

16th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

Day 1, April 17, 2015: Afternoon Session–2:00-3:30 p.m.

The Art and Science of Audience Development: How News Organizations Navigate a World where They Don't Control the Distribution Channels

Chair & Presenter: Emily Bell, Director, Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia Journalism School

Panelists:

- **Cynthia Collins**, Editor, Social Media, **The New York Times**
- **Emilio Garcia-Ruiz**, Managing Editor, **The Washington Post**
- **Stacy Martinet**, Chief Marketing Officer, **Mashable**
- **Helen Havlak**, Engagement Editor, **The Verge**

Cynthia Collins: Thanks so much. Thanks, everyone, for having me here and letting me learn from all of you as well. I'm here to share a little bit about how we're thinking about audience development at *The New York Times*. In September 2014, Alex MacCallum started forming the Audience Development Team in the newsroom. She defines the mission as, "Audience development is the use of tools, tactics, and strategies formed by data and ruled by editorial judgment to increase the number of readers, watchers, and subscribers of our journalism. While there is no silver bullet, there are many opportunities to make significant impact by reaching and engaging our audience at their digital doorstep."

As the editor leading the Social Media desk reporting up to Alex, my team plays a critical role in this mission. One month after we all started working together, a pretty special story came our way: "Here come the Brown sisters." Did any of you see this story? Did any of you share it? Thank you. Thank you all, because you helped make it the number one most visited page in 2014. It was a hit.

Now, this is just an exceptional piece of journalism that is begging to be shared, but it was driven in part by some new processes. One, like Emilio said, we were involved early. We had advance notice that this was coming. We were able to prep some social share copy and images. We were also able to sustain that push for several days, even weeks, and because of the incredible response, we kept it going for a few months.

So in honor of these four sisters, let's look at four themes from this photo essay that I think also illustrates what we're doing in audience development. We are looking at: 1) How do we command attention? 2) How do we forge connections? 3) How do we show and tell? How do we become more visual? 4) How do we learn from our wins and losses?

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First, command attention. When you see this photo in your Facebook newsfeed, it's impossible to look away. Attention must be paid to these women. How do we make sure that our stories also break through the noise? Our stories must jump out of a Facebook newsfeed. It must jump out of a Twitter stream. Some of the ways we're thinking about doing that: 1) It's great advance planning, especially for our biggest projects, like big enterprise series.

One recent example was the Towers of Secrecy investigative report. This was an amazing piece of journalism from Louise Story and Stephanie Saul. They spent a year investigating the international shell companies that own some of New York City's most expensive real estate. We were involved very early in this process, and this advanced planning allowed us to strategize publish times. This was a multi-part series. Each part of the series had a distinct geographic audience that was most interested in it: Malaysia, Russia, China. We were able to prep translations, social translations, for Facebook posts and geo-targeted posts. We created a plethora of social assets: photos, graphics, videos.

Really essential to this, too, it was such a deep, involved series, we developed piece takeaways and summaries that ended up being one of the top drivers into the series and worked very well on social. We also were able to plan some reader engagement opportunities. Both Louise and Stephanie were engaging in core discussions and Facebook Q&A's.

What else are we doing? A rapid and relentless push to breaking news. That's another way to command attention. Of course, some of these stories are going to dominate anyway, but we have to make sure that we keep on pushing these out and we sustain that interest and engagement.

A recent example was the Germanwings crash in the French Alps. Our Reporter Nicola Clark had a world-beating scoop about the Germanwings pilot locking out the other pilot in the cockpit. Our audience development team jumped into action working with the International Desk. There was a growth editor that was embedded with the International Desk, and a social editor that allowed the folks on the desk to focus on the live blog, and the growth editor was really analyzing how and where visitors were finding different parts of our coverage.

Constant SEO analysis and tweaking headlines. Pushing out the best pieces on both our NY Times World account and our main Twitter account and Facebook feed and other social accounts. Creating something that was really powerful, in this case, and some other developing news stories of what we know and what we don't know. Pushing that out in the form of Twitter images and on Facebook as well. All of these tactics helped ensure that we topped search in social trending topics for a good 24 hours for this story. And it became one of our most visited days in NYTimes.com's history.

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Another theme from the Brown sisters—connect. How do we connect? When you see these photos of the Brown sisters, you feel a twinge thinking about your own sister, your mother, your daughter. How can we ensure that our stories are reaching people emotionally? How can we find more relevance with our readers? We worked to expose the human element of stories. Highlighting stories that involve portraits.

Often, you know, there could be a story that might be buried in the paper. It was a good story on A-15 a couple of months ago about this 115-year-old woman in Italy, Emma Morano. The secret to her longevity, she says, "...was being single and eating raw eggs every day." [laughter] This story was something that didn't get any homepage play. As I said, it was on A-15 in the paper. It wasn't getting that much social organic share action. But when we saw it, we knew it was a story that was just made for social. Sure enough, we pushed it out on our main feeds. Within two days, Emma Murano's name became a Facebook trending topic, thanks to that story.

We are also looking to connect reader with our journalists. So like I said, we're trying to have more Facebook Q&A's. Reporters are being more and more active, jumping into discussion threads on Reddit and Twitter and Facebook.

Targeting. Facebook has been really powerful for us in testing interest targeting and geo-targeting, as I mentioned. You know, our main audience, the whole audience may not be interested in Downton Abbey TV show recaps or Walking Dead TV show recaps, but there will be a really passionate segment of our audience that is. And thanks to some of these interest targeting tests that we've been running with Facebook, we've been finding that we've been driving a richer dialogue in the comments between readers, often on these interest targeted posts.

Again, emphasizing reader's contributions, we're looking at more and more projects, like, The United States of Thanksgiving and Cooking, that you may be aware of, or travels, where to go in 2015. We're often soliciting reader's contributions and their thoughts, for instance, with where to go in 2015, one of the most must-see sights in Cuba and other destinations on our list. And then those contributions actually made it into the digital report.

One final piece about the importance of just connect is how we all work together. All of these examples, it's a really tight collaboration in the newsroom between the desks, the desk heads, digital deputy editors, graphics, design, photographers, social team, SEO experts, so it's really a big collaboration across many, many folks.

Another theme: Show and Tell. So, we have some of the best photos, interactive videos, graphics. And how can we do a better job highlighting this work and engaging readers with it? We know that some of these projects are often the most engaged items across social.

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The Brown sisters, they may follow more of the maxim *show, don't tell*, and you'll find in some of these examples that we do the same. But in others, like some explainers, we're actually doing a bit of showing and telling.

If you follow our main account on Twitter and our desk accounts, I hope you see that we've been putting an increased emphasis on becoming more visual. This is so important, especially on mobile. Again, when you think about people quickly scanning their feeds, an image like this will pop and stop you in your tracks.

Here's an example of an explainer, a little takeaway that we're doing. This is an example of showing and telling, right? This is just, again, making something that pops in the newsfeed a little bit more by breaking out the key takeaways of the story. We're finding that this approach is helping to really drive engagement on the social platforms, but to also drive visitors back to our site.

Video. Others have talked about the importance of video, especially on Facebook. And what we've been doing is trying to upload some shorter video clips of our longer-form videos to get people into it on Facebook. During the State of the Union, we were cutting with the video desk some live clips in close to real time of the President's speech and then we were updating them on Facebook, again, close to real time.

This example here, we found out from Facebook, was actually the most watched video of the day on the Facebook platform, which was pretty extraordinary for us.

This is just an example of some of the great photos that came in from this East Village fire in New York that we pushed out on Facebook.

We're also experimenting on Snapchat. So, this was a fun little video of our tech, Farhad. He was snapchatting, again, the Apple watch that so many seem to be sharing today.

We're doing more and more on Pinterest. This was an example of some live pinning that we did during the Oscar's telecast.

And at long last, we finally launched an Instagram for the official *New York Times* account. These were some incredible photos from Brian Denton and Sierra Leone highlighting the recovery after Ebola.

