

Summer Learning: How will these social media professionals use the break?

In June of 2018, members from the NISM community shared their plans for continuing education this summer. From catching up on changing laws to technical training, they shared their plans to keep up with the ever-changing world of social media.

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Digging Deep: A Summer of Continuing Education

Certified Social Media Strategists (SMS) are required to complete 20 hours of continuing education every 2 years to maintain their cert, so we asked members of our community...what are you doing this summer to keep your skills fresh? Join us the month of June and hear what they have to say!

In 2017, I decided I wanted to focus more on social media research – proven and emerging techniques. The timing was great because we were just starting to work with the [Social Media Research Association \(SMRA\)](#) and I had finished the bulk of [my book about certification prep](#), so I was ready for a new challenge. But how could I learn more about research techniques...in a fun and interesting way?

Dig it.

I've always been interested in archaeology – ever since I learned from Indiana Jones that I could fulfill my lifelong dream of teaching while simultaneously being a great adventurer. But if I was going to study archaeology, I knew I needed two things.

1. A reason (other than just thinking it's a cool thing to learn more about)
2. Structure (a class, an accountabilitybuddy, etc. to keep me on track)

I learned a long time ago that *the idea of learning* will always be of interest to me, but for me to actually do the work, I need purpose and support. When I decided to study archaeology, I determined that my purpose was to explore a new and systematic way to conduct research in a way that I would enjoy. My structure was a class – and then a certificate program – in archaeology. Paying attention to how I learn best has been the key to my success so far this summer.



My Life in Ruins.

Will my archaeology coursework count toward my SMS recertification? Definitely not. But it has helped me see new ways of organizing information and provided me with creative comparisons that can make what seems like boring social media research seem fun. For example, the picture attached to this post is a *perfect* pit. How did my team create such a fantastic result?

1. We clearly defined our parameters. We all agreed we were digging 1 square meter – no more and no less.
2. We moved incrementally (2 inches at a time), carefully exploring each level.
3. If one of us fell behind, the others helped so we all stayed on track.
4. We switched roles when we needed to – taking turns digging, sifting, and bagging what we found.
5. We expanded our dig when we needed to, but we decided as a team to make changes to our strategic plan.

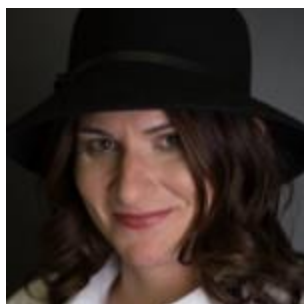
If anyone's ever worked on a marketing team, those steps may sound familiar. Doing research online follows a lot of the same process – and communication with the team is equally important.

It's also been an opportunity for me to develop my patience and creativity. I assure you, digging at an archaeological site isn't nearly as exciting as Indiana Jones made it seem. Sometimes the content you study isn't all you learn!

My question for readers is simple: What are you learning about this summer? Are you taking a creative approach to your professional development plan?

What will the NISM community be writing about in the month of June?

Throughout the month, we'll be hearing from SMS community members around the world! Our incoming board chair will share her focus on learning more about video, an NISM educator in Germany will talk about keeping up with regulations, and we'll even hear from our [NISM for Good](#) (social media strategy for non-profits) instructor about keeping up with continuing education in the non-profit sector. Life-long learning habits, redesigning marketing courses, and user-generated content are all on the agenda! Follow along with #NISMce on Twitter and see what great ideas for summer learning you can dig up!



Author: Amy Jauman, SMS

Dr. Amy Jauman, SMS, is the Chief Learning Officer at the [National Institute for Social Media](#) and author of the [Comprehensive Field Guide for Social Media Strategists](#). Amy is also one of 58 members representing 12 countries in the inaugural class of the [Prezi Educator Society](#). Previously she was the Social Media Director for Women Entrepreneurs of Minnesota (WeMN) and she currently serves as the marketing director for the Minnesota Chapter of the National Speakers Association. She is also an adjunct professor in the St. Catherine University Business Department and the St. Mary's University of Minnesota MBA program.

