

@campusdogz

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Description

Using the social media platform, Twitter, the handle @campusdogz featured dogs from individuals on campus who sent in pictures. Using the images, polls were tweeted following the dog post and users of Twitter were encouraged to vote for the best dog on campus using a bracket.

Individuals were encouraged to send in pictures of their dogs via Facebook, Twitter, GroupMe, Snapchat, and word of mouth. On Facebook, Snapchat, and GroupMe, the same image and message was posted on all platforms asking individuals to send pictures of their dogs to the personal account of the person asking for the photos. When a picture was received from someone via one of the platforms, it was saved in a shared Google Photos album. A screenshot of the Twitter page was used on multiple occasions to encourage more people to engage with the page. This was also used to gain followers. Through word of mouth, other people were able to ask around and talk about the page and were encouraged to send pictures to a personal contact if applicable.

After accumulating many images of dogs, the pictures were sorted through and a bracket was made. Most of the images sent in were used as there was not a large amount of images accumulated in the time span allotted before the project was to be started. When the bracket was created, 2 images at a time were posted onto Twitter with a follow up tweet carrying the poll. Each poll was given a 3 day time span in order to gain more votes from people who follow us or those who check our page fairly regularly. After the poll was finished, the winning dog from that post was moved on to the next round and so forth.

This digital storytelling project not only got people talking about something that was happening around them, but it got people involved with the whole process. Those who followed the page were those who had sent in pictures of their dogs and would vote on their dog when the posts came up. It became almost like a friendly competition with individuals who do not create the posts or the bracket, but could check back in every day to see what dogs were posted. People were able to see their dogs on a platform that was not their personal account which made it very personal and engaging with those who kept up with the page.

The finished project is different to what it was imagined to be like because of the interaction and reach the page got from those on campus and outside of campus. The page started somewhat late which was a little nerve wracking because it was hard to gauge who would follow the Twitter and send in pictures. Fortunately, there were plenty of pictures to use for posts and a steady following and voting happening on the posts to keep the bracket moving. Most of the followers are individuals on campus, but there was some reach to other pages that do not live around here and gave the page a larger fan base. Some pictures also got more attention due to the heading or the pictures based on what people were searching for on Twitter which was interesting.

Inspiration

The March Madness brackets influenced the idea for this project with how the league uses this style of keeping track of who wins and loses. People essentially make brackets ahead of time and then see who wins, but this page used it as a voting platform to keep everything organized and flowing. The idea of voting was always a topic of interest, but the idea of a

bracket and that style of voting came from the college basketball games happening during the time of this project.

Dogs are also a common phenomenon in people's lives whether it be on campus or at home. The reason for picking a topic such as dogs was because of how popular and readily available they are, especially through pictures. People like dogs and dog pictures and having the ability to share a picture of a pet makes it all the more engaging for both sides of the exchange through sharing with one another. It was also a fun idea for a story because people who may not have ever expressed having a dog were some of the first to send in pictures and the members of the page were able to see everyone's dogs and a peek into their personal lives.

There are similar projects out there that have used bracket style voting as a way to reflect and keep up with what was going on during March Madness. Many verified food, sports, and video game pages do a similar kind of digital storytelling with objects from the company. This could be on Facebook or Twitter using the poll option. Individuals are encouraged to vote for their favorite toppings or item at a fast food restaurant or a favorite player on a sports team. Polls in general happen on many social media platforms for larger accounts to use in order to gain customer awareness and appreciation. It can also help market certain products. Although it may not always be in a bracket style, the idea of voting for the best is similar to the Twitter page shown here.

Another similar project is the Twitter page @WeRateDogs. This page posts pictures of dogs that people have sent in and delivers a little blurb about the dog and then rates the dog on a certain cuteness factor. @campusdogz posted images of dogs with small blurbs and emojis to explain the post, but a poll was added as an extra component. This is what made our page a little

bit different because the dog pictures were posted in a similar fashion, but there was always a reason for posting two pictures side by side as well as an end goal in mind.

Experiential Learning

The platform that was used for this digital storytelling project, Twitter, was a platform each member was aware of, but did not know all of the logistics behind the website. Using the polls option on Twitter to create the voting aspect of the page was new, but easy to learn. One group member, Skylar, did not have Twitter since high school so it was somewhat of a challenge to relearn everything and get used to the new layout. After learning how to use the platform, especially through the mobile app, the story went by smoothly.

One platform that the group did not previously use on a daily basis was Google Photos. Google Photos was used to share all of the dog pictures collectively and be able to access them at any time. It was somewhat difficult to navigate based on how the platform is set up to hold pictures; it looks more like a Pinterest board than a photo album. The app, however, made it easy to keep all of the pictures in one place whereas on iPhoto it was scattered based on pictures taken or saved from everyday life and activities.

One learning experience from this project that will continue to have importance was how to reach out to people and actively try to gain followers and support online. It's easy to think that posting something on one platform once will gain a following and that is not always the case. Each group member collectively asked on multiple platforms for pictures and for people to check out the Twitter page. Taking something like a personal project and making it public can be a little bit scary, but knowing that the initiative and effort was put out in doing so can make it

worthwhile. It takes active participation on both ends to see results and it may take more than one post to get there which is what was important in helping this project become what it is.

Digital Storytelling

This project counts as digital storytelling because it created a community on an online platform and encouraged people to engage with the story and have the ability to create it as their own. One theory specifically comes to mind with regards to how the page interacted with followers as well as the group itself who created @campusdogz. Through media multiplexity theory, relationships with individuals who use more than one social platform to communicate are stronger than those who use less platforms. Group members reached out to many people through different social media platforms in order to gain followers and get dog pictures. Many of these people who saw the posts were also friends of the group members so even if it wasn't directly sent to them, they still engaged with the content, but also engaged outside of that platform via texting or face to face. The group itself used different platforms to discuss the project such as Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, and face to face interaction. Had there only been one platform, the group would not have communicated as well.