The last thing from the Brown sisters' 40 portraits: How can we learn from our wins and losses? A year after Nicholas Nixon took that first photo of his wife and her three sisters, on a whim he asked the women if he could take another photo and had them line up in the same order. It wasn't until he saw that second photo that then he said, "Hey, can we do this every year?" That's

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when the magic happened, right? And then they did it for 40 more years or 38 more years.

So, how are we learning from our wins and losses? 1) Real aggressive, aggressive testing strategy on social. We're testing framing. We're testing targeting. We're testing time of day. We're being experimental, like I showed you about Snapchat. Don't be afraid to fail or taking some more risks. If we find that something does work, though, do it again. Right? Find the common thread and apply it to other projects and other desks.

That example that I told you about the Germanwings explainer about what we know, what we don't know, we did that during the Paris attacks, and we saw that our readers really responded to that. That's what prompted us to do it again for Germanwings.

So again, if a story isn't generating the traction we like, if we're not seeing engagement and we think it deserves another push, let's see how we can frame it differently.

So in closing, each of these things may seem small. Each one of these photos of the Brown sisters on their own is wonderful. But it's really when you add it all up that it starts to become something extraordinary. It's still early. These efforts have been adding up to something big in social referrals for NYTimes.com. Over the past six months, we've seen almost 150% increase in social referrals.

So, I want to thank Nicholas Nixon. I want to thank the Brown sisters [and] all of you for sharing that, and all my colleagues back at The Times newsroom. Thank you all.

[Applause.]

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: [Speaks in Spanish at first.] What I'm telling the group is that I'm from Spain, and that the worst time to talk to anybody from Spain is two o'clock in the afternoon, because everybody is asleep. So, we have drawn the lovely post-lunch naptime slot, so our job is to try to keep you as entertained as possible while you're nodding in, nodding out, nodding in, nodding out.

We're going to start with a story which is something I'm sure that doesn't happen at any of your newsrooms, and you're not even going to be able to relate to this. So picture some editors and some reporters get into a room and they sit and they talk about journalism. And they come out of that room and they have an idea for a story, and they've already got it written and it's ready to go. And they walk down the hall of their newsroom, go down four flights of steps, cut across the room, where they keep the old printing press equipment that is broken, around the corner to IT. They take the idea and they go to IT and they say, "Here. Make this webby, please." And the IT go,

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"Huh? This?" And the newsroom people go, "Yes, yes, yes, yes! Make that webby, and do it in an hour, please."

IT people go away, come back, hand it to the newsroom, and the newsroom says, "What's this?! This isn't what I ordered. This isn't webby at all. Why can't you do your jobs?! We need things that are webby!"

Flash forward to now. A bunch of journalists get together in a room; although, in this case, there's a computer engineer in the room with them and a UX specialist, and there might even be a couple of different -- not only a print designer, but a digital designer. They walk out of the room with a piece of content, and they walk over to the Social Engagement Team, and they go, "Huh?! Get me readers!" And the Social Engagement Team goes, "Huh? This isn't gonna get any readers." And they're like, "No, no. Get me readers! Do what you do! Tweet it! Facebook it! Insta-cat it! Whatever it is you do, do it! And get me readers!"

The project publishes, and guess what? It gets no readers! And the journalists all believe, "Oh, my God, we have a terrible Social Media Team! They should have been able to get audience for my piece of content."

So, we all know that the way it really works is that social engagement has to be considered at the point of assignment. At the point of talking about a story, you need to think about whether or not that story has the possibility of getting an audience.

Now, if you have an investigative piece that is ripping the cover off of the Secret Service Agency, you don't have to worry about getting an audience. You're going to get an audience. If you have a brilliantly written, 1,000-inch narrative by the best writer on your staff, you don't have to worry. That's going to find an audience even though it's long. But for the rest of it, the idea of not thinking about whether or not your content is going to get an audience until the end of the process is just as stupid as what we used to do, which is to give stories to developers when it was too late.

So, that's the theme of my talk. Great content will find an audience. But the responsibility for great content is not on the Social Engagement Team unless they are involved at the very beginning of the process.

So, because I'm at *The Washington Post*, everybody has one question for me, which is.... (Why doesn't the clicker work? The clicker doesn't work because this is a handheld clicker that you have to do it with your hand while right at the arrow.) Anyway, so everybody wants to know. We're now owned by Jeff Bezos. What does that mean at *The Washington Post*?

And you know he's made a rather substantial investment in our newsroom. Last year, we hired more than 100 people. Some of that was existing openings, but we went up a net of about 70 people. And we went up that

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net... Let me quote Marty Baron, our editor, who when asked about sort of the types of people you need to hire now said this in a speech he gave at UC-Riverside a few days ago—it's a great speech—if you have a chance, you should give it a read—"These journalists write and edit with an ear for what resonates with digital readers. They are not romantics about a previous era."

So, we have been hiring people who understand how to get audience. And when you hire people who understand how to get audience and they work with the Social Media Team from the beginning, what happens? (The clicker still doesn't work. That way, that way, all right.) So, this is a great day for me to be giving a speech, because these numbers came out on Tuesday. This is the highest audience *The Washington Post* has ever had. 52-million uniques in a month. It's a 65% increase. And a lot of that...[applause]. Oh, stop. Please, stop. No, no, keep going. Keep going. No, no. [laughter]

A competitor slide, you say? Why, yes, I have that, a competitor slide.

Audience: Ohhh!

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: So, had another company... Oh! Oh, the clicker worked! Oh! [laughter] Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to put that up there before *The New York Times* person comes up. I'm sorry. [laughter]

Audience engagement for us begins on Day 1 when we are thinking about a story. How are we going to get readers to that content? So, we have hired people like Philip Bump, who we hired from *The Atlantic*, who when he thinks about beginning to write, even though he's writing public policy content that can be a lot of times political content that can be very thick and very dense, he writes it in a way that it's going to get an audience.

Now, what are the two key things for getting an audience in 2015? Anybody? I'll point my clicker at you. Anybody? [Inaudible response.] What was that? Cats. Why do cats work? Cats work because people share them socially, right? So, you have to think about when you start a piece of content, will people share it? And if not, will people search for it? Because as the topic of this panel states, we do not control distribution of our content anymore.

At *The Washington Post*, the majority of our audience comes from either search or social. We're okay with that. But we have to keep in mind, though, when we create content, those are the people who are going to control our distribution. If we do not control that, if we do not think about that distribution model, our content like everybody else's content will go nowhere.

So, what does it mean to think about the distribution model? So, I won't touch on this much, because the other panel did before, but the idea that when you create content there's people in the room thinking about how fast it's going to load, what is the user experience going to be, how can we build

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this in a way that's pretty cool and nifty, it all begins and ends with the engineering firepower you bring.

This is where we were in 2011, and this was well before Jeff, and this isn't all because of Jeff, because we started building up afterward. But this is where we're going to be when we move into our building next year: 47 engineers sitting in the room next to journalists. When we start a project, we want an engineer in the room. And we also want a social person in the room at the very beginning in the ideation process, not after anything has been written. The sooner, the better.

So, I'm going to run you through some examples of what this means. The first one is, this is the number one story on *The Washington Post* website last year. Did anybody get this in their social feed? Anybody see this? Right. So, this is the story of a woman who lost her job, her husband lost his job, and they basically had run out of public assistance. And they were down to having to exist on basically handouts [and] charity from food banks and things like that. And the one thing they did own is they owned a car, and the car was a Mercedes. And they had a decision to make. They could sell the car and use the money to eat or they could keep the car. And they chose to keep the car, because they were worried that they were going to become homeless, and they could always sleep in the car.

The woman involved wrote a first-person piece for us that with a lot of editing help became a terrific first-person piece for us that drew in the first few weeks millions of readers, and by the time it was all said and done, 6.2-million readers. These are not page views. These are readers. The page views were about 30 million. This was our highest piece last year. And where did all of that audience come from?

