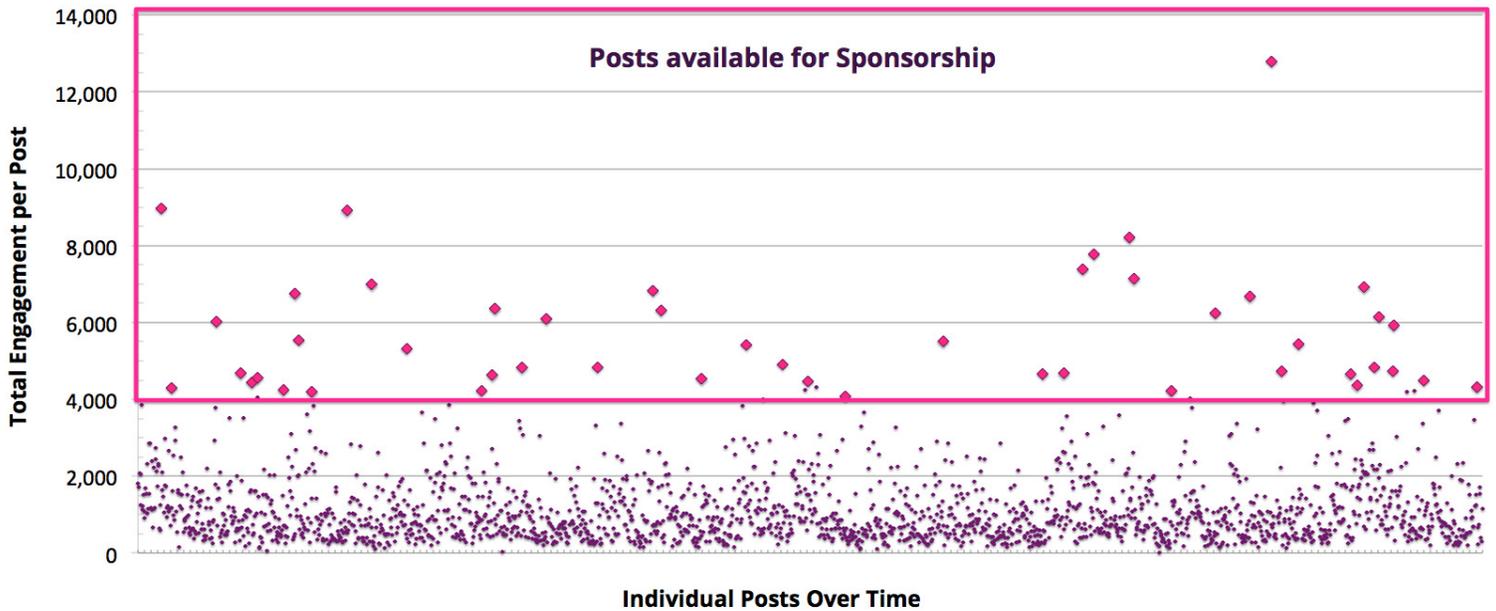
Media companies should monetize the reach & engagement they deliver

Media companies have publications that target and appeal to specific demographics, and, as we said earlier, they are winning the battle for organic reach and engagement in social channels. Marketers and advertisers have products and services they are targeting to specific demographics but find it challenging to get engagement and reach on social.

Given this dynamic, publishers can monetize their proven ability to reach and engage audiences by offering advertisers the ability to sponsor their premium social content. Advertisers gain access

to new audiences on social and mobile and benefit from the attention received by publishers' highest performing content. Publishers can reap the financial rewards of sponsorship and engage in audience development through advertiser-sponsored posts. This monetization by the publishers will also create new forms of advertising inventory for marketers. Rather than simply focusing on their own promoted posts / promoted Tweets, advertisers can sponsor high-quality, contextually relevant content from media companies.





## What About Facebook Instant Articles?

Facebook Instant Articles (see [InstantArticles.fb.com](https://InstantArticles.fb.com)) represent an important potential development in the way publishers can choose to distribute content to Facebook.

Six of the nine launch partners for Instant Articles are SocialFlow customers; over time we will see how widely they choose to adopt the Instant Articles format.

The launch of Facebook Instant Articles came just after the end of this data set; even subsequent data reveals that the quantity of Instant Articles to be very small compared to the rest of these media companies' Facebook posts.

There is little doubt that an Instant Article will have greater reach and engagement, given that it delivers a demonstrably superior user experience for the consumer on a mobile device—in fact it is akin to the difference in experience between dialup and broadband connection speeds on a desktop computer.