Getting More from My Summer Conference Schedule



Industry conferences happen all year long and provide us with the opportunity to network with others, learn new techniques, and get reenergized to do the work we are called to do. What I find is that I am often so focused on “wrapping things up” in the office before I head out to a conference that I forget to plan for and be intentional about

building value into these great events. This results in me feeling frazzled, forgetting to schedule my time, and ultimately missing out on opportunities to make a change in the business. Then when I return to the office, I am hit with a barrage of email or voicemail messages that prevent me from sharing what I learned with others in the office...let alone implement any of the ideas I gathered.

I have decided that it is time to stop the madness and make these large events work for us and not against us! Here is my approach for summer events.

Start with a plan

Once you have registered for a specific conference or event, spend an hour setting a few goals. What do you want to accomplish? Who else will be there that you want to connect with? What information are you hoping to gather? Whenever possible, make sure that these goals align with your business or professional development objectives and use the SMART goal setting formula to ensure your results can be measured upon your return. To ensure a goal is SMART you make sure it is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time bound.

Connect with other attendees

It is important to connect with other attendees, speakers, sponsors, and vendors before you ever walk into the conference hall. You can use social media to research other people who are talking about the event. If there is a conference hashtag, follow it. I suggest being proactive and creating a list in Twitter of the people that are tweeting the conference hashtag. This give you the opportunity to set up coffee meetings or happy hour conversations with those individuals you identify as potential clients or business partners. If you wait until the first day of the event,

you have likely missed opportunities and are more likely wasting time alone or trying to track down individuals who have already scheduled their time.

Take notes

You will hear a lot of amazing information in a compact period of time. If you fail to take notes you will return to the office and not be able to remember the action item that you took away from the speaker on day 1. Look your notes over at the end of each session, or break, and create a short action list. Organize your action items by what you implement right away, research more, or share with someone else in your organization.

Implement what you learned

How many times have you attended a conference with the goal of making new contacts and when you return to the office you get pulled into the daily work tasks and fail to enter those contacts into your CRM or connect with them on LinkedIn? That is why it is so important to set aside time upon your return to look over all of your conference takeaways and the action list items. Create an implementation plan and execute that plan.

This summer, I have the opportunity to attend or speak at several large social media conferences, as well as a few smaller industry specific events. I will be deliberately following the steps above to ensure that each event is successful. What tips do you have for making the most of conferences? I would love to hear from you below.

It would also be great to connect with others from the NISM community this summer. Share what conferences/events you will be attending and let's try to connect.

Author: Jennifer Radke, SMS

Jennifer Radke, CEO of NISM, is a dedicated, passionate and strategic business leader with 15+ years in sales and recruitment management, leadership, coaching, development and training. Most recently, she was the owner and chief strategist at Socially Inspired, a social media training and consulting company. In addition, she is an NISM-certified Social Media Strategist (SMS), served on the board for Women Entrepreneurs of Minnesota and can be found speaking and presenting to job seekers and businesses alike, on how to better utilize social media in the workplace. Jennifer believes that lifelong learning is the key to continued growth and your networks are the best way to expose yourself to new opportunities.





Summer Learning: Crucial content for students studying social media

Ahhh, summertime in academia. A chance to step back, soak up some sun and work! That's right, not all professors get the entire summer off. Hopefully we will get to relax just a little bit and find time to plan for our classes that start in September. This Fall [The College of St. Scholastica](#) will relaunch an online undergraduate degree in Marketing. I am thrilled to brainstorm with the colleague who will teach the Internet Marketing class online. I'll teach the class in person on the Duluth campus. My summer project of redesigning the class will sharpen my skills in curriculum development and allow me to keep up with trends in social media content.

Course objectives meet real life skills.

As I've approached the redevelopment of the course I've kept the student at the center of it all. I've asked myself, "If you were new to internet marketing and social media, what would be the key areas you should learn?" My summation is that along with social media as a cornerstone topic for the Internet Marketing class, there will be a focus on search engine factors, digital advertising, web analytics, and email campaigns. Tips for managing the digital brand will be woven throughout the course.

Content matters in real life and in the classroom.

