

How to simplify social media storytelling for your business

 By Leigh Andrews

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Mark Sham of Vivid Engage and Suits & Sneakers fame recently held a full-day workshop on the importance of harnessing social media in an ever-shifting business world. Here's what you need to know about how social media has changed the world as we know it and how your brand can be better at social media storytelling.



Aleksandr Khakimullin © – 123RF.com

Sham began with the caveat that social media itself is now so expansive that there's no true expert, but there are definitely bad practices to avoid and things we can all do better. It's also escalated from being just a "young person's thing," to having relevance for all, and as a result, the workshop attendees ranged in age from interns to older consultants, all looking to make social media magic for their business.

Next, Sham shared **a brief history of social media** – it really puts into perspective how fast the social media landscape is developing when you consider that MySpace was gaining traction in SA towards the end of 2006, with a big wave of uptake on Facebook at the start of 2007. So it's been roughly 11 "fascinating and fun" years of learning to connect with others in ways we couldn't before, which has since evolved many times over – exponentially, at that.

Sham said this has resulted in new ways to learn that just don't fit in with the old ways. Particularly in South Africa, which is one of the most unequal societies in the world in terms of that gap between the poor and rich.

As a natural content creator, Sham loves to document his experience of the world. He's had a long run in the social and digital media space as well as tech and strategic, especially as founding entrepreneur behind Suit & Sneakers. Also known as "the university of informal learning", Suits & Sneakers is a social enterprise helping businesses approach learning in the workplace from a modern perspective, while also attempting to "fix education" in South Africa.



Mark Sham

Sham shared that the online university is gaining traction in both Johannesburg and Cape Town, with the ultimate aim of developing the system to such a point that young South Africans across the country can use the university at no cost in the

future.



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Leigh Andrews 14 Nov 2016



Sham pointed out that time was local and linear back in the past – we hardly ever heard news from outside our tribe and grandparents and grandchildren alike lived similar lives. **Information moved at the speed of the campfire.** Today, we live in the polar opposite, a world that is global and exponential.

As that information is digitised, it's both moving faster than ever before and were able to build on what's come before. So digital is changing the business game, not just for marketing and advertising, though it's felt quite strongly there.

The need for exponential thinking

We're also living in a **world of convergence**. Today's smartphones are based on what came before – the encyclopedia, calculator and camera. As each of these digitised, they also merged. It's funny that we call the device a phone when that's the least we do with it. Sham adds that despite all that innovation the smartphone of today is still clunky, easy to damage and lose. So the current iteration is definitely not the endpoint.

Technological change like this is creating a compound interest effect on the world, and we're at the frontline of that change, as it keeps getting faster. Touching on some businesses' hesitance to step into the social media space, Sham says it's important to keep in mind that we're actually living in a dual world at the moment.

“ The way we do business is old school and steeped in rules, but we don't bat an eyelid at using Uber to get to an event. And so, as we continue to propel forward, the rules of the game change. ”

Sham also alluded to “broken rear-view mirror syndrome”, where we need to look back to see how we can't do things today in order to move forward. This is scary for some but definitely an opportunity for those who can train their brains to think exponentially. So Sham says our phones may well be digitised, but not the rest of our physical world is not – yet. What can be digitised, will be

It's typical of technological change. Just think of Kodak as an example of digitisation deception or deceptive growth with the resulting demonetisation. When WhatsApp came along, we no longer had to worry about the amount of characters used or how many messages we sent. We've also seen the demonetisation of storage and Sham says that the step of **dematerialisation or convergence** is often missed.

As an example, Sham said with Kodak, the best people, with the most amount of money backing them, were sent in the wrong direction. The early versions of smartphones with cameras weren't very good but we didn't care, just having that option as part of your phone democratised the art of photography.



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If you wanted to know the population of Bangladesh 50 years ago, you'd go to the library and hope to find recently updated information – today you just need an internet connection on a mobile device and you have a wealth of information at your fingertips. As a result, marketers are just one of many voices in the crowd, no longer to wait for the 8pm TV news.

“ Sham says not to take this to mean that traditional media is not dead, rather that it is being severely undermined by digital and how we now share news. ”

So social media acts both as a piece of the overall media pie and a connector for the other pieces of pie. Everyone is now connected and if what you're looking for doesn't yet exist, you can create that niche yourself. As a result, marketers have lost control of the message. Here's how to take it back...

Realise that consumers have become hyperactive, with short attention and tolerance spans, but they're fast to share news and their experience.



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Leigh Andrews 8 Jan 2018



Note that the former rules of communication and mass media theory have been broken. Facebook serves as a microphone or distribution channel to amplify the voice – it's not the voice itself.

