



How Publishers and Brands Can Navigate Social Media Publishing in 2018

Predictions and advice from experts and
leading publishers

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2017 was a wildly chaotic year on social media, for publishers and brands alike. What's ahead in 2018?

It feels like millennia have passed since our predictions report for 2017. In that time, the digital content ecosystem has shifted rapidly, and at times, it's felt like we were standing on quicksand.

In a change from the norm, any new features are less notable than the events that transpired on the platforms themselves.

We've seen some brands embrace their role as corporate citizens. The platforms have had to contend with their role in spreading news and information, and whether that information was always reputable.

As such, there's been a massive crackdown across every major platform against clickbait and sensationalized content. There have also been measures taken against abuse of the platforms, in terms of unsafe speech and content.

Being able to trust where your news comes from has become paramount, as there's been a parallel infiltration of politics in content across every vertical — from sports to health to finance to brands.

At the same time, there has been growth on the platforms. This year, Instagram became a pivotal platform for publishers and brands alike. With more than 800 million monthly users, and 25 million of those as active business accounts, Instagram has evolved into a way to reach new audiences in a more intimate and connected way.

LinkedIn has also undergone a transformation this year into a serious content distribution platform. We now have 280 characters on Twitter, something previously thought blasphemous. Facebook continues its investment into longer video, and we've seen audiences are open to that, with top engaging videos tending to be longer.

There's no question of how important social media is to the spread of content and information. Time and again, we've seen publishers and brands succeed by meeting their audiences where they spend time.

For publishers, **more than 67 percent of Americans now get some news from social media**. In Bustle's recent survey of 1000 readers, 81 percent said social media was the best way to reach them (**40 percent said Instagram!**). Brands are all in now – **92 percent of marketers said social media is important to their business in 2017**.

So what will 2018 hold for social publishing?

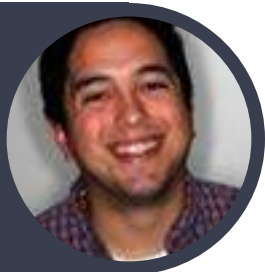
Once again, we decided to go back and ask the experts. We gathered up the thoughts of leading social media editors, audience development specialists and other strategists across the U.S. and Europe for their ideas on what social publishing in 2018 will look like.

We hope their predictions help you in planning your 2018 strategy.

Happy New Year,

Gabriele Boland
Manager, Content Strategy and Communications, NewsWhip

Note: The statements within this report constitute the opinions of the contributors to the report. NewsWhip takes no positions with regard to the accuracy of the conclusions asserted herein and the opinions do not reflect the viewpoints of NewsWhip.



Renan Borelli

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Facebook finally wakes up its sleeping giants

In 2017, there has been a subtle shift in the top destinations for consuming content on mobile devices. Most of these shifts are due to Facebook and their multifaceted app ecosystem, which includes Instagram, Messenger, WhatsApp and Watch. In 2018, Facebook will make key shifts and decisions that will impact everyone that creates or publishes content for these platforms.

After the initial buzz around Snapchat and the gold rush to secure a spot in Snapchat Discover, Instagram Stories has emerged as a preferred platform for more people; as of November, Instagram Stories has quietly amassed 300 million daily active users, compared to Snapchat's 173 million. It's enough volume and engagement for Instagram to utilize pretty much however it wants. It could be a key channel for advertisers, a key channel for publishers, or a key channel for original content; once Facebook decides what it wants to get out of Instagram Stories (other than beating Snapchat at its own game), it could be 2018's biggest social story.

Stories on Facebook's own app have been less successful to date, at least anecdotally; I rarely see as many friends sharing Stories on Facebook as I do on Instagram. However, Facebook also recently started testing the syndication of Stories from both Instagram and Messenger (the latter of which sports 1.3 billion users) to their main app's platform, something I'm already seeing people take advantage of. Facebook's using their many smaller, more intimate social networks to funnel sharing into the main Facebook experience to help its Stories succeed. This is likely just a first step in their efforts to do so; Snapchat and Instagram's combined user base pales in comparison to Facebook's potential audience of two billion people. I expect it

won't be long before Facebook Stories become a major programming outlet for publishers.