Content is important to social media planners as well as the students that will eventually become social media planners. The outline of weekly topics will be the framework for my syllabus. The outline will help me meet the course objectives. You can bet there will be plenty of NISM infused thinking in the links shared with the students.

Practice makes perfect.

I've found the best way to learn about social media and digital marketing, is to actually do it. Experiential learning is not new. Students will get the opportunity to work in a team to create a Google Ad Words advertising campaign, Facebook Advertising or social media campaign and test it out in an online simulation. Along with the simulation, will be assessments to gauge learning like quizzes, papers and exams. Developing questions and activities is a great way for me to re-examine how to complete both tactical and analytical items in social media.

I have a list of some creative ideas for social engagement in the classroom that I'll continue to explore as I prep for class:

- Create a hashtag for each week's content and have students engage on Twitter or LinkedIn in a relevant way
- Social polling. If I want to engage students in the content I need to ask them to vote.
- Examine case studies and explain how it could have been executed in a different way to get better results

End goal: Wouldn't it be great if the class got along so well that they wanted to become Facebook friends?

NISM followers-If you taught this class, what would be the most important thing you'd like your students to learn? With so much content and areas of importance in Digital Marketing, how would you prioritize the class objectives?

Author: Melissa Goodson, PhD, SMS



[Melissa Goodson, PhD](#) is an Assistant Professor of Management at The College of St. Scholastica with extensive experience in online teaching. She just happens to love all things social (including online dating) as her husband found her on Match.com. She's an SMS through NISM and has started consulting with clients since her certification. Melissa has worked in Digital Media at Star Tribune and managed social media for small businesses. This Fall, she is teaching an undergrad Internet Marketing class as part of the launch of the revamped marketing degree at St. Scholastica.

Life-Long Learning in the Social Media Space

One of the things I find so fascinating about the Social Media Marketing space is that it demands that I keep on learning.

There is always a new feature to test, another conference to book or another online course to invest in.

Countless opportunities I get to learn, apply and then teach to my peers.

Social Media and the way we now consume our education has created a level playing field for those who have marketing degrees and those who do not.

I know this because it was shared by a hiring manager at a successful customer acquisition marketing agency here in Northeast Florida.



In my estimation, education and access to information will never get old. This has presented a unique opportunity for someone like me and anyone else who wants to learn and develop skills they can bring into the marketplace.

As a Social Media professional I have to adapt myself to paying attention to both the internal demands of an organization and all of the external factors that are ever-changing in this industry. This profession demands constant growth and good instincts.

An expert who stops learning will likely not be an expert too long.

Life-Long Learning Lifestyle

Developing a habit of learning is crucial for Social Media professionals. There is no lack of information on the internet and it is easy to lose track of the time while consuming low quality content.

Here are some of habits that help me stay relevant as a Social Media pro.

Facebook Groups – Find and join niche-specific Facebook groups where you feel you can learn and engage in meaningful conversations with other members. What I found is that by doing this, you are sending signals to the platform to continue to send you content from those groups when you browse on your newsfeed. Facebook groups are a growing trend. It's there where I'm finding, connecting and collaborating with others and where I get relevant information for my brands. It's there where you create community.

Local Meetup Groups – While online learning is convenient, I make it a habit of attending industry-specific gatherings that might be taking place locally or where I attend in person when I'm traveling. There is something about getting around people who you can look at in the eyes without a computer screen in the middle. There's a wealth of opportunities to learn at smaller, local events that are cost-effective and most of the times free to attend.

Invest In Expert Training & Coaching – If you want to be considered a Social Media Expert, you must first be an expert at learning. In this space, if you fail to learn even for 3 months you will likely not be an expert for too long. Investing in the latest courses and personal development books are part of my personal development strategy.

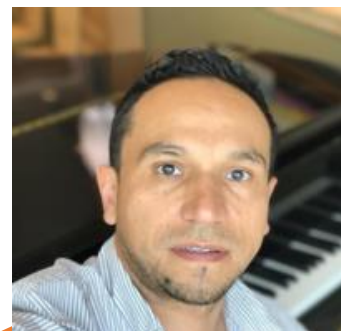
The Forever Student

It is important to point out that while opportunities to learn are all around us, I have to filter what I need to be learning. Do not fall into the forever student mindset. Don't let your mind trick you into thinking you are making progress without any measurable action. Changes in the Social Media landscape can create fear of the unknown and our minds are genius at finding ways to evade fear and discomfort.