“ A microphone doesn't make someone funny, it's what is said through it. Same for Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube, said Sham: They're loudspeakers for anyone's message, as opposed to traditional 'old media,' which still holds barriers to entry. ”

Social media also means today it's a **multi-way conversation**. So as a marketer or communicator, your job is not to master each medium but rather to master the thought process behind the storytelling and sharing yours in an interesting way. Social storytelling tools will continue to evolve, so you need to learn how best to tell the story, no matter the platform.



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Leigh Andrews 24 May 2018



Sham cautioned to steer clear of being 'too friendly' with your consumers. He says brands that say, "Hey fam, we're lit" are trying too hard and alienating a part of their audience. At the end of the day, you're still a business and need to be authentic. You can't fake it, as true success here comes from constantly aiming to add value to your customers' processes in your social media efforts.

Move away from interruption or be disrupted

You also need to remember the **role of the algorithms**. Facebook filters what's shown in our news feeds based on likes, comments and shares, and also monitors who you speak to most on Facebook. That means for a business page, they don't show your posts to all the people who like your page: It's only shown to the top 5% or so who engage with your page, and that increases with more engagement.

So the model of 'selling, selling, selling,' is a disservice to the brand – those carefully crafted messages likely won't even hit your audience. Size also matters far less than ever before as your true audience isn't how many like your page, but how many actually get to see the content.

In addition, consumers of 2018 have what Sham calls "finely tuned bulls#it metres" and we can hear the sales pitch a mile away. Effective marketing is still all about relationships, so we need to move away from the interruption model that did well with old-school broadcasting and rather speak with the audience.



The most common error in your online content strategy

Dries Badenhorst 10 Feb 2015



There's so much coming at us all the time that marketers really need to get this right. Use your panic to light the fire, the right way and don't think just 'getting on Facebook' is the end goal.

This Facebook post is no longer available. It may have been removed, or the privacy settings of the post may have changed.

Not only has our knowledge and the way we punt the message changed (100 years ago, it was perfectly legal to sell 'cocaine toothdrops'), but the marketing medium itself has evolved, it's not just extension of traditional advertising and people will not be shouted at all the time. Also remember Sham's words:

“ You never own your audience, you rent that audience from Facebook. Everyone is vying for real estate in the newsfeed so it's becoming more expensive to deliver that message. ”

That's why you need to do what you can do deliver the message in a way that hits home with your audience.

How to make more engaging social media content

Sham likes Gary Vaynerchuk's 'Give-give-give-ask' technique, to engage with your consumers over the long-term. Obviously, **video is the format of the future** but don't get stuck in perfection – the aim is to document rather than create something, so don't fall into the trap of careful scripting and expensive lighting, voice-overs and editing. Sham says behind-the-scenes footage does really well as it feels like we're getting a sneak peek at what really goes on behind the slick marketing messages.

Also keep in mind that SA is still an extremely data-sensitive market, so offering only video content means you're likely cutting out a large portion of your audience. Do the necessary research into who is your audience, what are their

capabilities and do they even want video?

That's why Sham says the big brands aren't necessarily the ones leading the revolution on social media. It's the entrepreneurs and startups that have had to learn how to truly disrupt, and do it well.

Casey Neistat's 'Do what you can't' video demonstrates this mindset, and what brands are up against on social media:

Sham admits it's not easy, but in today's tech-enabled world, we need to learn how to learn again. So if you need to sell on social, you need a new narrative to play the long term. In 2018, marketing is competing against how people feel about advertising and how the algorithms rank that content – innovation is not just adding channels but completely changing the game, as we can now create original content at a fraction of the price.

It's not a simple game anymore, but there are simple ways to get it right:

Three simple rules to tell better stories on social media

1. Tell your own brand story better.
2. Tell stories by documenting.
3. Remember that social media isn't just the light and fluffy but the stories that intrigue.

The next Suits & Sneakers event is taking place in Cape Town this evening, with Dawn Nathan-Jones, former CEO of Imperial Car Rental Division and first female of the SA *Dragon's Den*, as featured speaker for the CEI Series.

“ Hello Cape Town! We are bringing the [#SSCEOSeries](#) to your playground on 31 May and our guest is [@dawnathan!](#)

Please help us spread the word by retweeting! 180 tickets have already been booked. Only 120 left:

<https://t.co/qoj2ZSVXSN> [pic.twitter.com/FsFn7iWiu](https://t.co/qoj2ZSVXSN)— Suits & Sneakers (@SuitsSneakers) [May 19, 2018](#) ”

[Click here to register](#) and follow Suits & Sneakers [on Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) for the latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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