

SWOT Analysis of ABC's Social Media

Introduction

The ABC network has a long history with its beginnings in radio. When it became apparent that NBC and CBS had a monopoly on the business, NBC was forced to sell one of its big networks. On October 12, 1943 Edward Noble bought NBC Blue and it became ABC. These networks became known as the big three and have been in competition since. When the transition into television began, ABC was considered the “weak sister” of the networks. However, ABC has always been a network of “firsts”. After some struggles, the network was sold to Leonard Goldenson of Paramount Pictures in 1951. Goldenson made a deal with the Disney brothers that would give ABC seven years of a new Walt Disney television series. *Disneyland* became the ABC's first Nielsen Top Ten Hit. In the fall of 1955 ABC became the first network to air a primetime series produced by a major studio; *Cheyenne* became a network hit. They were able to get Fred Silverman to come work for the network in the mid-seventies leading to some success for the network. In another television first, ABC produced the first big mini-series *Rich Man, Poor Man*. Silverman's specialty included shows such as *Charlie's Angels*, and these types of programs came to be labeled “jiggle” shows. This scheduling led to an increase in advertising demand and huge Nielsen ratings for the network. Then in yet another first, ABC became the first network to break the billion-dollar revenue mark in the late seventies. In the early eighties, ABC's reach expanded with the purchase of ESPN. In 1986, all of ABC was purchased by Capital Cities Communication which resulted in a rebound to the top spot in the ratings. This was short lived and ABC was once again up for sale, which led to the biggest merger in history. What was touted as one of the best-kept secrets in the industry, Walt Disney Co. purchased ABC for nineteen billion dollars in 1995. This is the network that we know today.

ABC has a very broad reach across social media platforms Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. On each of these sites they have one main “ABC Network” account which is used to help promote a wide variety of things from a new television show to Radio Disney. From there, on each platform, they have individual accounts for each one of their television shows. Each of these accounts has a varied number of followers from hundreds of thousands, to millions of people. The ABC Network accounts seem to be their secondary account to reach a more general audience. The specialized accounts, such as the one for *Scandal*, targets the audience of the show with both updates about the show and events that cast members appear at. These individual accounts for each show also interact with the audience and will live tweet shows when a new episode airs.

This analysis will showcase a few different aspects of ABC’s social media presence. First would be their strengths such as new media techniques. Then the weaknesses of their accounts including the lack of engagement. From there the opportunities that have not yet been seized will be presented. Finally, a look at the external threats that ABC may face due to weaknesses will be examined. Looking at all of these different aspects will present a thorough insight into the social media presence of one of the largest television networks in the country, and what pieces of their social media strategy that they may want to adjust moving forward.

Strengths

ABC is one of the biggest Television Networks in the country. They are home to some the biggest series on television and are known for their epic programs. Their advertisements can be seen almost anywhere, especially through social media. ABC creates a social media page for each individual show that airs on their network. All the big stars of ABC have their own personal social media account where they help further promote the series they are a part of. ABC network

uses new media techniques because during each show they will display a hashtag that is relevant to what's happening during each show, viewers will then tweet using said hash tag throughout the entire broadcast. This is how the network keeps their viewers spreading information about the shows they broadcast. ABC advertises their shows in other places besides cable TV and they use the many social media platforms to reach out to all audiences especially those who do not have access to cable.

On Facebook and Instagram ABC will post sneak peeks of whatever show is about to be airing that night, which also gives the audience a small taste and will possibly even attract new viewers. On Thursday's ABC promotes shows that air on that night by creating their famous ad campaign #TGIT which means "Thank God it's Thursday". They want fans of their shows to always remember that every Thursday will be the night for their major programs. Facebook even allows you to add the TGIT border to your profile picture, for those hardcore fans.

ABC posts a trailer for the following week's episode in order to keep viewers' attention during that long 7-day wait for a new episode to air. ABC posts inspiring stories about their actors and actresses to their Facebook page to maintain the relevancy of their major stars. On Twitter, ABC will post quotes and hash tags from their hit shows in order to get its followers to keep the network trending as a topic. ABC has created an account for each show on Instagram, which they do to promote each series individually, as well as the stars that act in them. ABC wants the celebrities from its shows to help promote the many other programs being broadcasted on their network. ABC is good at keeping up to date when it comes to social media. They post clips, sneak peeks and articles about their many shows this helps keep their network current with the times. They do their best to keep audiences on their toes and interested throughout the workweek with hopes of keeping the viewers' attention until next week's episode premieres.