Learn to get comfortable taking measured risks implementing your new findings. Happy learning!

Author: Danny Monzon

Danny Monzon is the owner and CMO at DM Digital. He is a bilingual digital marketing consultant and speaker.



Family Picnics, Sun, and Learning?

Oh, sweet summer. Where I live in Minnesota, it's finally arrived after a miserably long snow-filled winter. All I want to do is get outside and soak up the sun....and learn.

Summer is a pretty ideal time to immerse yourself in a new learning opportunity. If that feels counterintuitive, let me explain.

I have been longing to take an online class about storytelling for over a year. I've had every intention of doing it when "things slowed down a bit." But we all know how that works out. I decided that although summer feels more busy, that during the week it gets very quiet in my email and voicemail boxes every Thursday and Friday. The weekends are still jam-packed with family reunions, time at the lake, or work around the house...but Thursdays and Fridays might just be the "slow time" I've been planning for!

So, here's my plan.

Commitment: I've purchased the online class. Right after the transaction was complete, I blocked the next three Thursdays and Fridays in my calendar with "TRAINING." Now, everyone with access to my calendar will know that I have prioritized a training opportunity. No one needs to know that it's at my desk and not some fancy conference in San Diego! Because if it were, it would undoubtedly be a priority, right? Well, so is this training.



You TAKE Time: You don't make time for things; instead, you take time. And with my plan, placing this item on my calendar will help me and everyone else know that it is happening.

Develop a Ritual: When I was in grad school working towards my Master's Degree, one of the things that helped me get through my program is that I had several rituals that set me up for success. I had a clean spot in my home to focus only on the lesson. I had my favorite iced or hot coffee concoction right next to me. And I lit a candle—lemon scented in the summer and warm vanilla in the winter. Once my classical Pandora station was fired up, it was as if my brain opened up. So, clean off your desk. Get your favorite beverage. Put in headphones if that floats your boat.

Don't change anything else: It'll be tempting to sleep in or schedule a lunch that becomes a stop at Target and then happy-hour if I don't treat my learning days the same as I do my regular work day. Even if you feel like you have to take a few days of vacation time to complete your summer learning goals, don't take the kids out of their summer routine. Keep them in their day camp or daycare. Get up and get dressed. You are in TRAINING, remember!

Reward Yourself: I know I'm going to be very excited to implement my new storytelling skills in my social media work to help my clients tell better stories. But I also know that I might be tempted just to take that one phone call or schedule that one meeting during my days of training. I plan on rewarding myself by ordering those sunglasses that seem to be just a bit out of my typical price range. How can you reward yourself and honor your commitment to learning?

Implement immediately: I have a social campaign I am planning with one of my clients that I know will utilize my new-found skills. Not only will implementing my new strategies as soon as possible make it worth my investment, but it'll also help me take any theoretical learning and make it concrete, so I retain more.

What are the trainings or learning opportunities you've been putting off? Have you been thinking about getting certified through NISM but haven't made it a priority? Or, maybe you need to get that continuing education completed to keep your certifications up-to-date. Summer can be a great time to make it happen!

Author: Megan Tsui



As a business consultant for over 15 years, Megan Tsui has helped everyone from micro-businesses to multi-million dollar companies meet and exceed their goals. Megan has a Bachelor of Arts in Small Business Management and Entrepreneurship and a Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership. In 2014, she founded Unleashed Ventures, LLC, a company with two markets: one, providing strategy and business development for local businesses through Unleashed Strategy Consultants, and two, an international online business called UnleaSHed that supports women entrepreneurs. Megan lives in Red Wing, MN with her husband Kent and their cats and dogs. Connect with Megan on [LinkedIn](#), or [Twitter](#)

I Will Survive – A Song, Compliance, Governance and How the European Union Ruined my Summer – or not?