So, the yellow up here is dark social. Everybody knows what dark social is, right? It's social that you cannot measure; although, lately, everybody is pretty much determined that this is Facebook's mobile or Facebook's app [that] is driving a lot of this traffic. The blue is other social networks. The red is other people linking to it and sharing it. What's missing from here? The home page and search.

This was all driven by other people. This was a public policy story about how the economic conditions in the United States are affecting people. Millions of these stories have been written. Not millions, but tens of thousands of these stories have been written in the last ten years as the economy went into the toilet, right?

This is a different way to tell that story. And it's a way that when the editor started working on it, he could have converted it to a traditional story and just used her to quote her, but instead, he decided, if we tell it as a personal story and make an emotional connection, it will move in the social space. And it did.

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How many people...? Well, this is a full audience, so you wouldn't do this, but Game of Thrones is a very popular show on HBO. How many people are familiar with Game of Thrones? Hmm, more than I would think. OK. How many people are scared of Games of Thrones and don't watch it? Just me? OK. [laughter] Everybody wrote preview stories about Game of Thrones. "Games of Thrones, it's coming. 5th Season is coming." One of our people.... And the theme that we wanted to do was, how much blood and gore there is on Game of Thrones. So, one of our graphic artists did a drawing of every single character on Game of Thrones who had died, and then a little bit about them in the space.

Last year, the National Football League, which is the biggest sports league in the United States, banned the use of a racial epithet, the 'n' word. And they ruled that if any player was heard saying this on the field, they would get a 15-yard penalty. This is a very big deal. Media companies struggle like crazy to try to tell stories about racial sensitivity. It's very difficult. So, we got a group of people into the room, and the two people who were two of the best writers at *The Washington Post* in that room said, "We need a new story form. We can't do this with text." Let me show you what they came up with.

[Video plays. Inaudible at first.]

Man: Gamers set out here say, "We don't want no niggers around here."

Man: I was born with the word.

Man: How does hearing the 'n' word make you feel?

Woman: Like my ears are bleeding.

Man: I'm totally desensitized.

Woman: It's trash.

Woman: There is also just the power of that word to wound. Make you take a need...

Man: It is misleading and can be confusing.

Man: It's not really confusing. They just wanna say it.

Man: We can't have a conversation without the 'n' word without talking about white guilt.

Woman: Who is saying this word?

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Man: I hear it on TV. I hear it in movies. I hear it in music.

Man: People are integrating on a faster level today than ever before.

Man: It ain't just black no more.

Man: White people are not driving around going, like, "Look at these..."

Man: I'm not a nigger.

Men: Right.

Man: I'm not ignorant.

Man: I'm a nigger addict.

Women: We're discussing a word.

[End of video.]

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: So, we attacked the story using a platform that is very popular not—video—but did it in a way that it required computer engineering to build a special experience for people. The idea of getting.... We could have done this in a big, long, 100-inch narrative, but this was far more effective. What the engineers built was a way for people to then decide which point of view they wanted to see and build their own playlist of the videos. So you could take all these different perspectives, click on them, and create your own playlist, and then watch whatever video you wanted to watch off of this. I didn't think this was possible when they told me this was what they were going to try to do. But we have a six-person engineering team that works with video.

[Video plays.]

Woman: This Chris Rock, "I love black people, but I hate niggers." Like, come on, Chris. [laughs] Like, ugh!

[Video stops.]

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: Then you could watch all the conversations, and you could also talk about it in the comment section. This got shared all over the place. Far more than a story about a racially sensitive topic that probably would not have been shared. Why? Because people would have been scared to death to put this on their Facebook feed. Scared to death. So, one of the questions to me about the 2016 campaign, can we get the same sort of

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volume of social sharing we need on specific, daily, political coverage as we do on these other things?

Public policy around healthcare. There's no bigger issue in the United States right now. If you write a standard, 40-inch story explaining healthcare policy, the chances of you getting much social action are virtually zero. You'll get sharing [and] you'll get search for a small group, but you're going to get no social whatsoever. So as we approach the issue of—it's a new survey that had come up about different behavioral patterns that could affect life expectancy, we gamified it. And we turned the whole thing into an experience -- that won't start. There we go.

[Video plays.]

Man: Your first life-threatening event is....

Man: Power up your immune system with tactical immune cells. This will help secrete antibodies to deadly viruses like HIV.

[Video continues to play as Mr. Garcia-Ruiz talks over it.]

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: So, we even turned the 'defeating the virus' thing into a videogame where people could actually shoot the virus out of their own bodies. When they're done, they picked up ten years. You can see this being a traditional narrative, right? If you do X, Y, and Z, then this happens. We've all done these stories. [Video stops.]

Baseball season was approaching or was ending last year and one of the feature stories a lot of people were doing was *Players and their weird facial hair*. How do you tell that story in a socially shareable way? You create an experience that enables you to, quote, "Build your own beard." So, that's what we did.

The idea at first was that you could take different Nationals players—that's the Washington team—but then you could go down and build your own beard. And for this demonstration we chose somebody who doesn't have a beard at the moment, but who hopefully has a sense of humor. So, a story that otherwise might have been, eh, missed by people, all of a sudden became an experience—an experience that people would want to share [and] that people might want to find in other ways, right?

And the difference here is that when you take this to your social team, oh, my god, their eyes light up. They can work with this. *This* they can do. You give them *this*, they can multiply your audience by 20. You give them a boring run-of-the-mill story that they had no input on and no knowledge until beforehand, they can't do anything. But this, this they can work with.

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And then when you were, of course, done building your own beard, we enabled you to be able to make sure that you could share that beard all over the place and drive more traffic back. So, in the content creation process was an entire emphasis on social. Has to work.

And I don't know what that 'patch management' thing means, because it's not my computer.

All right. In the World Cup, American audiences are fascinated by flopping. They love the idea of the flop, so we did vines that show the different flops. Actually, I might be able to use my great development skills to handle this. Hold on. Please hold one second. Oh, it didn't work. Cancel. Uh-oh, don't want to restart the reboot. That would be bad. Don't hold this time against me. This time card. Hold on one second. Give me these. [laughter] Give me that! Give it! [laughter] All right. OK. Technical difficulties, OK? Technical difficulties.

All right. American audiences loved the flop. We could have done every World Cup. Every sports section in the United States, there's a story about why foreign players flop. I've done so many [that] I'm tired of it. This is much better. But when serious topics come, you also have to find a way to make *them* work for your audience.

So, for us, there was no more serious topic than the NSA and the Black Budget. And in Washington, the most important part of the Edward Snowden revelations, or one of them, was where the money went. Because a lot of our audience is either involved with spending that money or trying to get a piece of that money, right? So, we did a nice little data breakdown on how the different things went. Very sharable. And when people searched, we gave them an experience that they would get. Again, give this to your social media team and you're fine.

At the end of the day, though, for us, nothing is more important than next Monday. Next Monday is Pulitzer Day in the United States. That's when we will all find out whether we won the greatest prize in journalism in our country. I don't know how well we'll do this year. We got two last year. Fingers crossed.

But for us, the battle is marrying the new great technologies with our indisputable attempt to create the best journalism ever, and bring those together and create great experiences, and then to find an audience for those experiences. At the very beginning, make sure engineering and social are involved.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

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Stacy Martinet: Good afternoon. So I have the pleasure of batting cleanup for the lunch panel. Emilio gave me a great pep talk. He said, "Don't mess it up. We're off to a great start." And I would agree. Thanks to my colleagues for their great insights. And thanks to Rosental and to R.B. for hosting us all here.

Austin is a great city to have this conference, because it's full of ideas and culture and really what's next. The last time I was here I was riding the famous Katy Perry liger from the Super Bowl. I was arm wrestling Hulk Hogan. And I was hosting the first ever Mashable Meerkat Meetup. And that was all in the name of audience development in real life. That was at our Mashable house at South by Southwest, which hosts thousands of our readers every day to come see us bring the internet to life. And for the record, I let Hulk win, because he was a guest in the Mashable house.