Video streaming services have allowed a person to watch entire seasons at one time, which has made people a bit impatient when it comes to waiting a week for their favorite show to air. So ABC and other major networks try hard to preserve the enthusiasm from their shows followers until the debut of the next installment. Technology has evolved to the point where people can just record a show just to be able to fast forward through commercials and avoid all advertisements. ABC along with the other major networks have had to branch away from the usual way of advertising such as commercials. Social media is where ABC has focused a lot of time promoting its programs and have even developed ways to get its fan base to unknowingly advertise their favorite shows over. People hate any and all advertisements so companies have to find better ways to promote their products. Most people on social media today can't even tell when they have seen an endorsement because ads have evolved so much.

Weaknesses

ABC Television Network has a plethora of social media accounts that allow for the consumers of their programs to stay updated and integrated via their favorite social media platform. The television network itself has a Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram but in addition, they also have an account for each of their TV shows that are currently airing. For example, @ABCNetwork has 419,000 followers on Twitter and one of its programs, *Grey's Anatomy* has 3.6 million followers on Twitter. The Grey's Twitter account alone has almost nine times as many followers as the ABC Television Network itself. With over 50 programs still on air (ABC, 2017), ABC has made itself readily available with individual accounts for each of the programs, tailoring to those that prefer some but not all of their shows. While this seems like an effective way to accommodate viewers, there are some consequences associated with such an overabundance.

One internal weakness that the ABC Television Network displays through their social media accounts is their unoriginal content on their network accounts. The ABC Television Network accounts only reiterate the content they post on the individual program's accounts. For example, the network Twitter page, @ABCNetwork mainly retweets original tweets from its own programs such as @ScandalABC and @HowToGetAwayABC, not forming a lot of its own content but promoting and linking viewers to more shows. The excessive presence among Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can be initially satisfactory, but it ultimately overwhelms users with constant ABC related information that may diminish their ability to see posts from others.

Another weakness that ABC Television poorly implements on their social media accounts is their lack of engagement with fans and viewers. Interactivity is one of the fundamental basics of new media where users can provide their own content in response to original content made by creators (Quan-Haase and Young 351). They do some sharing and retweeting but they do not usually give a concrete reply to anyone with questions or comments. They mainly leave it up to users to interact with other users on the platform and not with the account themselves. They do this through the use of shares and hashtags to get people involved in their content, and it does indeed unite viewers through a medium that may not have otherwise been reached. This may also be referred to as the users becoming *prosumers*, where they take control over the content through the use of hashtags and comments to create their own discussion and share thoughts about what they are watching (Quan-Haase and Young 351). That may be the goal, but their lack of interaction gives off the impression that they are too busy or secretive to directly reply to users on their accounts.

A final weakness associated with ABC Television Network's social media is their redundant sharing of information between all TV shows to the point that it reveals too many

spoilers and ultimately deters users from continuing to follow them. They continually post photos from episodes that will air or have aired that give away a lot of information. It is easy for users to scroll past a lot of words to avoid spoilers, but it is much more difficult to ignore photos as they find them on their newsfeed. This stems from the MAIN model and the fact that “visual modality is more trusted than text” (Sundar and Limperos 512). Although interactivity is a main use of big social media accounts, the over sharing with all of the shows can spoil things for a user that cannot keep up with all of their shows as they premiere. This can lead to frustration and diminished user engagement with a possible unfollowing of accounts and a decline in ratings if spoilers have ruined something for them one too many times. Any amount of unfollows on ABC’s platforms could ultimately be detrimental, especially if the social media accounts were allowing people to discover new ABC shows and further increase their TV ratings. If those daily reminders are no longer in a user’s view due to the possibility of spoilers, it may result in them no longer watching ABC television shows because they are no longer repeatedly exposed to them. While ABC Television network has good intentions of attuning to its followers, they are conclusively isolating themselves into seeming too corporate to care about their users and thus deterring those that feel bombarded by their repetitive sharing and spoilers.