Photo by [Greyson Joralemon](#) on [Unsplash](#)

I am sure if I were to hum the tune of “I Will Survive” by Gloria Gaynor you would all be able to join in. Oh come on, let’s try it just for the fun of it....See, you can do it!

As I was riding in my car home from work the other day the song was playing on the radio. With my sunglasses on I got that feeling of a cool summer vibe, but then I thought about the work I still had to put into my business to comply with the improved GDPR. Suddenly my disco summer vibe turned into the heartbreaking outcry of this famous song. The compliance and governance part of social media can be a headache to many of us. Different countries have different rules and regulations. And even if you have grasped the ones specific to you and your situation once, that doesn’t mean you are on the safe side for all eternity. That is one thing the European Union proved to us this year.

What is the GDPR? – A short overview

According to the European Commission, “[Regulation \(EU\) 2016/679¹, the European Union’s \(‘EU’\) new General Data Protection Regulation \(‘GDPR’\)](#),”

regulates the processing by an individual, a company or an organisation of personal data relating to individuals in the EU. It doesn't apply to the processing of personal data of deceased persons or of legal entities. The rules don't apply to data processed by an individual for purely personal reasons or for activities carried out in one's home, provided there is no connection to a professional or commercial activity. When an individual uses personal data outside the personal sphere, for socio-cultural or financial activities, for example, then the data protection law has to be respected."

The main idea of the GDPR is to give the consumers control of their personal data and its use by companies and organizations. In order to achieve that goal, there are six main pillars:

- lawfulness, fairness and transparency
- purpose limitation
- data minimisation
- accuracy
- storage limitation
- integrity and confidentiality.
-

I can almost hear many readers sighing with relief that they are far away from these new regulations. Well, here comes the bad news: even American companies might be affected by these changes. This [Forbes article](#) gives a great sense of how GDPR does (not only) affect European and American businesses. In addition, it is important to say that there is no distinction in the regulations as to the company's size. This means that a small business like mine has to follow the exact same steps as a multi-million national company. That did and still does give me anxiety sometimes.

How the European Union is ruining my summer – or not?

Even with all understanding and positivity towards consumer safety and privacy, my initial reaction to the GDPR and what it entails for my small business was less than ladylike and disco-feeling. But after an initial "Do you think I'd crumble, Did you think I'd lay down and die?", as Gloria Gaynor described it, "Oh no, not I, I will survive" set in. There must be a silver lining of all the changes and work that has to go into checking all the aspects of the GDPR and complying with the improved regulations. Here are how changes in rules and regulations benefit our work:

1. Feeling safer.

Even though it can be a lot of work, going through new regulations can result in a feeling of more security and safeness. Once I understood what the background of the GDPR was and what it would look like from a practical standpoint, I felt that I was more knowledgeable and able to explain to my customers and clients what was going on and I felt safer, knowing exactly what I was doing and why. It made me just a bit more comfortable with my business and my actions within my work.

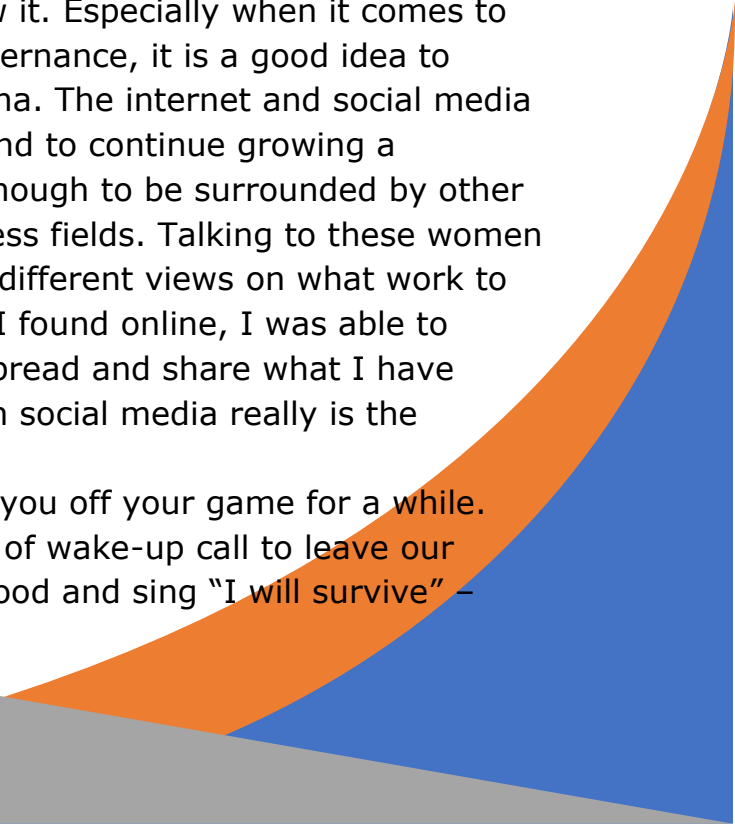
2. Know what you are doing.