Using many different social media platforms helped extend the amount of people who had access and knowledge of the page. Reach, a measurement of social media, asks the question of how many people saw the post. It is important to reach as many people as possible, but it needs to be the right people. Keeping this in mind, it was key to reach out to those who are on campus and take into consideration those dogs so people who follow the page have the chance to vote for their dog if they engaged with the group. Although Facebook and Snapchat are broader than just the individuals on campus, it was still kept small enough to know who was sending in

what and following the page in order to create a more engaging bracket. Especially with the interaction with different dog blogs and people liking the pictures of dogs, the page was reaching the right audience who like dogs and are actively looking and following Twitter pages that specifically tweet about dogs.

Since people were sending in pictures of dogs and their contributions mattered to our page it also connects to participatory culture. Without the help from people around us we wouldn't have been able to post pictures and start a bracket. Also it was low barrier, the type of engagement didn't cost participants anything and they didn't have to learn anything about our page other than to just vote on the pictures of dogs. There was strong support for creating and sharing the information on our twitter page because we encouraged people to be a part of the story.

The page used personal presence as a means to connect with the audience in a relatable manner. The verbiage used in each tweet and poll was crucial to setting the tone for an account that was engaging and fun to follow. The page had its own voice, and it felt more like someone was talking to a friend than a person behind a screen. This was accomplished by using emojis, jokes, and interacting with other pages. In between tweets and polls, they would retweet other popular page's tweets - mostly about dogs, but also to interact with other St. Norbert accounts. This was relevant to the followers because they most likely were with the page because they liked dogs, were a St. Norbert College student, or both. The personal presence also made the page stand out from other possible dog accounts on Twitter. They established a character that was clear to the followers.

The story that this page specifically told would not have been possible without collaboration and conscious participation. Even more important than gaining followers to the page was acquiring the actual pictures of the dogs. If people were not willing or interested in sharing their pictures, there would be nothing to post about. The collaboration between the owners of the account and the owners of the pictures/dogs was necessary and created a story together. The use of conscious participation - where the participant knows all the details about what they are participating in - was preferred in this situation because if they knew that there was an element of competition, they were more likely to follow and vote on the polls so they could see their dog continue in the lineup. If @campusdogz were to just use random pictures of dogs, there would be very little motivation to interact with the page, as it would get lost in all the other dog accounts on twitter. Collaboration and conscious participation set the account apart from other pages and allowed them to be successful.

Engaging Audiences

@campusdogz engaged with the audience through the polls posted on Twitter as well as how the pictures and followers were acquired. Through the tweets themselves, followers and users who went on the page were able to vote for their favorite dog in each post. This virtually engaged with the audience because they were able to have their voice heard and check back to see what the final score was. People that sent in pictures of their dog were able to see if their dog was posted and keep up with the scores. This engaged with the audience on a personal level because people would know if their dog made it as well as their friends dogs too and could help vote for each others dog. As of April 25th, @campusdogz has 43 followers. One tricky part

about Twitter polls is how it is anonymous. If only 20 people vote, it is impossible to see which pages are actively participating or seeing the post and which ones are not. It is most likely that those who voted on previous posts will continue to vote on the new posts because they are aware of the page's purpose.

This project also engaged individuals through many different platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, and word of mouth. Pictures and messages were posted on Facebook stories and Snapchat stories encouraging people to send pictures to that person via the story. In this sense, the individual is engaging with the group members as well as the page by sending pictures to the account. People were engaging with the content when they saw the story as well as if they sent something in. Through word of mouth, group members were able to tell friends and other individuals to follow the page or send in dog pictures. Through sports and groups on campus, many individuals were able to be reached just by talking about it to a group of people. This helped boost the followers as well as the amount of dog submissions for the bracket. Snapchat seemed to have the most engagement with dog submissions due to the ease of swiping up on the Snapchat story and sending the picture via snap message. Some interesting engagements came from another dog blog that had a good amount of followers who retweeted one of the dog posts. Through this retweet, many other blogs were able to vote and like the message. Some of these individuals were from out of the country and all over the USA. This helped bring some of the votes up for several of the dog posts; one getting more than 40 votes. Another post got a lot of engagement through likes, but it is unclear whether or not it was because of the pictures or the heading.

The amount of followers rapidly increased when the page started, but lost steam as the project continued. Although the page followed many pages, some did not follow back. Those who knew about the page and the voting that took place everyday may know to check back, but those who just saw the page once may have only voted once or twice and never engaged with the page again. The page posted numerous times in a day in order to gain more engagement through followers and the hope of more people seeing the page via Twitter. Based on the average number of votes it may have helped, but it is not certain whether or not it was the leading factor.

One way we could have gotten more engagement would have been if we added to the pictures whose dog it was, what class they were in, and the name of the dog. This would have allowed it to be more personal for some people and pictures may have been able to get more interactions from their friends if they recognized whose dog it actually was. This way people could have retweeted posts to get others who didn't follow our page to vote.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we really enjoyed doing this project. It made us think outside the box on how we could engage as many students as we could through telling a story using technology and all the type of ways you can actually do this. For the future, this page could be turned into something where students still send in pictures of their dogs but there won't be brackets for voting. It would just be a page where other students can see other students dogs here on campus. This twitter page can bring students together with something almost all people love: dogs.

Work Cited

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