Add to that the fact that publishers will receive 100% of the revenue for advertising they sell against the article, and you have a very compelling value proposition.

That said, media companies are rightfully concerned over the impact of multiple Instant

Articles on their overall site traffic, since consumption of the Instant Article happens entirely within the Facebook ecosystem and generates no traffic to the publisher site.

Facebook is working with the analytics platforms to appropriately measure and surface publishers' "viewed on Facebook" traffic, but it will take some time for the ecosystem around site traffic and monetization to account for these changes. And it's not clear that such Facebook traffic—even if it can be properly measured—will have the same value as site visitors. For that reason, adoption of this new capability may proceed more slowly than you would think simply by looking at the performance of individual Instant Articles.

Publishers have many strategic choices in front of them regarding content distribution and monetization, and of course those go well beyond Facebook and the new Instant Articles. But there's no doubt that faster, better access to high-quality content is a win for consumers, and for Facebook.



## RECOMMENDATION 2:

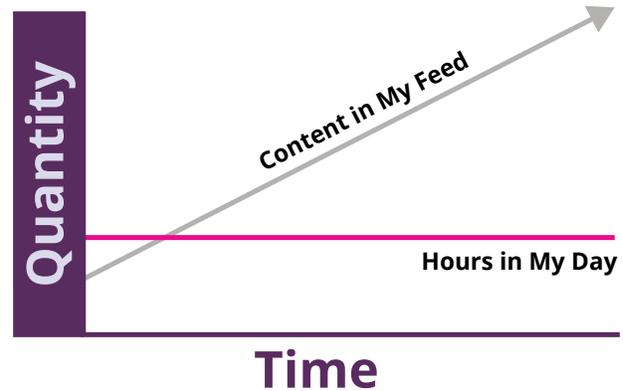
# Now more than ever, you need to take a data-driven approach to social publishing



There is fierce competition for attention in consumers' social feeds. The quantity of content continues to grow, while consumer attention is relatively fixed: every person has only 24 hours in a day, and an increase in consumer attention requires a corresponding decrease in some other activity.

Both Media companies and others can benefit from a data driven approach. Media companies that want to monetize their social success need to stand out from other publishers by achieving unparalleled reach and engagement in order to earn premium sponsorship rates. For a company's best performing content, a data-driven approach

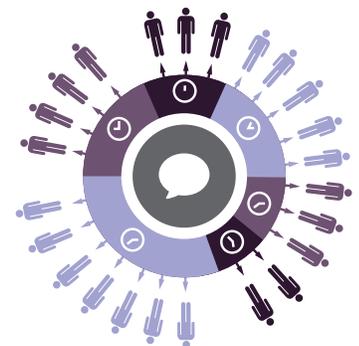
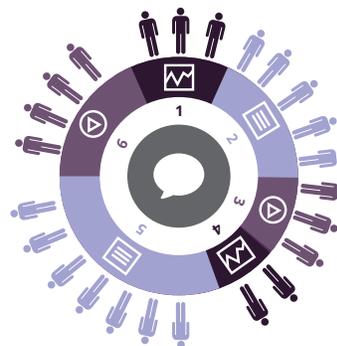
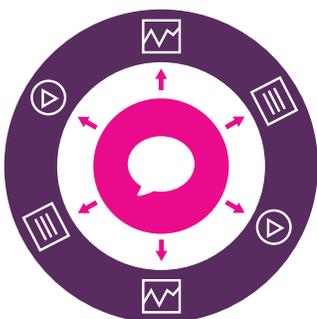
to social publishing provides a competitive advantage that is proven to deliver a 102% improvement in reach and 35% improvement in engagement over scheduled content.



## How Data-Driven Social Posting Works

*Shifting from scheduling posts to a Data-Driven approach requires a different mindset. It's a bit like moving from meals every day at a fixed time, to instead eating meals when you're actually hungry. Only in this case, it's when your audience is hungry for content.*

- 1** Create multiple pieces of social content.
- 2** Feed the posts into software that predictively scores and ranks them.
- 3** The posts are sorted in real-time based on your business rules and the activity of your specific social audiences.
- 4** The right message is automatically published to the right audience at the right time.



## “What’s the ROI of Social Media?”

For media and entertainment companies, traffic correlates to money, so it’s easy to calculate the Return on Investment (ROI) of your social media efforts.