Since I had to think through all steps of my business in which I handle personal data, I thought through all variations of my work processes and how they are built. As I was walking myself through all the steps, I realized that there is potential for optimization. In our everyday mode, we sometimes do things because we started doing them a certain way at some point. Sometimes it is for a specific purpose, sometimes it is for no real reason. When we are forced to think through our business with a specific intention we get a wonderful chance of putting our business and ourselves to the test. Thus, I was able to develop some ideas how to make the process of welcoming a new client more precise and also said goodbye to some ideas I had previously come up with that no longer proved relevant. The GDPR proved to be a sort of spring cleaning tool.

3. Finding a tribe.

If I don't know it, someone else might know it. Especially when it comes to very specific aspects of compliance and governance, it is a good idea to contact a legal team or specialist in the arena. The internet and social media itself are great tools to find these experts and to continue growing a network. In my specific case, I was lucky enough to be surrounded by other small business owners from different business fields. Talking to these women and men reduced my anxiety and gave me different views on what work to tackle. Through conversations and groups, I found online, I was able to strengthen my support system and try to spread and share what I have learned with others. Finding a great tribe on social media really is the "social" in all of it!

Changes can be scary and can really throw you off your game for a while. However, once in a while we need this kind of wake-up call to leave our everyday rut and get back into our disco mood and sing "I will survive" – even with compliance and governance.



Want to read about how others are staying up to date this summer? Check out these recent posts:

[Life-Long Learning in the Social Media Space](#)

[Summer Learning: Crucial Content for Students Studying Social Media](#)



Author: Magdalena Schürmann, SMS

Her passion for organization and solving problems benefits Magdalena's work as a consultant and in coaching private clients as well as small businesses in diverse areas connected to work life – from job changes to social media marketing. In her business [ArbeitsLeben](#) Magdalena often helps clients to reduce stress and gain more balance through

organization and personal and professional coaching. Her goal is to educate, to encourage, and to empower her clients.

You can connect with Magdalena through her social media channels:

Twitter: [@MagdalenaSchurma](#)

LinkedIn: <https://de.linkedin.com/in/magdalenaschuermann>

Facebook: [ArbeitsLeben](#)



Embrace User Generated Content and Hit the Sweet Spot Between the Customer and the Brand



Content marketing has matured and I've committed to learning more about it this summer. We've passed the phase of sharing brand generated content and developed to a model that is focused on data and analytics. As the backbone of a digital strategy, data puts the consumer preferences at the helm of today's digitally strategy.

Even with a data-driven content strategy, the most sophisticated marketers are challenged with a task of producing authentic content that delivers quality content and highlights the brand in a unique non-brand driven narrative. Adding memes, GIF's or having an Instagram account, isn't sufficient. Neither is hiring some millennials to manage the newest social platforms.

Today's consumers are digital natives. They want content that is valuable, personal, and focuses on their interests without the overt messages of a brand- centered campaign. With consumers extremely skeptical, marketing professionals confront a new marketing reality that forces them to reframe their marketing efforts.

How much do you trust the product info you get from the following sources?

Ipsos Millennial Social Influence Study 2014



So how can a brand scale its content marketing efforts to meet the needs of today's digitally minded consumer?

Digital marketers can shift their efforts to be customer-driven without diminishing their brands' message.

