

Transcript: Keeping up with the social media networks

Welcome to the Digital Masterclass Series, part of Glen Eira City Council's business support program. Today's topic is: keeping up with the social media networks. Today we'll be talking about what you can learn from social media trends and networks. Then we'll look at four examples of currently popular networks, and the things that you can take away from them. These are: TikTok, Snapchat, Pinterest and Twitch.

So what can you learn from social media trends? Social media is a constantly changing beast. While we do not recommend that a small business jumps on every new platform or trend, it is worth investing some time to research what is happening in social media at a global level. Doing this will not only ensure that you stay up to date with where the technology is, and where it is heading; it will help you understand what audiences value, and expose you to new ways of engaging with your own digital audience. This will in turn allow you to complete the necessary market research, and get ideas for creative content development to help your own content and social media presence evolve.

The first example of a social media platform that we're going to look at today is TikTok. TikTok is a free video sharing social networking platform that became big in 2019, during the pandemic. Users tend to be teenagers and young adults, but TikTok videos often make their way onto Instagram and Facebook, where a much wider audience views the content.

The interesting thing about TikTok is that it puts content above social connection. That is in the sense that TikTok is designed principally to serve users content that they are interested in. The primary timeline on the TikTok app is its discovery page, called the For You page. It uses AI and machine learning to serve each user the content that they're most likely to interact with, rather than what the people that they follow are posting. Because of this algorithm, user experience on the app varies dramatically, as content is served based upon your interests, not based upon popularity (or, as mentioned before, on connections). The content is so tailored to the user's interests that the result is something called TikTok communities; these are small groups of people who create and watch very niche types of content from one another. This type of group splintering means that a lot of the content that is created is unique and quirky. On TikTok, most of the content really doesn't have the highly polished quality that an Instagram post might have, because it's not designed to be viewed by a wide range of people. Paradoxically, this kind of unpolished, authentic, niche content has proved to be hugely popular, particularly over the course of the pandemic.

One of the most well-known examples of this is the TikTok created by Nathan Apodaca, skateboarding down a highway, drinking cranberry juice while listening to *Dreams* by Fleetwood Mac. Here's a short version of this clip. [Here you go.](#) Here we see Nathan skating down a highway, drinking Ocean Spray cranberry juice, and listening to *Dreams*. It was viewed over 50 million times on TikTok. It went viral on Facebook and Instagram. It was copied by celebrities. And it resulted in Fleetwood Mac's song *Dreams* ranking in the world's hottest 100 for the first time in 43 years. Ocean Spray, the cranberry juice company featured in the video, quickly capitalised on the exposure. It turned out that Nathan Apodaca was skateboarding to work because his truck battery had died a week before, so they gifted him a truck and a whole lot of Ocean Spray products.

This is a fantastic opportunity for a brand to capitalise on an idea. However, the real takeaway here from TikTok is that the internet celebrates and uplifts authenticity. Maintaining an authentic voice and being honest and straightforward, and telling your own unique story, is always going to be engaging.

The next platform that we are going to be talking about is Snapchat. Snapchat is a free multmessage

media messaging app that became big in 2015 and 2016. This is another app primarily used by teenagers and young adults. It hit the big time because it was the first app to use filters. These are the overlays which instantly photoshop your appearance to make your skin smoother, your eyes bigger, your face slimmer. It also makes wrinkles and blemishes disappear, and also includes a novelty element such as dog ears, like we see on Kim Kardashian here, or a flower crown, something like that.

Creating idealised, visually augmented identities proved to be enormously alluring, particularly to young people. The transient content model of Snapchat is another key reason for its success. On Snapchat, messages and images are only available to followers of a particular account for 24 hours. Because of this, users have to frequently check the app if they don't want to miss out on anything. The ephemeral nature of the content, the fact that you need a user's individual ID to see their posts, and the private messaging function, means Snapchat is also popularly used to send racy or controversial content that a user might only want to share with a very small group of people, and may not want to have as part of their internet footprint for any long period of time. The takeaway for Snapchat here is: never underestimate the power of novelty or vanity. The transience on the internet can be a good thing. Snapchat is still incredibly popular, however, Instagram has now taken over both of these functions, with its Story function. Again, content stays for 24 hours and you can use filters to post content.

The third platform that we're going to be talking about today is Pinterest. This is older than the ones that we've been talking about, but it's still an interesting subject to explore. It's a free, virtual mood board and it became popular in the early 2010s. Pinterest is in some ways the modernised version of image sharing platforms like Tumblr and Flickr, which were popular in the early 2000s. These platforms offered a kind of curatorial space, where users could create and cultivate an aesthetic through sharing and reposting images. Some accounts gained cult followings. Pinterest is really a step on from that, in that it's more shareable and interactive, and the links remain clickable. You create boards and you pin images and web pages to collect ideas. You can always access the original source by clicking on the image or the page. The group that uses Pinterest is slightly older than what we've been speaking about before — the biggest age group is 35 to 49, which makes up 35% of the user base. That's probably why Pinterest is so popular — it's often used to plan things like weddings, interior decorations, or significant parties. It's really popular for people who are planning on investing a lot of money in something, and want to create a visual of what that final result might look like. The Pinterest lesson here is that curation plays a key role in shaping our virtual identities. That means that customisation is important, because users really enjoy customised experiences. What this points towards is that users relish the opportunity to demonstrate their own taste making capabilities, and to investigate the taste making capabilities of others, and adapt those to their own interests and tastes. It's also, as you can see with the pink vision on the slide here, about cultivating an aesthetic a mood or an idea.

The final platform that we are going to be looking at today is Twitch. This is a live streaming service. It was launched in 2011 and is mostly used to stream video games and esports. It also has some paid elements. Twitch became very popular during the pandemic, as people who had more time on their hands needed to stay home. So they played video games and people felt isolated. They wanted to interact with others while doing these kinds of things. The way that Twitch works is that users log in to watch a streamer play a video game in real time, and interact with them. Interacting might include asking questions, making comments, making jokes, asking them for tips, anything like that. Users can also learn how to play the game in a better way. They can also find a community of people with similar passions and interests.

The takeaway from Twitch is that people will pay for a niche. Twitch has paid elements that people

pay to participate in, and while it seems like quite an unusual idea to pay to watch somebody else play a video game that you are interested in, for younger generations who are very involved with the gaming community, this is a key way to connect with other people and share ideas, and feel like you're participating in a group.

That concludes our webinar. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us by email. Contact us on cityfutures@gleneira.vic.gov.au. Thank you.