So Mashable, we now have 42-million readers. It's a global readership. Spans all ages. Split across gender. And what they have in common is that they are all equally passionate about this crazy digital revolution that we're in. And so at Mashable, we've been around for nine years, going on ten. We are an independent company. We do have venture backing. We started that last year.

So, for the first 8.5 years of our lifespan, we were bootstrapped. Now, our funding is two rounds to \$31-million, which in this day and age is not that much. Which is to say we're always thinking about, how can we approach something as the MVP strategy, the Minimal Viable Product. And that's really how we think about our audience development.

And so, I want to share with you some of the principles that we use, because yes, we need amazing world-class journalists, and we need amazing engineers and amazing designers, and they all need to live together and work together. But the principles that we use—I think what defines them—are: focus on what you can control, and those things are the 'b' word, brand, the relationship, and content production.

So brand. That's something that actually doesn't come up that often in these conversations about growing audience and data and how we tweak our social strategy, but digital has made brand more important than ever. You know, back in the old days of 2003, the analysts were predicting that brand was over and that everyone needed to invest in personalization. That we would have such robust targeting capabilities that we could deliver any piece of content to the reader, directly where they are, when they wanted it.

Now, we're partly there, but I think what we've learned [is] as humans, we like to be a part of something. We like to align with something. We like to be a tesla. We like to be a BMW. We want to be the Mercedes person. There's something larger to it. And quite frankly, while we have sophisticated tools, they're not there yet.

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So, brand matters more than ever. And something happened in January for our brand. We crossed the mobile threshold. We always had a large number of readers on mobile, because we have an early adopter audience. But in January of 2015, we surpassed more than 50% on mobile. And we're never going back. That is a line in the sand. So, we have to think about mobile while we do, and we had a great panel discussing how they think about it from a product and technology standpoint. But from a brand standpoint, we have to accept the fact that we now live in streams. Our whole life is now in a stream. It's right here.

So, we seek news and information in a stream. We seek entertainment in a stream. We plan our holidays in the stream. We communicate with loved ones in a stream. We seek mates in the stream. Some would argue the world is passing us by because we are living in this phone. I'm going to leave that the academics in the room.

But the point is that in the stream, the brand is all you have. Your avatar needs to mean something. Your logo needs to mean something. When someone sees your prompt, it has to add value. Sure, you can get by every week or maybe a year or two or the next three with click bait, great images, but long-term, the investment has to be in brand.

And I think a lot of the companies in this room that are more than ten years old will tell you that they've been able to weather the transfer from medium to medium because of that brand. So, we're putting brand first. We're planning as a brand, we're measuring as a brand, and we're investing as a brand. You know, we're setting up our technology to live as a brand in mobile.

Second, continue to own the relationship with the communities. There's a lot of hand wringing about who is going to win out here—the technology companies, the Facebooks, the Twitter of the world, or the publishers? And what we still have is the relationship with the reader. We are using other people's pipes. We do not own the presses, and we don't own the patents on those codes, but we own that relationship with the reader.

They are coming to Mashable. They are coming to *The New York Times*. They are coming to the Verge. They are coming to *The Washington Post* for great quality content. They are coming through Facebook. They're coming through emails. They're coming through apps. But it's coming to that brand that matters, so that relationship is more important than ever.

So, you have to think, how are you providing value? And where are you providing value? The value expectation has to match the value provided. So, thinking about that holistically, we then boil that down very specifically to the channels in which our community lives on. We engage our community across

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platforms. You have over 60 accounts, over 20 social networks, and so, we have to take a different approach to each.

So, what's the tone on Facebook? What's the timing? It's very friendly. You know, we're sitting at the intersection of credible and relevant. We want people to think of Mashable as their friend giving them the news. What we do on Twitter is more real time. That is a sort of platform that is all about news consumption. It's where news junkies live. We brought on the first ever real-time news editor about a year-and-a-half ago, and we're building out that team, and they're really managing Twitter.

And that's very separate from how we approach, say, Tumblr or Pinterest, which is all about custom created content. That's what the audience wants there. That's the value they expect, so that's what we provide. On Vine, it's all about the creative community and finding innovative ways to tell a story in six seconds. So, we've had a lot of fun there and seen a lot of success. And of course, there are the Snapchats of the world and the other emerging ephemeral networks.

But regardless of the platform, we need to find ways to showcase our brand in a way that provides the value that the community expects in that particular moment on that particular platform.

Third, invest in premium content production. It doesn't seem yet that these social giants want to be in the content business. I don't blame them. It's hard. It's expensive. The business models constantly evolve. You know, they're really good at building codes and pipes. They want these companies—us—to continue to produce quality content.

Increasingly, brands—the major advertisers of the world—are looking to us as publishers to create content for them. Content is our single biggest asset, and it's our single biggest advantage. And so, we need to continue to invest in that. And of course, now, it means everything.

You know, we say the word *video*. *Video* is like saying *the internet* these days. Is video stop motion? Is it animation? Is it hyper-labs? Is it slow motion? Is it all sorts of mixed media that we're seeing on Snapchat? It's all of the above. And we saw some great examples of that from my colleagues on the panel. It has to be all those things, and we have to be able to tackle all those things.

And so, we need to use data to do that. And while big data is all the rage, I don't think it's going to solve your Facebook strategy. So, we're thinking about usable data. What pieces of data, what sources, can we use to get the full story? And we use a diversity of sources to do so. And our product team is amazing and developed us our homegrown algorithm called Velocity, which scans the web to tell us what's about to be hot before it's hot. So, we use that, but we use tools provided by the networks. We use third-party tools.

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Many of you in the room provide those services, so thank you. So, how do we use data to inform us, what type of creative, what form of content is really going to work, and where? So, that marriage there.

And then the fourth principle is to really just accept the world in which we live in. We can try to hold time where it is. I don't think it's going to work. You know, at Mashable, change is in our DNA. We're a digital-only company. We started from a very nice gentleman in Scotland. He was a media outsider. We've always been punching outside of our weight class. In order to do so, you have to change really quickly and you have to run really fast. And that has served as a huge advantage over the past ten years.

So, [we're] thinking about how we approach that [and] really rethinking the approach with the distributors, the social networks. I go to so many meetings where publishers are just so adversarial, you know, about what they're doing, and they're ruining the business. And that might be right or wrong, but they don't care or don't want to hear it.

So, how do we focus on having productive relationships? We want to make their product the best it can be for our community. We want to make their platform the best it can be for us to distribute great content. And having those relationships has been very successful, and we've seen a huge return on that.

Second, you have to equally obsess over data and creative. And I talked a little bit about that. Data is not our master. It doesn't make decisions. It doesn't make the content. It doesn't influence whether you're going to expose a truth or not. But it's your best friend. And creative is everything. They have to live hand-in-hand. And we learned how some of the teams are aligned at the other organizations. It's very similar at Mashable.

We have to use our right brain and our left brain at the same time. Collaboration is a must. This might be one of the most important principles. The competition is so fierce and so fast that there is no time for in-fighting. You have to have collaboration across teams, across desks, across departments—dare I say it—across the sacred newsroom wall! Because the world is not waiting for you to decide which side of the wall gets it. Someone else is going to take it. And so, collaboration has to be built into everything that you do from today forward.

Finally, fail quickly and move on. I mentioned our Mashable Meerkat Meetup. We're doing a ton of stuff on Periscope. At any given hour, you can see us doing something. And some of it's been really great and really fun and some of it has just been weird. And that's okay. We're still learning. And as these tools mature, I think we'll have a good idea of what's going to work for us and what's not. But in order to get there, we've had to fail quickly, move on, try things, and be okay with it.