Lastly, Facebook announced that it is shifting its News Feed algorithm to prioritize videos and series that people watch for longer sessions or have repeat viewership, presumably to support the expensive Facebook Watch shows they debuted earlier this year. There's no reason to assume that Facebook would feel obligated to continue to prop up publishers flourishing within the current iteration of the News Feed, especially since Facebook can easily use the power of their platform to drive viewership for programming they're now figuratively and literally invested in. That's great news for Facebook's partners and any publisher capable of creating compelling longform video, but bad news for anyone that isn't.

Read more: Clickbait is dead. How emotion-bait drives virality on social



Esra Dogramaci

Senior Editor of Digital, Deutsche Welle

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Death of Snapchat?

2017 was the year I expected Snapchat would die and that has not come to pass. While the popularity of Snapchat continues to thrive in certain regions, as of writing, it has missed consecutive quarters of revenue, earnings and user growth projections, and the viability of the company comes into question.

Besides the risk of investors deciding to pull the plug, Snap continues to face the threat from Instagram Stories, as well as Facebook creating its own Snap like experience, while not as successful, it has a far larger user base from which to experiment and draw lessons from.

Facebook and co

Speaking of Facebook, I suspect we'll see a slowdown in its attention and investment towards news. While Facebook responded to and continues to address criticisms around false news, I do think this will become less of an issue. Publishers should continue leaning on them though for better revenue share.

Facebook will continue to reach for video ground from YouTube, which remains the world's biggest video platform. While YouTube have been slower in bring in live mobile video streaming, their overall video user experience still dominates. Twitter meanwhile also continues to strengthen its video and even analytics capacity and this can simplify tools for newsrooms with on platform experiences for posting, analysis, account management and security.

Smarter numbers

On that, I'd like to see more sophistication from editors and those

working in digital when it comes to numbers (analytics and metrics). We have to remember that social companies provide numbers that at foremost serve their interests. News is a very small picture of the digital landscape and as publishers we should know what we are looking for.

Views, reach, impressions and so on might be big show off numbers that make you feel good enough about yourself though contribute minimally to editorial or content strategy. Those metrics are part of the 'click bubble' that will inevitably burst. If publishers think three seconds for a view is a success for instance, we have really set the bar low.

At the end of the day, who are you?

Lastly, and complementary is discovering your digital identity. Generally, news publishers try to be everything to everyone and as a result have poor engagement. I'd like to see more brands and sub strands knowing who they are and what they are about, developing a (better) relationship with their audience which can be measured by loyalty and seeing them thrive.

I've touted Dress Code by DW Business a lot this year as an example of an engaging, fun video series with a serious underlying message. Their challenge, which exists across media, is taking that social media hook and ensuring the rest of the brand and content offering is as good and as engaging.

Predictions

I'd put my money on data. As the Reuters Institute found, video is important, though oversaturated. Text still matters. I would like to see 2018 be the year of data - data journalism, data visualisation which is where Google has an edge over everyone. They've been in the data game from the start and could really boost their Digital News Initiative with expertise and support in this area.

Read more: Q&A with news expert Esra Dođramaci:
how newsrooms are finding their digital identity



Gady Epstein

Media Editor, The Economist

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I predict the buzzword for 2018 will be “trust” -- that is, publishers will be “pivoting to quality” as a way to differentiate from the rest of the dross, build trust with audiences and diversify their strained business models. Whether or not they will follow through on such talk is another question. Don’t simply trust that they will.



Claire Wardle

Executive Director, First Draft News

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2018 will be the year that the world wakes up to power of manipulated and fabricated visuals as vehicles of disinformation.

Many of these are low-tech, for example ‘memes’ (striking visuals with block text overlaid) and misleading data visualizations, but we’ll also see the rise of automated videos, and AI generated images. For these more sophisticated examples, we need to guard against people losing trust in imagery entirely. While technology will catch up to some extent and we’ll have more ‘visual watermarks’ around trusted, untampered content, my fear is that we might be too late.