Opportunities

There is an innumerable amount of social media opportunities available for ABC. Because ABC is a direct affiliate of the Walt Disney Company, there are already several different outlets for partnerships and collaborations. Currently, ABC takes an incredibly active stance on social media having created separate Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook profiles for each individual show on their network. I find it intriguing that ABC has chosen to take such a specific route in displaying the lives of their actors and employees publicly, however there is a lot of ideation to

back up this action. Every show on ABC garners a particular audience differing in age, race, geographic location, etc. By creating these individual social media profiles, viewers are able to solely follow the cast and crew of the show they like most, without distractions from other network television. The first area of opportunity I would like to hone in on is *cohesion*. Instead of overwhelming viewers with so many profiles for the same show, I believe there should be one particular blog or website dedicated to each show. This way fans are not having to visit 3 different social network sites to keep up with their favorite characters. Additionally, this blog would be able to more effectively communicate information about each show because all the information can all be found in one place. I am much more likely to visit a site where everything is readily available as opposed to 3 different sites where I am expected to piece information together.

Intersectionality between ABC and various partners is another outstanding area of opportunity for the organization. When large name companies choose to collaborate on certain initiatives and campaigns, there is typically a positive audience response. Through this collaboration, each company is attracting their followers and target market to support one particular cause. If ABC were to partner with Nike on an actor-athlete commercial campaign, they would raise a significant amount of morale surrounding both entities. Consequently, viewers who are interested in Nike would then be exposed to ABC and vice versa. It is not often that television networks collaborate with clothing brands so this is an exceptional opportunity for the company to be innovative as well. Actors from ABC's most popular shows could be featured discussing how they embody #NikeFit when they are not busy recording for their shows, while athletes could discuss their favorite ABC hits that they enjoy watching when they are not busy

working out. Overall, collaboration allows for expansion of ABC's target market and exposure to new industries, which will ultimately take the network to never before reached heights.

ABC upholds an incredibly strong viewer-loyalty system. Those who support ABC television tend to be avid fans of one or two particular shows. Social media sites are the number one place people visit to express their emotions regarding their favorite movies or shows. Fans will tweet about their expectations for a show, what they are excited and angered about, their thoughts during a certain scene, what will happen on the next episode, etc. All of these opinions can be used toward ABC's benefit. When you have people who are passionate about one specific television show, there is a huge amount of room for capitalization. In order to honor this passion, ABC should feature the tweets and posts of these fans on television while the show is airing. If they are not lucky enough to receive air time, their tweet, post, or comment should still be placed on the cohesive blog site about the show. This way fans feel as if their thoughts and feelings regarding the show are actually valued by the network. Additionally, fans should be alerted when their post is going to be featured so they have the chance to see and share their claim to fame. ABC could foster a wonderful opportunity to show appreciation for their viewers through implementation of this system.

There is a plethora of social media activities that could actively work to improve audience engagement. It is vital that ABC use their strong fan base to their advantage. If the company developed online games that led to insight about what is coming next on the shows, fans would be highly interested. People could have the opportunity to earn points based off their knowledge of the characters and plot, and have access to exclusive hints about upcoming show content. Additionally, ABC should provide the opportunity for fans to be able to personally interact with their favorite actors and actresses. They could develop an online Skype feature that

allows fans to ask questions and the celebrities respond live. The casts would vary on a rotational basis so that each group of fans would have a fair chance of speaking with their favorite characters. Lastly, I think it is important for ABC to encourage their actors and actresses to interact with their fans on Twitter. There is nothing more exciting than having a celebrity whom you are obsessed with favorite your tweet, retweet your tweet, or actually take the time to reply to a tweet you posted. All of these minor activities would improve audience engagement significantly. Making fans feel special and connected is the primary responsibility of the organization's social media team. By utilizing these suggestions, and maximizing opportunity, ABC can easily become the industry leader in social media efficiency.