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So, in short, too long, didn't read; too long, didn't listen. Brand is more important than ever. Continue to own the relationship with your audience. Focus on premium content production. And accept the things you cannot change.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

Helen Havlak: OK, great. So, for those of you who don't know The Verge, I know Trei spoke about us a little bit, but we date way back to the year 2011. And we were founded as a site to cover technology and how technology intersects with culture, art, and science. We are part of Vox Media, so we have a lot of sister brands—Eater, Curved, Raft, Vox.com, SBNation, Polygon—so we do a lot with them, which we'll talk about in a little bit.

But if you think about when we started, it was technology focused. And then as I'm sure you guys have all noticed, technology started to gobble up everything, so science is a lot of technology stories now with Health Kit, with Apple Watch, with everything going on there, Entertainment, where everything going on in VR is becoming a technology story. And we actually just launched a car hub this month, because car hubs are essentially—I'm sorry—cars are essentially just giant gadgets. So, what you won't see up here is video and features, because those are integrated into editorial for each of these different hubs.

Great. So, if you think about who our audience was, we started as, you know, essentially an online technology blog, but it's become a lot more than that. But if you look at our audience right now, what we know about them is they are 82% male and they largely skew 25-to-34. So, as we approach editorial development in the next 12 months, we know that there's a lot of audiences that we just aren't talking to right now. And part of that is bringing on voices and creating the content that those audiences want, but the other part of that is being really aggressive in how we pursue new audiences and pursue audiences that aren't necessarily going to come to our home page.

So, I'll let you know, I put up here the old platform model, which old for us [was] in 2011, but it was a pretty simple model, right? We had this beautiful website. We would get people to the website by search, social, SEO, and once on the website, people would do everything we wanted. You know, they would consume the news, do video, do live blogs, look at our galleries, and then have all of their conversations in the forums. And it was this super clean model.

It does not look like that anymore. We talked about this. I heard Bryce talk about this a little bit earlier today, but the people we're trying to talk to aren't necessarily going to come to our homepage and talk to us there or read us there or watch our videos there. So when you think about where

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we're publishing now, it's a lot more complicated. There are ten social networks we're publishing to on virtually a daily basis. Facebook, obviously, I think everyone is really familiar with. And I think when a lot of people about social, they mean Facebook and Twitter. YouTube—we have a lot of subscribers on YouTube who I don't think know we are a website, but they do know we make videos that they like. So, it's this totally different audience, and what we try and do with that audience is not always drive them back to the site to drive page views. Twitter—great at driving traffic.

But Periscope, if you guys aren't familiar with the logo, is not such a good traffic driver. But when it launched, we've been doing Periscopes all the time. We get a lot of cool new products in. When we had Apple Watch in, when we had, you know, the new MacBook in, we just put a journalist in a room with Periscope and let fans talk to them for ten minutes. So, an interesting thing with Periscope is, we've seen like 2,000 views at the same time on Periscope, which when Ellen did a Periscope, it hit about 4,000, so we feel like we're doing pretty well.

Tumblr. Tumblr is essentially a lot of different things combined. It's a really interesting thing. But the rules of Tumblr are totally different from the rules of the rest of the web. If you just post your own content to Tumblr, the people will not appreciate it there. So, you have to approach [it] in a totally different way. And you can't just take an article and put it on Tumblr and expect it to do well as an article post on Tumblr. And you can't necessarily expect it to drive traffic, because a lot of times it just won't.

Snapchat, I will talk about a little bit more later. Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Google+. There's all these different sites that have totally different audiences and that you have to create totally different content for. So if you think about all the stories we publish in a day, we have to think about what we publish, and then we have to think about how we slice it for each of these different audiences, and if there's different content we can draw out of it. Because it's not just take your article and put it across all of these [platforms] and expect it to drive traffic.

What's not up here is actually podcasts, which we do a lot of as well. So, we just launched a new podcast a couple of months ago called Let's Tech that's been pretty great. But yeah, I mean, if we're going after a younger audience and we're going after an audience we don't have right now, they're going to expect us to come to them.

So, if you think about what that looks like for our video right now, we started with a really good video team, so that's been a big advantage for us. But again, the videos we put on TheVerge.com are now doing the same amount of views as the videos that go on YouTube. And then Facebook video is kind of the wild card. And I'll show you guys an example of that in a second. But we've been playing a lot with Periscope. And then Snapchat we've been

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sending with our writers into totally weird and wild places. That is a Snapchat of a rocket launch that we covered.

So, I'll show you guys an example. So, we make a lot of video. A lot of our video is beautiful. It's like six minutes. It's ten minutes. It's 20 minutes. And that doesn't always play well on Facebook. When things play on Facebook, they play silently by default in newsfeed. So, you can't always expect that people will turn on their volume unless you give them a compelling reason to do so.

So, this is an example of a longer video that we knew wouldn't play well on Facebook, so we recorded a new voiceover for it. We did a totally new edit and we integrated text. And this was the result:

[Video plays.]

Narrator: Greetings from the year 2030. This is the Mercedes Benz F015 luxury in motion. It's a self-driving car that's not like anything you've ever seen before. It's got lasers. It's got touchscreens everywhere. It's got swiveling seats. It's got windows that look like metal.

We were on a naval base outside San Francisco. It's actually a decommissioned naval base, which is good, because that meant that it could drive us around safely. It looked and felt like the future. It may not be my future, but I'm glad somebody is working on it.

[End of video.]

Great. So I know we were actually talking about self-driving cars earlier and about how content will go in the car. That's probably a good example of, if that's what a self-driving car looks like, and you swivel your seat around and continue to read the news while the car drives you. But the longer form video of that on YouTube did about 250,000 views. On Facebook, it did 650,000. So, that's not always the case with all of our video, but if you think about where it's going, that needs to, like, impact everything you do—the voiceover for it, the visuals for it, the level of animation you do in it. You can't expect the same video to just paste across all of the different social platforms and get the kind of engagement you're looking for.

So, I know Trei spoke about the Apple watch a little bit, and he spoke about load times and overall experience, which was 7,000 words long and had ambient videos and was this beautiful object. We knew that part of our goal was to get as many people to go to that review as possible, but we also knew that part of our goal was to get people to know that we were covering the Apple watch, know that we were kind of the resource on the Apple watch, so not everything we did was about getting traffic. So, we took every frame and

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about a six-minute video and turned it into a gif. Those gifs became photo sets on Tumblr. They became how we promoted this thing on Twitter. And they went everywhere. The six-minute video had a cut-down similar to the one you just saw that had integrated text and that was designed to be played on Facebook for our Facebook audience.

We were thinking about what we could do on Snapchat. You know, we did the standard demo of the device on Snapchat, but we also said, "Hey, you know, this thing hits stores this week." And so we had reporters in Tokyo, Paris, and London actually take Snapchat and watch the thing hit stores for demos, so there was a 24-hour Snapchat story that followed the opening of the Apple watch preview events across the world. And then, you know, we had the YouTube video, and we were talking about this in a lot of different ways. We were talking about it on podcasts. We were talking about it everywhere we could possibly go.

But yeah, not everything drove traffic, and not everything has to drive traffic. A big part of our goal is always like build the audience, because if we build the audience as big as we possibly can, that's when you get to the question of, you know, Vox creative and the work we do with native advertising. It's easy to get trapped in paying too much attention to Chartbeat and expecting page views to be your primary metric, but we're aggressively investing in other things.

This was another kind of cool example of something that didn't have a video component. So, it was in theory a little bit harder to promote. We wrote a big, crazy feature about Max Headroom, who was a really creepy, like 3-D, pop culture icon in the 1980's. But essentially, we gathered tons of different assets. It was another beautiful product-designed piece. But we turned it into gifs. We turned it into photo sets. We took quotes from it and made them objects you could share. And it became this really cool, powerful thing.

