

The Principles of Great Content Creation

Everyone wants their content to go viral. It's a digital badge of honor.

Set Expectations

We are all jealous of viral content we've seen succeed, like when the **Human Rights Campaign turned Facebook red** or the ALS ice bucket challenge happened. But here's the thing: it's a great goal to shoot for but it rarely happens. What you should really focus your energy on is reaching your target audience. If your target audience is everyone then you likely aren't reaching anyone. Instead focus on creating good content that will inspire those that you are trying to reach.

Remember to ask yourself:

- 1) Who is my target audience?
- 2) What do I want them to do once I have their attention?
- 3) How will this content add to or support my overall digital and communications objectives?

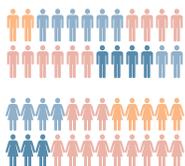
Spitfire's **Smart Chart**® can help you think through these questions and incorporate your content creation into your overarching communication strategy.

What Makes Good Content

Once you have established who you are trying to reach, consider what will inspire them to act. Think about these general principles of good content creation.



Tell authentic stories. Your content should feature stories with a genuine message. If your audience feels like you are trying to pull one over on them, they are likely to skip over your content, or maybe worse, stop following you. People are also more likely to share and like your content if they can empathize with something relatable in the story. Therefore, it pays to humanize your content and make it personal.



Address your audience's barriers but don't reinforce them. Identifying your target audience is particularly useful because then you can tailor your message to reach those you want to engage. Think about what it is that might keep your audience from participating or agreeing with your position. Address that barrier in your message, but be sure not to repeat it. But be sure not to repeat the barrier. Stay away from "myth vs. fact" posts because studies show that mentioning the myth just reinforces it.



Include an emotional ask. Emotion is an important element of what makes content powerful and empowers your supporters to act. Think about what emotion you want your piece to evoke. If you are looking to motivate your audience to act, consider using a tone of anger or hope. If your issue is heavy, beware of depressing your audience. Depression rarely generates action. Using geolocation data to provide tailored information such as a city name, makes a difference because it hits close to home. Make sure not to use ALL CAPS or too many punctuation marks. Include a call to action when necessary, but keep in mind that you'll lose subscribers' interest if urgency is overdone.



What Makes Content Spread

Now you have a great piece of content. How are you going to make it circulate around the web? Planning how to distribute your content is just as important as creating a post that will inspire your audience. After all, if no one sees it, what impact will it have?



Cultivate influencers. Analyze your supporter network and organizational contacts to identify where you have relationships with influencers. Look for those individuals or organizational partners that you can tap to help you circulate your brilliant content. Ideally these folks will not only have a big following but will also be a trusted source of information on the topic. Think beyond celebrities.

While many do have an enviable number of followers, do their followers actually care about your issue? Your time may be better invested in nurturing a relationship with someone who has fewer, albeit higher quality followers.

Let go of control. If you have created good content that inspires your audience, they will want to make it their own and share it with their friends and family. Embrace your online community and let them see themselves in your content. Letting go of control is hard for organizations concerned about their brand and identity. Keep in mind, this worry could hinder the reach of your brilliant content.



Luck favors the well-prepared. Create a calendar of your organization's priority events and not any important internal dates. Then include events that you know will be happening outside of the organization that you could leverage for your work. These could be related to the legislative cycle, a commemorative month or a holiday. Use that calendar to plan ahead. Capitalize on events that will generate buzz online to gain more attention for your content.



Listen to Your Audience

You've created an inspiring piece of content, sent it out through your own digital channels, recruited influencers to help you give it an extra boost, now what? Your job is not done.

It's time to evaluate how you did. Think back to your initial strategic framework and assess how this content supported your overall objectives.

- How did your audience respond?
- Did you recruit any new supporters, petition signatures, or donors?
- Was it a success to share with your whole organization at the next all staff meeting? Or did it flop?

Think about what might have worked or not worked and why. It's important to look at your metrics and draw conclusions about how you can improve the next time around.

- Could you have posted it at a more opportune time of the day?
- Did you release the content after the news cycle expired?
- Could you have used a more compelling image?