Read more: [The most trusted publishers & how they’re restoring trust on social](#)



Sarah Marshall

Head of Audience Growth
Vogue International, Condé Nast International

As 2017 comes to a close, there's much doom and talk of an "apocalypse" for media companies.

And after investing heavily in Facebook – hiring social video teams and handing over cash to market their offers and articles - news publishers will be disappointed that Facebook referrals are down by a quarter (there was a 24 percent drop in traffic to news sites from Facebook between February and October, according to Parse.ly's report).

Whether due to changes to the algorithm, the volume of articles published by news organisations and content marketers, or down to readers' reluctance to share articles in a world of fake news, publishers that are overly reliant on Facebook may be in for challenges in 2018.

But don't despair, 2018 is bright for some publishers. It's positive for those that:

- Have built direct relationships with readers, via email and other sources
- Know their audience to the level where they can sell to them directly, whether events, conferences, education or e-commerce
- Have developed loyal audiences
- Have diverse sources of traffic
- Have diverse sources of revenue
- Think audience first, focusing on off-platform as well as their own sites
- Understand how to reach their target audience on Instagram
- Play the Facebook algorithm with high-quality video
- Have vision and focus

2018 will be more challenging for publishers that:

- Rely solely on general news rather than focusing on a niche topic or topics
- Have little investment in SEO, email and other channels
- Have not built trust with their audiences

In 2018 publishers will spend more time on

- Instagram
- Understanding their core audiences
- Vertical video

Publishers will likely spend less time on

- Facebook Live
- VR projects
- News for smartwatches
- Chatbots



Meena Thiruvengadam

Global Head of Audience Development, Bloomberg

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In 2018, news organizations will focus more on the quality of the relationships they have with audiences as opposed to the quantity of people they count within their audience.

Metrics of success will move from likes, followers and view counts toward deeper signs of engagement and loyalty such as time spent, registrations, and subscriptions.

More wisdom from Meena, on how to tailor content for native:

For [Bloomberg], certain content performs better on certain platforms, so we look to make sure we're highlighting the right content on the right platforms, but we don't try to force everything on every platform because the way people consume content is different.

I think people can tell if you're cutting corners and just putting the same thing up everywhere. Communities tend to appreciate it if you cater to the way content is consumed on the specific platform. For instance, something like Instagram, works for business brands because a lot of business content speaks to people who are looking for inspiration, motivation and education, and things like that.

So there is a way to appeal to that element on Instagram, but on Twitter, the finance audience seems much more interested in market movement, economic news, what's happening right now, getting unfiltered, unbiased information on the ground, and less so about finding those inspirational stories."

Read more: [Does the brand newsroom work? We ask KPMG, Bloomberg & Sutherland](#)



Gavin Johnson

Managing Director, JOE.co.uk

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100 percent original content a must

Original content has always been key, but 2017 has bred another level of expectation on this front. We are really seeing how brands and consumers alike are growing increasingly tired of the whole aggregated content space. Everyone has had their fill of cats on skateboards. Whether you're a brand or a publisher, having your own tone of voice and creating your own content is something we believe is going to stand the test of time, and JOE is certainly going to continue to heavily invest in that.

Video will remain central, but we'll see more diversification

Video will continue to be a central focus for 2018, and we'll likely see Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter continuing to invest in it. Recent reports say about 87% of marketers are currently using video in their campaigns, and 80% of global internet traffic is predicted to be attributed to video in 2018. That said, we think there will be significant diversification across formats next year. At JOE, something we've been acutely aware of, and responded to in a big way, is the podcast resurgence – and a move into 'vodcasting' alongside it. We have a new podcast series called 'Unfiltered', with James O'Brien that is doing incredibly well for us in the UK and beyond, with our listener base consistently growing an average of 25 percent each week. We have a number of other exciting podcasts in the pipe for 2018.