I think other examples of it we haven't really talked about. I know Trei had some Fast & Furious in his presentation. We made a 10-minute explainer video of Fast & Furious, and when that went on YouTube, it kind of didn't do that well. And so, we looked at search trends around how people talk about big releases in movie theatres, and we figured out that conversation always peaks on Saturday, the day after the premier. So, we took the video and we put the whole thing on Facebook on a Saturday morning. And a 10-minute video is a lot to ask people to watch and interact with on Facebook. It did like three-million views like right off the bat on Facebook, which is totally different from kind of the common knowledge.

So yeah, when we think about like where we're going and like what we need to do, we always think about not depending too much on one different place, which is why we're so aggressive about Tumblr [and] we're so aggressive about Pinterest and all of the different platforms, because we know that we're not always going to control those distribution platforms off the site. But

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if we can do what we can to build as many people paying attention to us there are possible, it will work out for us in the long run.

Search—still hugely important for us. I know we're not the only ones to mention this, but we think about SEO very seriously, because it's still kind of keeping that connect with search [and] social. And then we actually do have a super robust homepage audience, which is kind of unusual, I think, in the digital space. And I think the common wisdom is that that's not something you can do, but between RSS and subscribers and people coming to the homepage, that's still been huge for us.

But our main goal is to keep this mix as diverse as possible so that we can always kind of depend on traffic in different places. And then if we have big enough audiences off platform, [we] figure that someday when we have Vox creative native advertising that we need to get out to really specific audiences, they're going to be there, and we'll have people we're talking to already.

[Applause.]

Q&A Session:

R.B. Brenner: We're going to start here, but again invite you to come to the microphones. And we want to involve the audience as much as possible. I'm going to start with a comment that you ended on, Stacy. You said, "Fail quickly and move on." All of your presentations talked about successes. I wondered if you could share sort of a memorable failure in this area.

Stacy Martinet: I think there's little failures that happen every single day, and we just soldier on. I think for us some of the failures have been probably not moving as quickly on some trends, waiting to see what was going to happen. Maybe spending too much time doing competitive research, instead of just getting in there and doing it. That's one of the learnings that we've had over the last year or so, and that's why we really leaned aggressively into Meerkat, Periscope, Meerscope. And a lot of people have said to me, like, "You guys are really on it with that. Like, what is going on? You love it!" And we're just, you know, everything that comes up, we're just trying. And so, I can't think of one colossal failure. And our business isn't built that way. We're just trying to fail a little bit every day or just learn something every day.

R.B. Brenner: Let me ask the same of others.

Cynthia Collins: Sure. I have a small example that hopefully others can take to inform how they are doing things. There is one fun example, if you will, about a styles article that we did. It was this great article about Mindy Kaling, a night out with Mindy Kaling, the actress. Our headline for this story was *Mindy Kaling Talks at the New Yorker Festival*. And we buried the lead,

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right? At the end of this article there was this amazing anecdote about an older gentleman, a tipsy gentleman at this event. And he mistook Mindy Kaling for Malala, and he congratulated her on her Nobel Peace Prize. [laughter] And sure enough, everyone else saw that that was the way to frame that story. And it was a Facebook trending topic. We weren't there. Mashable had a piece on it, I'm sure. BuzzFeed did. US Magazine. Everyone was covering it, and our lead was buried. So, in that instance, we noticed it on our Social Media Team, and we alerted the Styles desk, and within minutes, they changed the headline, and we were able to reenter that conversation and have a seat at the table, and pushed it back out on social and was able to take back a little bit of what we lost potentially.

R.B. Brenner: Helen or Emilio?

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: Well, I mean, I think failure, in this area, failure is now organic, right? So, even if you get everything right and the social team is there and you build a great package, sometimes you publish and plbtt! Nothing happens, right? It doesn't move. You can't figure out why. What social gives you is the ability to repackage and try again, and keep trying, and keep pushing. So, you can't really accept failure. We can't live in a day when you publish and walk away. You have to publish and keep reiterating off of that until you get to the point where the failure becomes maybe not a huge success, but at least it becomes something that's acceptable.

Helen Havlak: Yeah. I would say for us as we go aggressively after new coverage areas that our existing audience isn't super-familiar with, [like] entertainment [and] covering it in a serious way.... We have Emily Yoshida now, who's come over, science. You write these great -- we have these great stories. And then when we put them out to our current audience and we don't frame them in a way that our current audience can understand, they just totally flop. So, it's figuring out how we can take these things that our audience is not used to, that they are very uncomfortable with, and then go after new audiences. And then once we bring them onto these pieces, if someone lands on, you know, a great essay about Bjork is up to in New York, we can't serve the rest of the website around it to them as like, "This is the latest news from Windows." "This is the Apple watch." And we have to figure out how we change those pages and change the suggested links and update that to make sure that the experience is good for a lot of different types of readers.

R.B. Brenner: So the idea of audience engagement at the point of story assignment, you know, makes so much sense. But we all heard you're talking about multiple platforms, multiple audiences. So that seems like a really basic goal that's incredibly hard to achieve consistently. Can we talk about that challenge?

Helen Havlak: Well, so, we use some tools, and actually, we see a lot of stories trickle up really quickly that may trickle up because they're trending

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on Tumblr that just haven't hit the rest of the web yet. And we know that even though it started on Tumblr, it will become a very good general news [item]. Or, we know it started on Tumblr. It's something really interesting. It's something we can take to the site, speak to the person behind it, add value to [it], then put it back on Tumblr and see it absolutely blow up. But we use like a tool called Crowd Tingle, so we're watching all the time exactly what's bubbling up on Facebook from, you know, hundreds of websites.

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: And I also think for the publishers out there who don't have the resources that we might have, smaller place, it really is, just have the best plan you can have with the resources you have, right? I mean, do the fundamentals correctly. Make sure your headlines are good. Make sure your SEO is where it should be. And then just do that as well as you can. And you'll have a lot of successes. It doesn't necessarily mean that everybody has to have something on every single platform, but pick your spot. So, instead of one story cutting in eight different ways for eight different platforms, maybe you pick two that you think this particular story is going to work on and attack those two. So, you can do different things with different resources. You shouldn't be intimidated by that.

Stacy Martinet: I think adding to that, looking at your traffic mix, what is going to work for you? Your site might just be so well suited for search. That's great! Like, think about that in your content strategy and your distribution strategy. Like, Twitter might actually be bigger for you than some other networks. And so, how are you going to think about that? How is that going to influence the tone and timing? And I don't think.... We talk a lot about, well, it's Facebook, and then maybe Twitter, and then maybe others and then search. That is a trend for a lot of publishers, but each publisher has a unique advantage in different corners of the web. So, finding that and then just really owning that.

Cynthia Collins: Yeah, I think so much of it, too, is as much planning as you can do, and that's definitely the goal. We also all just have to be really nimble and responsive. So, like everyone else said, just in terms of monitoring how people are organically coming to the story and seeing, you know, if our assumptions were perhaps wrong in how we planned it out. Okay, so adjust. If we're seeing more engagement on Twitter than Facebook, okay, give it another push on Twitter, right? Try to amplify where we see the action happening and respond to that. So, I think that's a really critical piece as well.

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: You know, there's an interesting question, too, that I'd love to ask the group, which is, how many of you feel like your writers feel responsibility over the audience their content gets? [no audible response] Yeah. So, do your writers feel like the audience is their responsibility? That they are responsible for tweeting, for posting on Facebook, for making sure the headlines are right, for making sure the SEO is all working right. How many of you feel like your writers understand that and are trying to do that?

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Man: The younger ones.

Helen Havlak: Yeah.

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: So, this is a problem for traditional media places, because a lot of them, us included, don't feel like that's their responsibility. And that's part of the cultural transformation, because I guarantee you that the people at Mashable do.

Helen Havlak: I mean, one thing we do with our writers is, you know, it's not like the writer finishes a story and says, "Hey, social, take this, make it go out into the world." Every single post, pretty much, that goes up on our site gets web workshopped by the writer. And they come in and we look at SEO, and the writer actually posts it to Facebook, which is a little crazy, but I think we're really excited about it. It makes people pay attention to how they are positioning things for the audiences that are actually reading their story.