Brands simply have to be willing to get closer to the source—their customer. Marketers looking to engage with their consumers—the very reason the company exists—and find ways to bring their customers into the fold. How can digital marketing professionals turn customers into the primary source of their digital efforts?

The answer is that a brand needs to shift the content efforts by integrating user-generated content, or [UGC](#) for short, as their next powerful content marketing tool.

What is User Generated Content?

User generated content is where the brand and customer meet. It's defined as any type of content that has been produced, promoted or created by customers. It tells brands how customers actually engage and use the product. UGC delivers the most trustworthy content without the brand interceding.

UGC Validates Your Offering with Voices of Your Customers

Not only does UGC enable the brand to solidify their positioning within their industry, but more importantly it provides a direct mode of conversation with their audience. By eliminating any potential barriers between brand and consumer, companies can reach a broader audience and connect with their marketing segments, something that many brands struggled with until recently. Why is UGC such a powerful content marketing tool?

People trust people.

A recent survey by [Stackla found that authenticity](#) is more important than ever, especially in a world filled with celebrity endorsements, sponsored posts and paid influencers, consumers crave authenticity, now more than ever.

UGC Cuts through the Marketing Noise

Consumers consider user-generated content most authentic.

User-generated content isn't only a way for brands to identify consumer interests, it's actually increasing the bottom line. Consumer driven content actually drives others to purchase without any brand involvement.

According to the Stackla report, over half of the Millennials surveyed (a generation with a purchase power of over \$200 billion) have made travel or other leisure plans based on user-generated content that was delivered in their social media feeds.

UGC is an effective at influencing purchasing decisions because consumers trust content that is generated by their peers over content generated by the brand itself. Several years ago, Burberry launched a user-generated campaign which yielded a 50% increase in online sales.

Of course, the positive (or negative) experiences are shared in real-time on social media, which in turn impacts future decisions. It's precisely the constant stream of content that inspires others by instilling a sense of FOMO, which just perpetuates the ongoing cycle of user generated content and the ROI of social media.

Maximizing UGC and Outsmarting the Competition

After working with a diverse range of clients, from startups to the city of Jerusalem, I noticed that all were going about social content the same way –rather than leveraging their consumer content as a source – they tried too hard to create new content.

Together, I guided them to augment or bolster existing content strategies with UGC as relatively easy way to outpace their competitors.

The benefits and opportunities of user-generated campaigns are clear and that's exactly why 86% of brands have tried consumer driven campaigns. Once initiated, 70% of these brands, have found it easier to create on sustain new content marketing efforts. Collecting UGC can be as easy as asking for it. Chobani, the global Greek yogurt company, put their loyal consumers to the test and asked them to share the many reasons why they love the yogurt. The fans responded with tons of fresh, delicious content. Once Chobani collected it, the brand decided to maximize the user-generated content by sharing across all digital channels and integrating these images into traditional media and advertising campaigns. According to Chobani, their increase of nearly 226% in revenue can be attributed to the switch to UGC.

Several years ago, the city of Jerusalem's tourism division decided to embark upon a similar campaign. By allowing the tourists, the city's best advocates, to become the primary voice of social content. First, the city leveraged events that drew major international crowds (like the Jerusalem marathon), as a way to collect content from participants, with a simple hashtag. In three years since embracing UGC during the marathon, the city was able to increase its event-driven user content by 66% from 2015

to 2018, yielding a social reach of 3 million customers and now uses UGC as the primary source of its social campaigns.

What Does UGC and the shift mean for digital marketing?

As marketers, we're constantly competing for our customers' attention and wallets. We struggle to generate new, compelling and valuable content. But, as it turns out, we're probably going about it all wrong. Our customers aren't looking for choreographed images or stock photos to highlight the value of the product, they want to see other consumers using it. Customers want the raw, unique, and unadulterated content that is relatable and natural.

Marketers have to simply listen to our customers and give them what they want. With so much quality content being generated by consumers, we just have to tap into it and allow them to guide our digital and traditional campaigns.