Threats

There are many potential risks the organization ABC could experience with the presence on social media. On the topic of crisis within an organization there are many types of crises; the good, the bad, and the ugly. Directness and boasting are good, bad mouthing and tattling are bad, and spite and feeding the vultures are known as the ugly types of crises. Boasting is when an individual gives positive feedback about an organization on social media such as Facebook or Twitter and spreading good word on how well the organization handled the complaint. Directness is how direct the individual is with the company online when directly contacting them about their complaint. Badmouthing is when an individual automatically turns to Facebook or any other social media without contacting the firm first. Tattling consists of complaining to a third-party website or newsletter. Spite happens when after the company fails to respond to the customer's complaint, failing them twice, the customer turns to social media and starts badmouthing the company. Feeding the vultures is when a competitor not only takes joy in the organization's failure to address the complaint, but uses social media to amplify the mistake to

steal more of the firm's customers (Grégoire, Salle, Tripp, 2015). Being on social media you can get hate mail, which consists of people talking bad about the company and trying to make the organization look bad. Because it is public, the comments are exposed and anyone could see and get their own viewpoint of the organization just by what others are saying. Even if the statements made are inaccurate some people may believe everything they read or hear which in turn ruins the company's reputation. Another problem the organization faces being on social media would be security issues. The company's social media accounts/websites have the risk of being hacked, spyware and bugs amongst others. The organizations personal information could be leaked outside their company and that could be detrimental for them.

Social and/or political climate could play part and effect this organization on social media. If the organization tweets something political or tweets something about social issues that some may not agree with, this could cause a huge problem. It could cause others to stop supporting this organization because of their own political or social beliefs. The best advice for the organization would be to keep everything equal and not tweet anything political for it could backfire.

If the target publics do not agree with something that happens in an episode (The Bachelor) this could cause an outrage with viewers making nasty comments on the organization's social media. For example, during the show *The Bachelor*, when a contestant gets sent home that was a favorite of many, this could cause the viewers who really liked that contestant to comment their own personal opinion and it may cause them to stop viewing. Also, when ABC kicked Patrick Dempsey (Derek) off of *Grey's Anatomy* this caused an outrage for the viewers emotionally attached to him. But the reason he was kicked off the show is because he was cheating on his wife in real life and the producer found out about it. Once she found out

about it he was off the show. But at the time, viewers didn't know the real reason as to why he was being kicked off. If other organizations hear about this they could get more viewers by simply trying to make ABC look bad. They could capitalize on this by saying "our actors don't cheat on their wives." Another aspect target audiences may not agree with would be the length of commercial time. Other organizations may try to compete with this by making the length of commercial time shorter between commercial breaks. Or if someone is completely fed up with the shows ABC produces, they may turn to other organizations to watch their shows. In turn, the other organizations would make sure their shows seem more interesting than ABC to keep the viewers and to get more people to watch their shows rather than ABC shows.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, social media is a double-edged sword for the ABC; it brings benefits to the company but also goes along with the threats. On the one hand, as a company that has long history, ABC uses social media to develop its business and put new energy into itself during this changeable new age. Through its large numbers of social media accounts on different popular social media platforms, the ABC persistently exposes itself to the public and increases its popularity. Besides, the official account of the ABC keeps in touch closely with the famous celebrities who has large quantity of followers and takes it as a way to introduce the ABC to more and more peoples. Moreover, the ABC related social media accounts post short trailers of their works frequently in order to attract audiences who use social media more than ordinary TV. From the future perspective, using of social media can also bring the company large opportunities. Clearly divided social media accounts of the ABC offer a chance that people from different communities or have different preferences all have equal chance to find their place to state their opinions. This could bring the company great reputation. Besides, social media

provides chances to the ABC that it can collaborate with the companies that they would not work with in the real world. New corporations have large potentially benefits and could help the ABC develop their business further.

However, on the other hand, the ABC does not control its social media accounts perfectly. Sometimes these social media accounts can also hurt their public impression and bring side effects to the company. Large numbers of social media accounts can be the strength of the company but also can be the weakness. Because there are so many social media accounts that related to the ABC, the main official account spends so much its sources to repost the contents that original posted by other branch accounts and lack of its own creation. Furthermore, their followers always look through the same contents they already saw on other social media. Over time, it can be annoying. Additionally, the ABC's social media accounts rarely reply their followers' comments. They tend to leave all things to their followers and make them talk to each other without officially explanations, which always cause unnecessary arguments and even cyber bully that can reduce the ABC's public credibility. Moreover, potentially security threat that may occur in the future Such as the accounts be spied or hacked.

All in all, it cannot be denied that social media brings great benefits and improvements with the ABC. Owing to the using of social media, the company increases its popularity and builds its reputation. However, as an old saying goes: "nothing can be perfect." The ABC has lots of challenges to overcome and still a long way to go on social media using.

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