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: Yeah. In a perfect world, if you get that fundamental right of your writers being responsible for the basics of getting stuff out, then your social engagement team is really the amplifier at 10,000-feet looking at different high-level strategies. And then it becomes a whole different game than worrying about every day, how many clicks am I getting? It becomes a whole strategic plan.

Stacy Martinet: You know, I think it's a little more nuanced. I think some folks in the newsroom should not worry at all about where their stories go. They should worry about informing people, and they should let the other folks they collaborate with get it in front of those people. That's a certain type of journalism, like, those informed stories. Then you've got the entertain stories. Those people should absolutely be thinking about the web every single day, and they should be seeing what's trending, and they should be reacting to those trends with their own unique spin. And then we've got the inspire stories, which are just like, "Heck, we're gonna do this even if no one reads it, because it's important and we have a point of view on it." And somewhere in the middle, like, everyone is responsible for that, but I wouldn't say every single person needs to be thinking that way.

Every single person needs to think web first, social first, as a reporter when they come in the door. I think also journalists need to understand posting to social, because it influences how their stories are displayed. So, we've seen journalists that are like, "Well, this is going to do really well on Twitter." It's like, well, you're actually not spending enough of your professional time on Facebook, so spend more time on Facebook to understand that. But I think it has to be a collaboration, because I think it's humanly impossible to source, report, edit, copy edit, publish, socialize. I think that's a high expectation.

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I think what Emilio is saying is absolutely right. And at Mashable, we're like, "You need to think social first. You need to be a social being." But we also need to set up teams, processes, and responsibility within certain people to lift everyone up and collaborate and own it.

R.B. Brenner: Great. I'm going to go to the audience. Can you introduce yourself before you question, please.

Mr. Cruz: Yes, I'm Victor Cruz. I work for a Brazilian newspaper called Folha Sao Paulo. And we use a lot of social media tools to promote our content, I think, as everyone here. But we are not using Snapchat yet. So, I'm a bit curious about your experiences with Snapchat and what kind of return you are getting from it. Thank you.

Cynthia Collins: Sure. I can kick off. It's very much an experiment for us. I know Mashable may have more to add. Post as well. But it's very new, and we just wanted to test it out. What we're doing, we have basically turned over the channel to our reporters and photographers and videographers. So each day, another Time's journalist takes over the keys to our Snapchat account, and they tell stories there. Data, in terms of how this is all doing, it's very hard right now. I assume the folks that are in the discover tab on Snapchat, that they apparently have a much more robust set of reporting tools. But right now, we're just trying to learn sort of how to tell stories on that platform. And I heard before this session, someone told me they really love what we're doing on Snapchat, so that made my day. Thank you.

Stacy Martinet: We've been on it for about a year, and certainly some fits and starts there. But one, I think it's a great place to build brand with the younger generation. We've gotten a lot of feedback in various forms. Some on the platform, some off, some through other channels. But it's really pushed our whole team, our whole company, to think about formats differently and to think about what a future world will look like in mixed media. And I think what they're doing with the live events product is really, really interesting and really important as a mark for a transition to a new era for UGC.

Helen Havlak: Yeah, I mean, what Mashable does is awesome. We also cover a lot of live events. In terms of views that you can see on your Snapchats, we're seeing like 15,000 views per Snapchat by the end of its life right now, which is a very significant audience of a very hard to reach demographic. And so, you know, we're pretty rigorous about A) when there are big events we're covering, if it's, you know, a big convention, if it's a rocket launch, whatever that looks like, making sure we have the plan in place to tell a coherent ongoing story. But then on days where we don't have big events, finding something in the office, whether it's like a Q&A or a demo of a new product, something we can do that keeps us in people's feed.

R.B. Brenner: Going to go over here.

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Woman: I'm just curious how you actually find out why a story becomes popular, the reasons it becomes popular. And I'm sure we all do this, like, you put something on Facebook that doesn't do so well. We put up our kids. Obviously, our kids are the most beautiful things ever, whatever. But like I was particularly impressed with Ms. Havlak's comment that a particular story did well at a particular time, because it was Saturday after the premier. You know, what makes the story become a story that does really well with readers because of its content versus its time or its particular season of the year or something like that?

Helen Havlak: Yeah. I mean, we look a lot at Facebook's domain insights, which let you see traffic from Facebook into the URL. And so, we'll look at stories that are doing well and, you know, take that data and try and analyze [it]. How long was the copy? What time of day did it go up? What day of week did it go up? But that's never going to be a complete answer to the magical Facebook algorithm that sometimes chooses things and sometimes doesn't. So, I think it is, if you have a hunch that something should have done well, we'll change everything about it, like, who it tagged, what the image was, what the headline was. Change the whole thing and try it again a few days and see if we can get better luck. But sadly, there isn't like a be-all and end-all, especially for Facebook.

R.B. Brenner: Right over there. A reminder to introduce yourself, please.

Jonathan Groves: I'm Jonathan Groves with Drury University in Springfield, Missouri. And I was wondering, in all of the mix that you're talking about—you talked about organic search and referrals and social—I wonder what part paid search and paid promotional posts or tweets go into your strategy.

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: We use it a little, not a lot, largely because it's expensive. But I think it's more of a power boost on something that is going pretty well that you think you could go a little bit bigger with. I don't think, you know, you start at the very beginning with that. It's sort of an add-on at the end. Like I said, we don't do it that often.

Stacy Martinet: Yeah. We don't do any paid search. We do paid social. We use it very similarly. If something is really taking off, then we'll double down on it. We also use it a lot for targeting. So, if we have something that's going to have a huge fandom, like target them, put some money behind it, [and] see it take off more than it probably would have without it. I do think we have to acknowledge that all of the platforms we're talking about are now on the hook as public companies for revenue, and therefore, acknowledging that they have paid products and acknowledging that that is part of the game is where we are and we have to accept that.

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Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: And then you should also keep sort of a healthy skepticism with some of these companies and the audience they are driving to you and make sure that they are actually human beings that they are driving to you and not bots. I used to have someone on my staff who's very, very skeptical of all paid traffic. Just thought it was all bullshit. So....

Helen Havlak: Yeah. We actually do a lot of product reviews. And every once in a while, I'll see paid search traffic going to the product review that we didn't pay for, so I assume that the maker of the product occasionally is doing some buying, but that's not something we at all take into account. We have been testing some Facebook-paid similar to how you guys do it. We have custom audiences bill against all the different Vox websites, so if we publish something on The Verge and we think, hey, Vox readers might be into this, we may target their custom audience and try and go after that. Because some of the interest targeting on Facebook we see really successful for fandoms, but general interest stuff is a little tougher.

Cynthia Collins: I know *The Times*, the marketing team, some of the programs that they are running that are really successful is to help launch new pages, so to help boost posts from our new cooking page on Facebook or we have a new New York Today page, so it's tougher and tougher to build new communities on Facebook. So, I know that marketing has been giving that a bit of a boost, and it's been seeing some good efforts there.

R.B. Brenner: Great. Mark.

Mark Glaser: Yeah. Mark Glaser at PBS MediaShift. I understand BuzzFeed putting a lot of original content on Facebook. They have a lot of native ads. And some others that put it there. What is the business case? How can publications make money by putting original—and I mean they are not pushing people back to the site, they are literally making original content for Facebook or other social media.

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: *New York Times*?

Cynthia Collins: I'll talk about some of what we've done.

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: What about that partnership with Facebook? [laughter]

Cynthia Collins: We do some short-form videos, as I mentioned. You know, we are putting exclusive content out on every platform, you know, especially talking about Snapchat. I mean, we're telling stories completely right here on that platform. Where we're really seeing the value is in bringing in a completely new audience, right? Like on Facebook, 70% of the followers of our main page are under age 34, right? It's very different from our core readership in print and online for our subscriber base. So, we believe the value in providing these unique content experiences off our site in large part

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are to get our stories seen by folks, younger folks, primarily who may not be coming naturally to our homepage or subscribing to the paper.