'Live' isn't going anywhere, it's just evolving

For us, there is no question that 'Live' will continue to be a focus for platforms and content creators in 2018. Live isn't going anywhere,

it's simply evolving to meet the demands and changing consumption habits of key demographics such as Gen Z. Smart folks will know to go where their audience goes, and whilst linear TV viewing is down substantially amongst younger audiences, live social broadcast viewing and habitual engagement on social media platforms around big live broadcast events on linear TV, is up. A recent study we did in Ireland for example – with over 15,000 participants, 75 percent 18-34 – told us nearly 70 percent engage on social media frequently when watching a match/sporting event on screen.

Ephemeral content on the rise

We'll hear more about ephemeral content as we go into 2018. It's on the rise thanks to Snapchat coining the 'short-lived' content format, but we predict a shift up the gears here, as Instagram and Facebook are also in this space now, and demonstrating strong, growing engagement and slick tools for brands and publishers to get on board with.

Growth of Instagram

2017 was a big year for Instagram, up to 800 million users and lots of advancement to its capabilities that has made it a much more exciting platform for all parties. It's 'Stories' feature is now more popular than Snapchat, only a year after going live. We predict more of the same for 2018 from Instagram.

No trust, no dice

Recent research tells us a whopping 89 percent of British internet users are concerned about online privacy. With this in mind, we think there will be a renewed focus on people wanting to consume content in trusted environments, and with this, brands will be ensuring that their messaging is delivered in trusted environments too.

The year of Gen Z

Gen Z are coming of age just in time for 2018, so this will be the

year they will take the consumer crown from millennials. 2018 strategies will therefore need to focus on reaching that younger, fickle, value-oriented and socially conscious audience. It's not just about demanding consumers anymore – brands and publishers will need to adapt to Gen Z's inclusive “us, not me” mentality and reflect that in their objectives and messaging to earn their vital attention.



Jason Townsend

Deputy Social Media Manager, NASA

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In 2018, I expect to see more experiential media-rich content on social media. With more augmented and virtual reality technology getting into the hands of audiences, I expect to see more content produced that takes advantage of this and allows people to be embedded in ways that can transport them to everything from galaxies far, far away to a newsworthy location where the action is happening. I suspect that social media platforms will allow for the wider spread of this content and also bring together the audience community of like-minded fans.

I'm also expecting to see trends continue that allow people to experience events and locations together through stories on more platforms that allow very in-the-moment posting without polish and packaging, as well as the further expansion of live streaming to bring audiences to stories and content so they can experience it for themselves. Collectively harnessing these trends, social media audiences will get front row seats to content around the world (and universe!) without leaving their own backyard.

Read more in our interview with Jason and his colleague John Yembrick: [Why NASA's social media is out of this world](#)



Mallory Johns

Engagement Editor, PopSci

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How important will social media be to your efforts next year?

As Facebook and Google continue jostling for control over how we get our news, social media's importance will only continue to grow. Of course, this poses unique opportunities (and challenges) for engagement editors like me, but in 2018 social media's role will be more crucial than ever.

What do you think may become more important in 2018?

2017 was the year of the platform, and I expect we'll see more of that in 2018, but I think messaging apps (and yes, chatbots) will be the thing to watch in 2018. We've already seen Facebook going after kids (as young as 6!) with their new messenger app, and Instagram is testing a standalone app for the platform's in-app private messages. And it's going to be really interesting to see how brands and publishers will utilize personalized content—although it's too soon to tell whether chatbots or human curation will prevail on that front.

Do you foresee any challenges next year regarding content strategy and social media?

According to Parse.ly, Google has eclipsed Facebook as the #1 external referral for website traffic. In 2018, the biggest challenge for publishers will be balancing an organic and paid Facebook strategy to offset that shift, while also exploring other avenues for referral traffic coming from social media besides Facebook (ie: LinkedIn, Reddit, Flipboard, etc.).

What aspects of social media publishing are you most excited for in 2018?

I'm really excited by Instagram's latest (and forthcoming) updates! Namely, the ability to archive all Stories, highlight the best Stories on the main feed, and the forthcoming native Regram button. These aspects of Instagram are game-changers for social storytelling on the platform, and we're going to see some truly creative use-cases by publishers (including Popular Science!) in 2018.

Any thoughts around trust in publishers becoming more important?