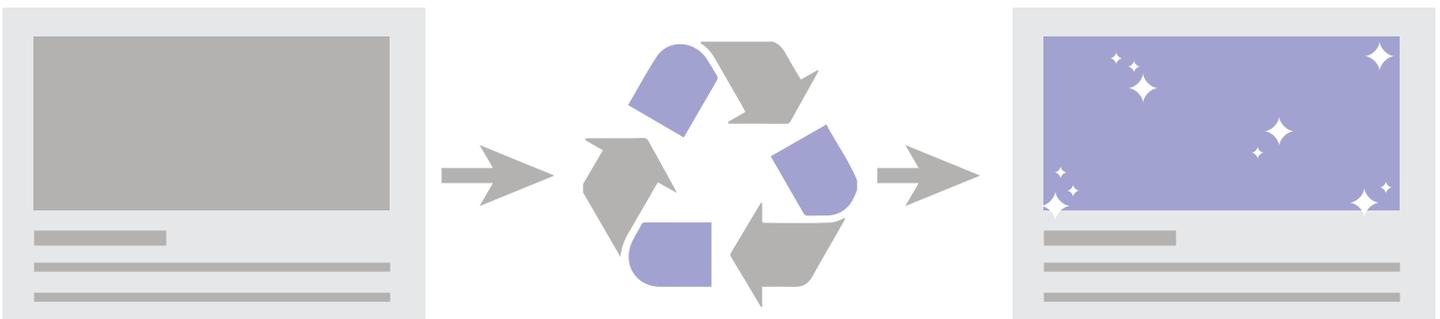
For most marketers, though, the ROI question is much harder. Social Media is more easily understood as an “upper funnel” activity that is effective at building awareness, consideration, and intent. For some brands there can be a strong correlation to actual purchase, but social media marketing is still nascent as an effective Direct Response technique.

The ROI question is best addressed with an effective focus on Attribution Modeling: what digital signals can be correlated with your transactional data, and how do those signals get valued? Marketers have much to do in this regard, but fortunately there is an entire category of attribution modeling software that is tackling this challenge.

As attribution modeling becomes more widely adopted, upper funnel activities such as social media will see an increase in credit, while lower funnel and last-click activities such as search will see a decrease.

### RECOMMENDATION 3:

Marketers should develop an effective post-recycling strategy



Marketers have focused on the decline in organic reach, especially on Facebook, as a concern. And indeed, the fact that an increasing

amount of content is competing for an essentially fixed amount of consumer attention makes organic reach more and more difficult to attain.



## But My Company Uses Social Media as a Customer Service Channel

As organic reach has declined, companies have increasingly viewed social networks through the lens of customer service. And while we certainly advise any marketer to identify and address customer service issues, we don't believe that this is the highest or best use of social media for a marketer.

If you have tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, or even millions of fans and followers, your primary means of communication should be one-to-many, not one-to-one.

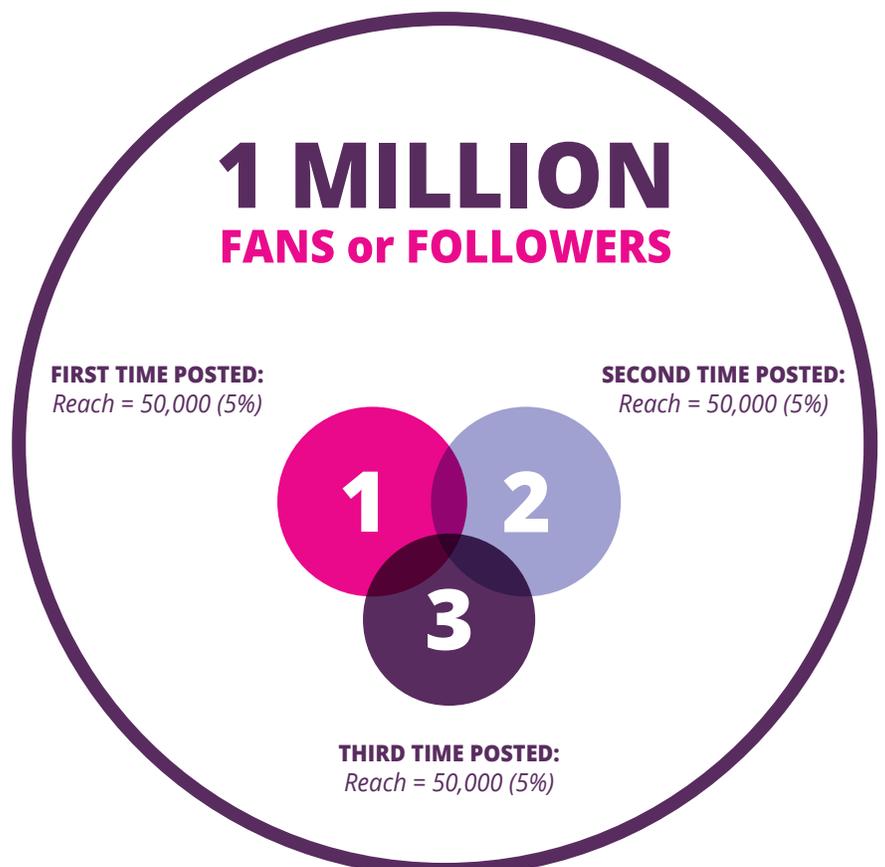
One obvious solution for marketers is to focus less effort on large-scale original content creation for social networks and instead develop an effective recycling strategy for a smaller number of highly engaging posts. Repetition in the delivery of messages has long been a staple of advertising, and despite the different mechanics of social media when compared to other forms of advertising, the data is clear that post recycling is effective. Given the premise of social media as a "new way to engage with customers," accepting that social posts are in fact advertising may be the most significant obstacle.