Mark Glaser: But you don't see that. Do you see it connecting? Like, you're obviously branding or bringing new audiences. Good. But then do you see it connect to getting people to your site in other ways?

Cynthia Collins: Sure. Sure. That's really the marketing and product teams. I'm sorry they are not represented here today. But, you know, we bring them in, and then they are thinking constantly about, you know, okay, how can we move them up the ladder to sign up for an email perhaps? In fact, that video example that I mentioned when we were posting the video from the State of the Union. We just put a simple email newsletter prompt in there. And from that one post, we got 17,000 new email subscribers at least, I think it was.

Stacy Martinet: Wow.

Cynthia Collins: So, there's little ways like that, that you're making that sort of first connection between the reader and *The Times*. And oftentimes these are the young readers. So, it's getting those first steps. And then they're working really to move them up the ladder to then becoming maybe a subscriber on digital or print.

Helen Havlak: I would say it's also part of the algorithm game, right? Like if you can put a native video in that will reach five-million people, that will raise up kind of how Facebook treats the value of your page. So, it is a little bit playing that game of trying to lift up the page as a whole and get people to click back, like the page, see what else you're posting, and maybe convert eventually either to someone who looks at what you're doing on Facebook or comes back to the site.

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: And the numbers that she cited are true. I mean, if you put a video on your site versus a video on Facebook, most of the time you're going to see a four or five-fold difference in audience, bigger audience. The monetization will be five-fold less, obviously, but it's just hard to ignore the power that they have to drive massive audiences. We have to figure out a way to turn that to our advantage somehow. Hope it gets you readers you wouldn't get otherwise. But in terms of, is anybody cutting you a check? No.

Mark Glaser: So you're not worried that you're giving Facebook power.

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: Oh, terrified. Of course, you're terr--, I mean, of course, that's... It's what we worry about all the time is giving away content. But, you know, those are the cards you've been dealt. What was your slide? Don't worry, be happy? What was that? [laughter] What was that? Don't worry about the things you can't control?

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Stacy Martinet: Yeah. Grant me the serenity to accept the things I....

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: Right. Grant me the serenity, right?

Stacy Martinet: Yeah.

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: This is the hand you've been dealt. Let's try and see what happens. Get a lot of eyeballs on stuff and hope it works out.

Helen Havlak: And I think the idea that it's one person who you could get back to the site if you don't give something away is not true. I think the people who are.... There are many people who will only consume it on that platform, because of the eight-second load times.

Stacy Martinet: Yeah.

Helen Havlak: Because they are going to another video player.

Stacy Martinet: That's right. It's not either/or. It's not like you're full-in my subscriber or you're not. Mark, it's so great to see you in real life, because like I've known you on Twitter for so long. [laughter]

Cynthia Collins: Ditto!

Stacy Martinet: But I think, I mean, the final part, there's like legion and then there's like getting in the algorithm which is huge and a full-time job. The third part is the revenue, right? And I think we'll have to wait and see like what the revenue model is for that content, and does it make sense for your revenue?

Mark Glaser: Yeah. That's my big question. I'm curious.

Stacy Martinet: Well, you're the journalist, so you tell me what you find out. [laughs]

R.B. Brenner: Great. Thank you.

Laura Weffer: Hello. My name is Laura Weffer. I'm coming from Venezuela. I have a platform called Effecto Cocuyo. Thank you for sharing your knowledge. Thank you for sharing your knowledge. We have seen beautiful and really wonderful examples of how to make news a little bit fun. You know, it's like you have to dress reality with a glossy dress and make people read it. Is it true that users in the internet don't like to read? Have you put some long pieces and have the people been receptive with them?

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: Yeah. That's one of the big fallacies. Two big fallacies. Number one, people won't read long stories on the internet. Number two,

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people won't read long stories on mobile. It's bullshit. If you tell a good story, people will get to the end of your good story. Human nature.

Stacy Martinet: We've been writing a lot about what's happening in South Carolina. And we've been actually doing a lot of Snapchat stories about it, which is a huge departure from Tech Tuesday on Snapchat. And the response has been incredible, and it's incredible from a young audience, and the time spent is huge. So, I think when I talked about the streams, like we're all humans and we have many parts of our brain and personality. And so, people can take the hard and the soft in one place.

Cynthia Collins: We're actually seeing some of our long foreign pieces, our enterprise journalism, they are the most shared pieces across social. So, that's, again, what's so great about what folks like us are doing. You know, these are stories that deserve to be seen. And, you know, they can't just have one tweet, one Facebook post, right? They need a thoughtful strategy that is thinking about all the different potential audiences that may be interested in that story, right? There could be, you know, a dozen different niche communities that are interested in one story. How can we talk to all of them in slightly different ways and bring them in? So, I think that's one of the areas for *The Times*, at least, where we're seeing such great results is in getting people to engage more with these long-form stories, and they absolutely are.

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: Yeah. And one thing none of us talked on, I think, is images. How important images are in social. Make sure whatever you're using, your content management system, whatever it is, is feeding photos into your various social streams—Facebook and Twitter. Make sure that's a priority. That makes a very big difference that time and time again research has shown that that really matters.

Helen Havlak: Yeah. It's not just having images. It's also what the images are. We cover a lot of tech, and a lot of like the Getty images you'll see are like, "Look at this image of an Amazon logo. Look at this image of an Amazon tape." So, we actually have photo shoots periodically, where we'll look at some of the worst stock photos [that] make it onto our site, and try and create original, good photography around those periodically. And then put it into the CMS's custom stock photography that we can use that's more on brand for The Verge and hook our readers better.

Stacy Martinet: Yeah. If your budget can sustain it, like, snap up photo editors in mass.

Woman: Hi. I'm a Anim van Wyk. I am from South Africa. Anybody else from Africa here? Oh. [laughter] This is probably not entirely on topic, but it's been something that's bothering me and a lot of my South Africans. This is more for Emilio and for Cynthia from *The New York Times*. But why did you just ignore or forget about the Garissa attacks in Kenya? We've been hearing

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that it's important to listen to your audience and what they want to know and what they want to read. Now that the United States people here would like to read about things that happen here, but everybody is also saying that some stories are just so important that you have to push it. And 147 students massacred in Kenya is just something that the world barely took notice of.

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: I don't think we ignored it.

Cynthia Collins: Neither of us. There was really....

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: I don't think *The New York Times* ignored it. I think we beat the hell out of it, actually. We couldn't get to, I mean, it's a difficult place to get to. We were caught a little out of position, if I remember correctly. I think our correspondent who lives in Kenya wasn't there. But I don't think any major media company in the U.S. didn't cover it.

Woman: Sorry, I just checked, and I couldn't find a *New York Times* tweet.

Cynthia Collins: Oh, no.

Woman: Oh, I found a *New York Times* tweet, but I couldn't find a *Washington Post*.

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: I'm sorry. A tweet or stories about it?

Woman: A tweet.

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: Oh, that I'd have to check. I don't know what we tweeted on that.

Cynthia Collins: But both organizations covered that story quite powerfully and over the course of....

Woman: Talking about social.

Cynthia Collins: Well, okay. I'm not sure about *The Post*, but I know here at *The Times* we did in fact cover it. It's an incredibly important story.

R.B. Brenner: We are at time, so please....

Emilio Garcia-Ruiz: Wait. Before you do that, can I do one plug, please? Before you guys leave, go to the Virtual Reality Studio and see the project that Gannet has done, *Harvest of Change*, and learn and look at that new technology. It is really very cool. It is game changing. I believe it's the future of storytelling. And it's scary, and you gotta put a headset on, and you have to sign up for it, but take the time to do it. They've done magnificent work there. And go! Just go. Trust me. You won't regret it.

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R.B. Brenner: Great. Thank you, everyone.

[Applause.]