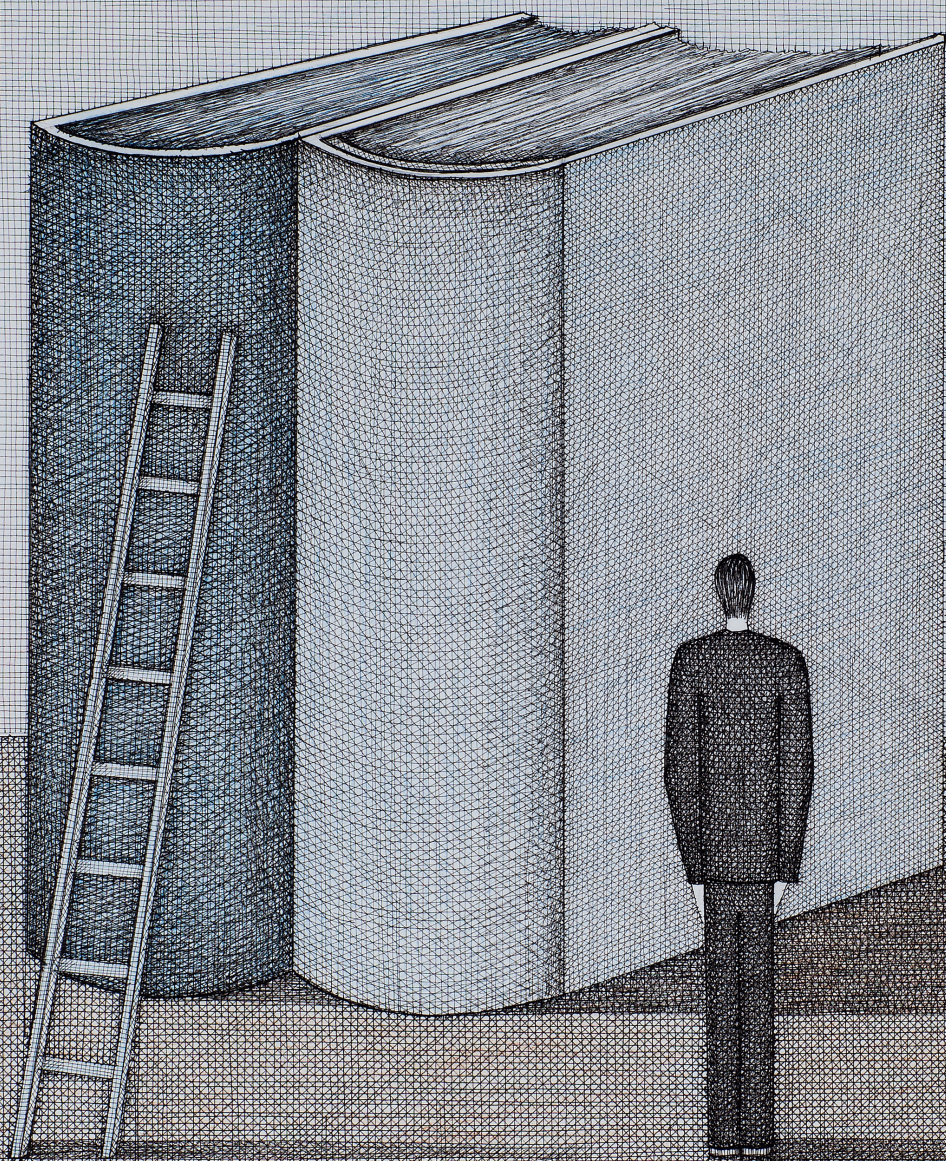# The Role of Cultural Institutions and Events in the Marketing of Cities and Regions

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Social media in building a relationship with the audience. Case study: The Marek Edelman Dialogue Center in Łódź

Utility. That is what Internet is all about. Nowadays, whenever we want to find information we start by browsing, and the tools are closer than ever before. Computers, tablets, mobile phones, even e-readers have Internet access.