For me, one of the best things a publisher can do to build brand loyalty and gain trust in this era of "fake news" is to invest in community initiatives. Facebook Groups and Reddit have been great in that regard, and we've seen some really great examples from the New Yorker, the Washington Post, and others, who are being open and transparent with their readers in these spaces, and in some cases, letting the readers speak directly with staff writers and editors.

Read more: How Upworthy & Popular Science find important social signals



Lucia Moses

Co-Executive Editor, Digiday

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This past year has caused people to question many of the rosy premises of the shift to digital media. The scourge of fake news and Russian meddling in the election threw cold water on the idea that big tech will make the world a better place. Publishers started standing up to the platforms' dominance over content distribution and monetization. Marketers called for a cleanup of digital advertising, with all its fraud, bots and measurement problems.

These questions will take on more prominence in 2018 as media companies realize there's no easy money to be made from Facebook and marketers see the limitations of programmatic advertising. Media companies that can't compete in a scale-based world will consolidate or further their drive to look for other avenues for revenue, such as subscriptions or e-commerce.

Those are hard businesses in their own right, though. Publishers will find that adopting a consumer-focused model requires changes to their fundamental DNA. Being all things to all people might have worked for the purposes of scaling an audience, but to get people to pay, you need to give them something high-quality and unique. To get consumers to pay directly, publishers need to explain why they need readers' support, and do it continuously, which isn't in their habit. And getting people to keep subscribing takes a whole other set of skill sets that publishers didn't think about when they were optimizing for sheer growth. Not all will be able to pull it off, but like all things in media today, surviving this transition means getting a million little things right.





Kalle Pirohen

Audience Editor, News and Current Affairs, YLE

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There has been discussion whether social and media will be separated. This fear may very well be justified which underlines the importance of our own platforms but whatever happens, I believe people will always find ways to share content that really interests them and it is our job make ourselves aware of these paths to reach new audiences, be they messaging apps, voice guided systems or something else. Yes, our job might become more difficult, but still.

I believe timeliness and the content's ability to endure time well will play a bigger role in successful social publishing.

For one, because algorithms seem to continue to develop to a direction where we see less and less newly published content in our feeds.

Secondly, because competition has increased so much – take Facebook native videos for example, the number of which has exploded which makes it more difficult to stand out.

And thirdly, **because it seems Google's role as a source of traffic will continue to grow and Facebook's role as a source of traffic will continue to if not decline then at least fluctuate unpredictably.**

What this means for organizations, strategies and work processes is that we have to stay alert of how the landscape is changing but also learn how to turn our data into actionable insight more efficiently in order to stand out. Just having huge amounts of data will not be enough.

Read more in our interview with Kalle: How Finland's national broadcaster uses social media



Ravin Sampat

Assistant Editor - Video, Innovation and Audience Engagement, BBC News

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I try to avoid predictions because I think things happen so fast in the digital landscape you're constantly scrambling to work out what's going on and measuring what's working where and whether it's sustainable for you. However if you had to ask what does 2018 look like I think you're going to see two things take prominence, and it comes from an audience perspective.

Long-form will win

2017 was the battle for attention spans with so much short form video in our various social feeds, that publishers were sometimes publishing more than the audience could handle. We've started seeing a move away from this (with various publishers including BBC Stories, putting much longer video on social channels) and I think you're seeing a shift in viewing habits – 2018 will be the year people will continue to scroll on their feeds as passive viewers but their behaviour will change and they'll be active viewers on longer content, as they grow to value content that spends time investing in an issue or character because they will feel like they are getting a reward at the end – more context, more value.

Personalisation

It's been talked about for ages but I think 2018 will see a significant shift into personalisation – more content that is specifically catered and curated for certain audiences. This could be personalisation on social media (more personal filtering in audience feed offering) and more personalisation with publishers on their apps and websites.



Maia McCann

Editor-in-Chief & EVP of Original Programming
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How important will social media be to your efforts next year?

Social media will be just as important to our efforts in 2018 as it was in 2017, which is to say, that will be our primary area of focus.

What do you think may become more important?

