Getting into the algorithm

Making social media algorithms work for your marketing strategy

Algorithm = how a social media platform determines which content to display at any given time to a particular user.

Getting to grips with how they work

Underlying considerations

- **Machine learnin**g and **data science** is used to rank posts based on criteria that most marketers can't follow.
- Platforms are trying to be more transparent though.
- Function of social networks has evolved from **connecting people** to **distributing information**.
- What comes up in your feed is based on two things: **quality of content** + your **actions and reactions** to content.

Why the shifts we see today?

- **Content overload:**
  - Social media platforms grew and became inundated with content (especially from non-human entities i.e. brands).
  - Looked into monetisation options and diversified offerings.
  - Clickbait articles, fake news, bots, trolls and political warfare started to saturate Facebook.
- **Politics:** viral element of the old Facebook algorithm played a fundamental role in news-sharing during the 2016 US Elections and Brexit in the UK.
- **Privacy concerns:** users were not engaging in many personal conversations online.
- Focus is now on building a **COMMUNITY** rather than an audience, creating **CONVERSATIONS** rather than grabbing attention.

Facebook

- Facebook's algorithm changed after the company started taking more responsibility for how the platform affects users' well-being.
- Emphasis shifted to meaningful conversation and interactions and users seeing what is **relevant** to them.
  - Increase **quality of time** on platform not quantity.
  - Less news articles, **more friends and family**.
- Posts are ranked according to the order each user is **most likely to enjoy** them.
- Three main categories for **ranking signals**:
  - Who a user typically interacts with
  - The type of media in the post (e.g. video, link, photo, etc.)
  - The popularity of the post

Facebook continued...

- Posts that ask for likes and comments or posts with external links get pushed down the news feed in favour of more genuine interactions and native content.
- In 2021, posts in Groups and Events are now prioritised. Facebook wants us to use more hashtags: recommended tag listings for crafting posts.
- But there were major concerns for brands…
- As of December 2019, the average reach for Facebook posts was **down by 2.2%**. Brands could reasonably expect their posts to be seen by about **5.5% of their Page's followers**. The bigger the follower count, the greater expectation for even lower averages.

Instagram

- Factors that influence what shows up in your feed: **interest, relationship, timeliness, frequency, following** and **usage**.
- Major concern: clamp down on bought likes and followers.
- Users are seeing more content from accounts they don't follow in their main feed.
- The algorithm wants users to focus on building genuine engagement with own audiences.
- Rankings of Instagram engagement (saved > shared to DMs or stories > commented > liked).
- Posts with clickbait or engagement bait don't get recommended by the platform.
- Tread carefully with contests or giveaways and repurposed content from another source.
- Something to look out for in 2021: Instagram **Reels.**

Instagram continued...

- Is the **shadowban** a thing?
- Shadowban = the platform curbing your content reach by limiting its visibility.
- But Instagram has clarified that they do NOT:
  - hide posts in the feed.
  - favour users who use Stories, IG Live or other special features.
- Head of Instagram, Adam Mosseri: "*Some people don't realize this but we don't actually show every post with a hashtag under that hashtag. We try to show people the ones that they might be the **most interested in.** This is to try and keep hashtag pages interesting but also to **avoid spam and abuse**.*"
- Bottom line: comply with the IG terms of service and be strategic with hashtag use (e.g. branded hashtags, niche hashtags etc.)

Twitter

- Primary concern: **killing automation** i.e. bots creating fake engagement.
- **Timing** is everything on Twitter.
- The following is prioritised:
    - Recent content (the last 24 hours) with the highest amount of engagement from users you follow.
    - Content with fewer characters and at least two hashtags.
    - High quality images.
- Other things that are instrumental in your content being seen by more users:
    - **Retweets, mentions** and **replies**.
    - Use of relevant and trending **hashtags.**
    - **Credibility** of your profile - your bio and profile picture should be updated every few months or so.

LinkedIn

- **Human-centred** approach.
- Now prioritising more personal status updates.
- Users will see content from other users with high engagement even if they are not following them.
- But users will now also start to see more content from people they actually follow.
- Platform favours native content (text posts or images and videos with or without text). Use external links sparingly.
- Video content is recommended by the platform.
- Lengthy **comments** > many reactions.
- Tip: make more use of business owner's and employees' personal profiles, not just the business page for updates.

Other platforms: Pinterest, YouTube and TikTok

- **Pinterest:**
  - Favours quality content that is regularly updated.
  - Re-pins and comments get you noticed.
  - Avoid over-pinning.
- **YouTube**
  - Shows content from users whose videos you previously watched and viral ((high engagement) videos.
  - User's likelihood of engagement and the type of content you post are key factors.
- **TikTok**
  - Users are most likely to watch a video all the way through. You want to post videos that are 15 to 16 seconds so that they are watched to completion which the algorithm favours.
  - Users are fed content that is similar to what they usually watch.
  - Interact with followers to increase engagements on posts.

How to work with the algorithm

- Stay active.
- Be consistent.
- Post when your community is online.
- Develop strategies around video content (including short form video content), where possible.
- On IG, use Stories to get more organic reach with your audience without affecting your feed's cohesive style.
- Influencer marketing can help but be aware the platforms also want to monetize.

- Be meticulous with hashtags and experiment often.
- Be guided by what is working for you and your audience.
- Comply with the terms of service of the platform.
- Bottom line: create content that sparks genuine engagement:
  - Up your caption game.
  - Engage with followers' content shortly after posting.

"Social media algorithms are becoming central to everything you do. Often **misunderstood** and **occasionally inaccurate** but always on and always learning. How you and most of society consume news and information can be attributed directly to algorithms."

- Stephen Davies, PR and digital media expert -

Sources

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