In 2011 Jan H. Kietzmann and his colleagues [Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011] decided to spotlight social media, a relatively new means of communication. They took social media and segmented its aspects into a honeycomb of categories. Most of us think about social media as something intuitive, something simple and fun, but there is a clear pattern behind it. When using social media one should consider looking at it through the following categories defined by Kietzmann [Kietzmann et al., 2011]: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. Perhaps there is an aspect of social media you have never thought about while exploring it might help you build a fruitful relation with the audience? Stay curious.

I work at the The Marek Edelman Dialogue Center in Łódź, an institution that was established in 2010 but has been operating since April 2011. It is the perfect place to talk about how to dialogue with audience, regardless of the topic. Since the very beginning we have been trying to be as open as possible, therefore we use any means of communication available. Social media is one of our main forms of communication with our audience, so understanding the functional mechanism of social media is crucial for us. Our work would be pointless if no-one knew about us. Also, it would be highly unwise if we didn't know how people react to what we do. Of course, there's nothing like a face-to-face conversation, but our target audience is spread around the world. Social media gives us the opportunity to be permanently present and up-to-date with what is hot, what is the buzz, what is going viral. Social media are very intuitive tools and it is necessary for the people who use them as a form of promotion and audience development to understand their functionality.

1. Identity

The extent to which users reveal themselves:

«*Data privacy controls, and tools for user self-promotion*».

Client and service, user and a tool, target and a product, viewer and product of culture. Most of us will or already are in one or both sides of these categories. We are bombarded with things or services „we all need right now" on a daily basis. But obviously, not everyone needs everything. There are as many target groups as many different ages, sexes, groups of interests, etc. When the Internet started being used for monitoring consumers at various levels it became possible to adjust products to their actual needs.

From the point of view of a cultural institution, social media platforms force/teach us (depending on the attitude) to reveal ourselves. We are no longer anonymous employees of an institution. And we no longer should be. In these times of seemingly superficial relations it is very important to show the audiences that we, the institutions and their employees, care about them and really listen to what they have to say.

Audiences do not always realize that there are people standing behind the institutions. We need to dispel some secrets about so popular „behind the scenes" arrangements. Institution content managers are not very different from regular social media users.

From the users' point of view, social media are a double-edged sword, because we, the employees of institutions, can see and use whatever we find to our advantage. Tracking also lets us see what the potential viewers are interested in. It is very important to analyze and evaluate viewers' tendencies as they can prove to be a very helpful tool, helping us decide what to focus on. Although anonymity is now a long refuted myth, the viewers' exact identity (such as name and address) is not the most important part in the whole process. It is the choices we make and things we like which are being followed and are considered a part of the online/social identity in social media. When an institution knows who views its websites, videos and follows or likes its posts, it can reformulate its content or, on the contrary, strengthen it. Because it is not only about *what* to post, but also *how* to do it.

It is very important that the employees feel they are a part of the institution, so that they have a real impact on how it is being promoted. From the employees' point of view all the promotional activities which involve them can also integrate the team.

2. Conversations

The extent to which users communicate with each other:

«*Conversation velocity, and the risk of starting and joining*».

Internet and social media hate inactivity. The whole idea of Web 2.0 (and upcoming era of Web 3.0) is based on communication and presence.

In 1992, when Nokia came up with its catchphrase „Nokia. Connecting people", the ways of connecting were limited comparing to what we have available now. In „the golden days" connecting actually meant that we either talked to each other or texted each other. The contact we used to make was verbal. Nowadays, we do not

need to talk to let people know what we do, as social media give us many new ways to express ourselves.

As an institution, especially a cultural and a municipal institution, it is very important to stay in touch with the viewers/visitors. Conversation, and in our case, dialogue is what people are hoping to get, and we should listen to what they have to „say", meaning expressing their feelings and interests. As the Dialogue Center, we have many online relations, and some of them are just „the beginning of a beautiful friendship". A perfect example is Leon Weintraub, a Litzmannstadt Ghetto survivor, a wonderful person who started following the Dialogue Center on Facebook about 3 years ago. At first, we only knew him from his Facebook account, but since we met him in person and befriended him (using our private Facebook accounts) we can call him one of our most devoted supporters.

„Here and now" is what runs the social media. Nobody wants to watch expired news, no-one wants to take part in past events. Keeping viewers up-to-date gives them a sense of security which assures them that if something interesting to them is happening at a certain institution they will know about it. A big mistake often made by those who run social media profiles for institutions and businesses is overdosing. It is really important to find and keep a balance in the amount of information a wall (on Facebook, Twitter etc.) can take.