Author: Mordecai Holtz



Mordecai Holtz is the CEO of Blue Thread Marketing, a boutique digital marketing working with clients that range from startups to cities. While the firm is based in Israel, their client base span across 5 countries. As part of his role with city of Jerusalem, Mordecai is a strategic advisor to the city on how to leverage the city's strengths of tourism and a thriving startup ecosystem to position the city as a global leader in digital innovation for tourism. Mordecai is an avid blogger and an active contributor to the digital marketing space. His content has been featured

on industry leading sites including [Social Media Today](#), [Business2Community](#), [Social Media World](#) and [Post Planner](#), a leading social media platform with close to 1 million unique views a month. Mordecai has also been featured on [DukoscopyTV](#) a leading forex trading television channel.

Beyond his writing within the industry, Mordecai has submitted guest content to several tech blogs including Technologer and TechAcute. Mordecai has spoken at several conferences including IMTM, Israel's leading Tourism Conference and MegaComm, a leading Israeli conference for technical writers, on the topic of User Generated Content and Turning Customers into Brand Ambassadors.

Can you do too many CEUs?

Talking in the SMS community this month about the work everyone's doing over the summer brought an interesting question to light. Can you do too many CEUs? Our focus has been on the power of learning and how important it is to stay up-to-date in our industry. But with everything there is to know and all the education that's available, is it possible to go too far with a CEU plan?

The short answer we came up with was "Yes...yes, it's possible." And here's what we decided had to stay top of mind when choosing CEU courses.

Why are you interested in the course?

This may seem like a small thing – and it doesn't have to be anything more than a mental exercise (though some people do find writing out the reasoning for their choices to be very helpful) – but it is critical to your decision-making process. Of all the ways you could spend your time and of all the opportunities you have to grow, why would you choose to spend your time working the CEU course you're considering?

With this question in mind, a lot of people are surprised at the answer. While there isn't any one right answer for everyone, the reason that comes to your mind should be carefully considered.

- If your first thought was, "This is best for me because it's the least expensive," you may want to consider if it will be the best use of your *time*. It's possible that cost is your most important consideration, but if it is, be sure you don't accidentally commit to something that is a waste of your time. Your time has value, too!
- If you chose the topic because it's something you enjoy and are familiar with, make sure the content is helping you grow. It can be easy to choose CEUs that are familiar and easy. But if you already know (or mostly know) the content, what's the point of doing the work?

What other motivation came to mind? The possibilities are endless and again...there's no right or wrong answer. We just want you to think about *why* you're making your decision.

What are your other commitments?

Sometimes opportunities are appealing because they are challenging. Certification is a great example of this! Accomplishing professional goals that set you apart can be very rewarding – both personally and professionally. But *wanting* to successfully complete a

big challenge isn't always enough. Ask yourself if you really do have the time to commit to the materials. What's happening in your personal and professional life that could potentially influence how much time you can commit to the materials? You're better off fully committing to a reasonable professional development goal than you are committing to things you'll never be able to accomplish.

Respect your community.

Depending on the opportunity, you'll have a varying level of interactions with others. You may choose to complete a self-paced, completely independent exercise. You may join a large group and add value through discussion posts. There might be an opportunity to partner with someone or participate in a small group. Whatever you're considering, be *considerate* of what others are trusting you will bring to the table. The smaller the group, the bigger the impact your absence will have, but really...we encourage you to make your commitments thoughtfully and honor them when you can.

How do you decide?

I hope I didn't just talk you out of taking continuing education classes or convince you to set low, easy to reach goals. I promise that was not my intention! I just want you to make smart choices. There are so many options at our fingertips, I see more and more people overcommitting and then underperforming. With all of the opportunity we have available to us, we have to be honest about what we need and what we can do to make good choices.

Maybe a good way to remember to make smart choices is by writing SMART goals?

Author: Amy Jauman, SMS

S pecific	Does the goal contain enough detail that you and your team will know when you've been successful? Or is it vague and open to interpretation?
M easurable	How can you measure not only goal completion but also progress as you and your team complete the tasks associated with accomplishing the goal?
A chievable	Do you have the resources (people, skills, funding, motivation, etc.) to complete the goal?
R elevant	Does the goal align with the overall organizational goals?
T ime-bound	When does the goal need to be complete? Are there milestones before the final completion date that can be used to keep us on track?