"Marketers should focus less effort on large-scale original content creation and instead develop an effective recycling strategy for a smaller number of highly engaging posts."

Post recycling is difficult to measure at scale, because marketers will often times make small adjustments in a post when it is published a second or third time. Whether such a post is considered to be new or a recycled message is a judgment we'll leave to the post creators. The points made in this section apply regardless.

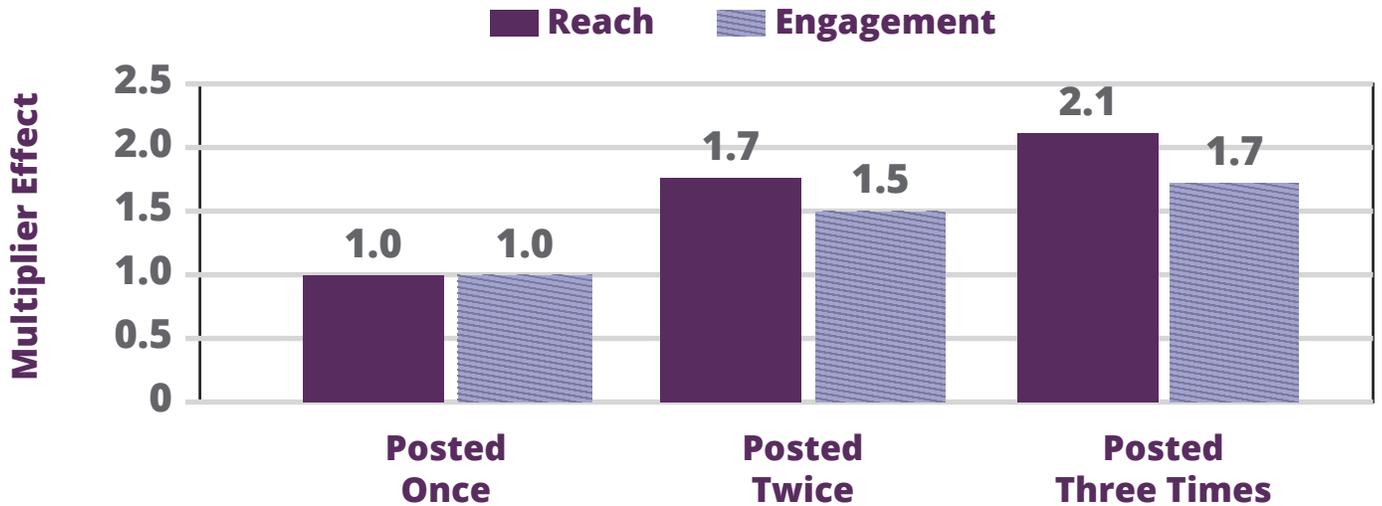
*Most users will not see your post at all (the white portion of the circle). Of those who see the post, most will only see it once (where circles 1, 2, and 3 have no overlap). A few will see it two times (the areas where two circles overlap). And a very few will see it all three times (where all three circles overlap).*

*We looked at a sample of 1,500 stories that were recycled on Facebook using SocialFlow's platform and found that the optimal frequency for those posts was 3 times (the original post, then recycling it two times). We chose to look at recycled Facebook posts because we wanted to understand what effect recycling might have on Facebook's Edgerank, but similar results should be available on Twitter given the unfiltered nature of Twitter's Tweet stream.*