Social media have changed one very important thing about how we communicate. Nothing we do on social media platform is definitive, but everything *is* definitive. What I mean by this contradictory sentence is that if one likes, follows or attends something in social media it is not necessarily the truth. How many of us never turned up at an event they attended on Facebook? At the same time, whatever we do online is seen and commented by many. People take the online activity, of not only individuals but, most of all, institutions, universities and (we must acknowledge) authorities, very seriously.

3. Sharing

The extent to which users exchange, distribute and receive content:

«*Content management system and social graph*».

Nowadays, information spreads around the world in matter of seconds. Most of the information we receive comes from the media, but, in contrast to what it looked like 40, 30 or 20 years ago, not only journalists, newspapers and TV programmes are the sources and the transmitters. We all are. The rule seems simple — the more people you know on the Internet, the easier it is to share news with their help. But is it really as simple as it seems?

Kietzmann et al. stated (2011):

We suggest there are at least two fundamental implications that the sharing block of the honeycomb has for all firms with ambition to engage social media. The first is the need to evaluate what objects of sociality their users can have in common, or to identify new objects that can mediate their shared interests (p. 245).

It's about what connects people. Why would anyone want to share a post/picture/movie posted by an institution on its social media platform? Here comes the crucial principle that runs social media: emotional attachment. Building a relation with the audience by forging emotional ties can help building a strong and profitable network, a network

that is is based on sharing — hashtags, reposting, localization, pinning, tagging, liking, following and many other ways probably yet to come.

At an institution like the Marek Edelman Dialogue Center it is very important to find balance — the topics we talk about are quite often complicated historical matters with no simple answers. We also touch multicultural, multiethnic and anti-discrimination subjects. This is why we always try to balance the dark and the bright side in our social media. Hopefully, by doing so we encourage people to follow and like us but also to re-share. But we are on both sides of the river — we have to share to be re-shared; like to be re-liked. Never leave your audience unattended.

Its been more than 50 years since Marshall McLuhan famously stated that „medium is the message" (McLuhan, M., Fiore, Q., & Agel, J.,1967) but as Hiebert noticed (Hiebert, P. 2014) the main point has not changed — nowadays, we, the people, are the mediums/media, and we are being given many different tools (social media) that are used in the real time.

4. Presence

The extent to which users know if others are available:

«*Creating and managing the realty, intimacy and immediacy of the context*».

In 2014 almost 4.55 billion people were using mobile phones. 1.8 billion of these devices were smartphones ("Smartphone Users...", 2014). Although there are so many of us (I write from the perspective of a user of two smartphones, both based on different operating systems), social media give us numerous solutions for finding people who not only have same interests but are also in the same city, district or place.

Smartphones are usually permanently online with the location option on, and many applications will use this information to offer local services. From the perspective of an institution, especially one that has its own office/building it is very important to make the potential viewer aware of where this particular place is. Social media are here to help, but the viewers need to be encouraged to participate in the process too.

There are two main types of real-time participation: on the premises of real-time presence and online real-time presence. Engaging viewers on the premise of real-time presence might seem easy to achieve, but it requires encouraging people to actually „check-in". Institution employees should not fear checking in. At the same time it is very important to tag posts and pictures uploaded online by the institution.

5. Relationships

The extent to which users relate to each other:

«*Managing the structural and flow properties in a network of relationships*».

Even though the Internet and mobile phones have been accused of drifting people apart from each other, the truth is social media have done a lot of bad, but also a lot of

good for human relations at many levels. (Graham, R., 2014) Building a strong and efficient network is what we are all looking for on both lifestyle and business websites/applications.

Problems with gaining users' trust begin when an institution like the Marek Edelman Dialogue Center tries to specify its target. What if the target is varied? What if you try very hard but no-one wants to read your posts, view your videos or share your content?

There is no simple answer to these questions, but one thing is certain — it is very important to emphasize the emotional attachment one can build with the institution — or in this case, the employees of the institution. This can be done by an honest approach to social media, because well maintained online relationships may bring a lot of benefits.

