

DIY content: Three case studies in self-promoting social media

 By [Aaron Farrington](#)

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Every successful social media campaign has its focus on two tasks: creating shareable content, and getting users to engage with and share it. This is ideal, but as with many campaigns falls victim to [minutia and complications](#).

A good solution to both is starting a campaign based on user-generated content. Your target audience creates the content themselves, actively participating in a campaign to make your brand go viral. In other words, it's killing two birds with one stone.

A social media campaign based around user-generated content can be a big strategic win for a few reasons. For one, it leaves your audience with choice in both creativity and the level of involvement in your campaign. Some viral sensations catch on simply because the users see existing content and want to either one-up on it or express themselves. Another big plus is the return on content for the amount of effort put in: by sparking the interest of the right followers, you can get the number of engaged users to multiply through sharing, word-of-mouth, etc.

Three cases

A couple great examples of this approach use Instagram and YouTube:

#TellOn is a hashtag-based Instagram movement brought on by [Artifact Uprising, a photo book production company](#). The purpose of #TellOn is to get users to "Show us all the ways that you explore, create and move your way through the world." Users would capture Instagram pics of themselves in action, doing what they love or going on an adventure.

The campaign had enough engagement for the site to host a #TellOn page, and rewarded users who had the most eye-catching Instagram pics by displaying their handle and content. It's a marketing win-win using a medium that already caters to the overlap in Instagram users and photo enthusiasts.

YouTube works the same in principle, and has a wider base that serves a diverse audience. In this case, it helps to go niche. For instance, the video game market attracts many to YouTube with reviews, parodies, and walkthroughs related to video games. Video captures of gameplay, [like in Game Grumps](#), are especially appealing as content is relatively easy to produce and relevant to the niche. Game companies are fine with their own product being watched for free as it helps curious or unfamiliar gamers gauge their interest on new games. Once again, it's a win-win: companies have their product promoted for them, channel owners get views and revenue, and gamers can make informed decisions after watching game content for free.

Users can promote your product or service with digital media, but there are cases in which a tangible object can become the focus of a social media campaign:

In a move to cross-promote their brands, Belkin and Lego created [an iPhone case with a Lego surface](#), allowing the back of the iPhone to have conventional Lego pieces attached. The result was a wave of content (pictures, videos) featuring the new Belkin Lego case and user-created designs.

Many photos were shared on platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest, as a collective response fueled by inspiration and nostalgia. The design of Belkin's product itself offered thousands a chance to engage creatively on social media, and the payoff was not only sales, but the promotion of multiple brands.

A better way to make content

The aim of a good marketing campaign isn't to simply shill out a good or service, or make a boastful statement about what you have to offer. The high road takes us to promotion by means of motivation, to actually get your audience excited and interested in sharing what you're about. The future of social media should steer away from sharing content and look at user-generated content, tapping in to people's inherent need for expression and creative freedom.

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