# Impact of Post Recycling on Facebook

*Cumulative Impact on Reach and Engagement*

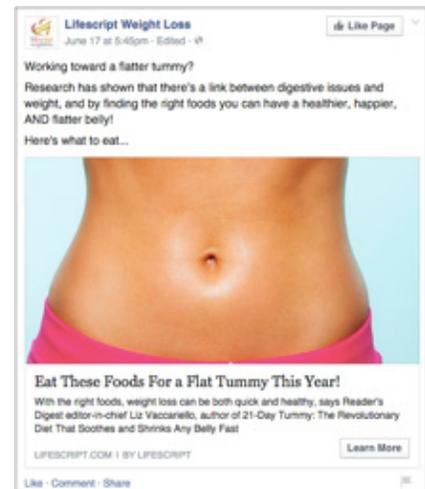


*If the first post has a reach of 1 million, then that same post made two times would have a reach of 1.7 million. That same post made three times would have a reach of 2.1 million. Engagement calculations function the same way*

It's clear that this simple approach, used thoughtfully, can increase reach and engagement without the additional overhead new creative requires.

Effectively recycling high-performing posts can bring your organic reach for those posts back up to the levels you enjoyed in 2011 and 2012.

*Examples of effectively recycled posts:*



# Isn't Recycling Posts "Spammy"? Won't Facebook EdgeRank Punish You For This?

The topic of content reuse tends to generate visceral reactions among marketers, many of whom have seen poorly-conceived content reuse strategies irritate and annoy the target audience.

We offer three specific points of guidance on this issue:

1

**Make sure the content you are recycling is actually good.** And "good" should be judged by the audience. This may not be easy to do when you have specific marketing campaign objectives, but is the single most important thing you can do to make your post recycling effective.

2

**Do not over-weight individual negative comments.** If you have a fan base of 1 million, make a post three times, and get 5 negative comments, that is a negative response rate of 0.0005%. We suggest that on Facebook you respond to those users with a comment to the effect of "We're sorry you didn't like the message" and then briefly tell them how to use the "Hide Post" feature.

3

**Don't overdo it.** Our data suggests that the most effective approach is to recycle a high-performing post two times (for a total of three posts, including the original).

Facebook's EdgeRank introduces uncertainty into any marketer's strategy, but focusing on your highest-performing posts should minimize any concerns coming from EdgeRank.

# INDUSTRY VERTICALS

The following verticals were studied as part of this data set:

- Media:** Television networks, magazine and newspaper publishers, digital-only publishers and portals
- Fashion/Cosmetics:** Clothing, cosmetics and luxury brands
- Retail:** Companies with brick-and-mortar locations
- Entertainment:** Movie studios, professional sports leagues and gaming companies
- Technology:** Software, hardware and system integration companies
- Non-profit:** Foundations, educational institutions and non-governmental not-for-profit organizations
- Travel and Hospitality:** Brick-and-mortar and online companies in the hotel, airline and travel industry
- Other Brands:** Marketers that do not fall into one of the above verticals.

# LANGUAGES

Our study included posts in 55 languages. These languages comprised 1% or more of the non-English posts in the data.

Arabic	German	Italian	Portuguese	Swahili	Ukrainian
Estonian	Hindi	Malay	Russian	Tagalog	Urdu
French	Indonesian	Persian	Spanish	Turkish	

85% of the posts in our sample were made in English; the remaining posts were created in 54 other languages, the most popular of which were Arabic, Spanish and French.

# COUNTRIES

Our study included posts that reached people in every country on the planet. The top 49 countries and locales represent just over 85% of the click data. In order of clicks, they are:

 United States	 Netherlands	 Pakistan	 Austria	 Argentina
 United Kingdom	 Iceland	 Romania	 Belgium	 Puerto Rico
 Australia	 Singapore	 Italy	 Portugal	 Egypt
 Canada	 Malaysia	 Turkey	 Norway	 Taiwan
 Germany	 Spain	 United Arab Emirates	 Poland	 Saudi Arabia
 India	 Brazil	 Indonesia	 Colombia	 Chile
 Mexico	 New Zealand	 Denmark	 Thailand	 Peru
 Philippines	 Japan	 Russia	 Greece	 Finland
 France	 Vietnam	 South Africa	 Korea	 Israel
 Ireland	 Sweden	 Hong Kong	 Switzerland	

## About Us

SocialFlow's software uses Real-Time data, along with business rules set by the customer, to determine what and when to publish to social media properties. Companies can manage both owned and paid social posts.

We take the guesswork out of social media, replacing the scheduling of content with actionable data about when the audience is active and what they are engaging with on social in the moment.

Our algorithms are continuously sifting through millions of rows of social data, developing predictive recommendations in real-time. The results are clear: increased engagement, increased click-through rates, and less time spent by social teams.

We license our technology on a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) basis. Social teams log in to our platform and manage content from any web or mobile browser.

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