Tailoring video formats for different platforms seems to be one of the most important areas of focus going into 2018. I am always encouraging new team members to look at their creations on the screens on which they'll be viewed. This seems obvious, but it's not. We aren't editing videos on our phones, so it isn't second nature to view them on our phone screens.

Do you foresee any challenges next year regarding content strategy and social media?

As the emphasis on long-form video increases, publishers are going to face challenges in terms of scaling their efforts, unless they're being paid adequately by social platforms for the creation of new shows.

What aspects of social media publishing are you most excited for in 2018?

We've just started to "dip our toes" in terms of using our Instagram stories as another platform for publishing content and reaching our audience. So far, this has been a fun and exciting new area to focus on, as it allows us to tease article content with video directly to our fans when they're looking to pass some time. I'm excited to see how this develops for us.



Steve Wilson-Beales

Head of Editorial, Global Radio

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Earlier this year the Reuters Institute released a **report** looking into news consumption trends, and the insights were quite shocking. To summarise briefly, it noted that whilst audiences still went directly to trusted branded news sources to verify breaking news, when it came to passive news consumption in their social feeds they very rarely remembered the brand serving them the news. Even more worrying, 'brand attribution' was even lower in search. In an era of Fake News, this is not good news.

A case in point: remember the Irish bat? That **hilarious video clip** of a family trying to rid themselves of a bat that had flown into their kitchen? The video clip went immediately viral as it was picked up by publishers across the world. Within 24 hours it completely dominated the social feeds of most brands, news sites, family and friends. But if you'd asked anyone that day who served them that story they would have been none the wiser. This illustrates the challenge we all face working in the digital space – capturing audience attention and retaining that attention. That's why in 2018 the focus will shift back to original story-telling with brands and publishers creating true 'thumb-stopping moments' for audiences to like, follow and share in their mobile social newsfeeds. Podcasts will be a key driver of this and will accelerate even faster once the issue of discoverability has been cracked. Looking at how fast the market is moving, I don't think that's far off.





Sara Rosentheil

Founder, Naran Xadul, the top Spanish-language parenting community on Facebook

I expect social media to continue being important [for publishers]. Video will continue its growth, and in order to have organic reach, content is the most important thing.

I expect to see more long form and live video on social media. As a publisher, data continues to be very relevant. VR [will be big], everybody is speaking about it.

Other insights from Sara:

We're very data-driven... Especially video content, it's easy and cheap for us to produce it... We have developed our own format and they're very engaging with our audience, which is awesome.

We use formats that are fast, we always tell a story, and the stories are part of my heart. We can see what's already working on Facebook, by looking at ones like AJ+, BuzzFeed, PlayGround Magazine. If you analyze the big players, you can see what's already working.

We have Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, Facebook, and our website. Facebook has been the channel. The other channels have never grown as fast as Facebook.

It's very important to us to develop outside of Facebook. Our website is growing, with more views and people are spending more time per page and reading more content once they are there.

Condensed from our interview with Sara: How this site grew a community of 1.9 million parents through [Facebook video](#).

Thank you for reading our report. For further reading, check out our [2018 cheatsheet to the latest platform changes and trends you need to know](#).

NewsWhip is a social discovery and content analytics platform that tracks and predicts engagement from the world's news and social, powering a suite of products used by journalists, editors, marketers, communications and PR professionals.

Our Spike dashboard shows journalists and PR professionals which events, stories, and influencers are getting the most social engagement, in real-time, globally or locally. Tracking a wide range of digital objects — including articles, videos, Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube posts — Spike gives a singular view of what content is performing on social and predicts which stories will go viral next.

Use Spike to:

- Find tomorrow's stories, today
- Save hours of 'discovery' time
- Increase readership and revenue
- Better manage reputations online

NewsWhip Analytics is the only tool that gives you an understanding of how your competitors are performing across web and major social platforms. Analytics is armed with the world's most comprehensive data of how stories are engaged with on social media since January 1, 2014.

Use Analytics to:

- Understand what's working and why in your content portfolio
- Benchmark your performance, and competitors', against KPIs
- Gain real-time direction via customized dashboards and alerts
- Improve your social distribution strategy and ROI