When building a relationship with users, there are two levels of analyzing online content. First of all an institution's promotion strategy should be the baseline for all promotional activities, including social media activity. But then one should look *through the looking glass* and try to understand the specifics of each particular social media platform. If Facebook is more casual that LinkedIn, then let's shape the content according to users' expectations. If LinkedIn is for professionals, let's not be too casual. This applies to all platforms, and as there are dozens of social media apps and websites, institution employees should approach each of them differently. Only then the users can feel comfortable enough to share and talk about the content being posted online.

High hopes usually lead to disappointment. Being humble, listening and reading what users and followers have to say might repay lavishly. The „relationship" attribute of social media requires content managers to stay focused and open-eyed. Users/viewers may be an extension which cannot be underestimated in the world of social activity, especially if it comes to local activities. Currently „locality" is what ties people together, and that bond can boost network development.

6. Reputation

The extent to which users know the social standing of others and content:

> «*Monitoring the strength, passion, sentiment, and reach of users and brands*».

Reputation is key trait that defines a cultural institution. In the end we are here to build awareness (regardless of the type of activity) of recipients of culture. We all care about likes, followers, views on social media platforms. Sometimes this indicators can be deceiving, especially on Facebook and Instagram — two social media platforms which have no negative rates — you can only like or ♥. And even though many users have petitioned for the negative rate (like „dislike") these platforms are resistant. Despite this potential inconvenience, users have adjusted to the formula. This is clearly visible on the Dialogue Center social media accounts. Holocaust, Litzmannstadt Ghetto, turbulent history, multicultural and equality issues — all these can be very challenging matters when raised through social media. Personally, I felt confused and uncertain the first time I was reposting an article (on Facebook) about the WWII genocide and then I saw people „liking" it. But then again I understood that „likes", „views" and „♥" can have many shades and meanings and most of the time social media users are aware of what the meaning of a particular activity is.

Social media are just another form of expression. At the Dialogue Center we are no longer surprised by hashtags like #holocaust #litzmannstadtghetto #genocide (on Instagram, Twitter or Facebook) or photos from Litzmannstadt Ghetto (pinned on Pinterest boards). If used in the right context they can strengthen the awareness.

Social media managers should be aware that it is very important to monitor and analyze the user-generated content.

7. Groups

The extent to which users are ordered or form communities:

«*Membership, rules and protocols*».

An audience by definition is a group of people that attends an event. ("Audience", n.d.) Social media and the Internet completely redefined what an audience is and how to reach it. At this point of development of online social relations the viewers who actually attend an event are just a drop in the ocean when it comes to an institution. This is quite visible when the statistics are reviewed — there are people who visit an event (which they usually know about either from the Internet or the press), people who visit the website and people who follow an institution's profile on social media platforms. Despite the fact that Facebook, LinkedIn and many others actually offer creating a group as an option (this option might be quite helpful, I discuss it below), the actual „groups" that an institution should be interested in are indefinite. They are formed by hashtags, likes and follows. That is why a content manager has to stay focused not only on location, gender and age as target indicators, but also should „regroup" the social media audience by following their groups of interest.

Organizing groups can be very helpful in targeting and narrowing the circle of recipients. This option is particularly important in maintaining a constant relation with, for example, volunteers. Also, creating events or encouraging viewers to use a certain hashtag is a way of gathering a group of interest. It is equally important to have many viewers attending events and to gain the audience, which can be a transmitter of information or future spectator/visitor, online and using social media.

At the Dialogue Center we have organized groups on Facebook and have also tried to acknowledge informal groups created by hashtags (for example on Instagram each of our pictures is marked by #centrumdialogu).

Content managers can benefit from creating groups, whether officially organized or unofficially assembled. The trick is to pay attention to how a group works, what kind of activity are its members are interested in and what events they would like to attend and share.

8. The 4 Cs

Cognize, congruity, curate, chase.

Each platform requires a different attitude. The key to success in social media is to understand how an application or platform works and how its users function. To help

us understand social media Kietzmann gives us the 4Cs rule. First of all COGNIZE (recognize) — pay attention to how your „brand" is being discussed and received by other users (you, an institution is a user too!). There are various ways to monitor and analyze web and app traffic. Then CONGRUITY, meaning it is very important to listen to what users have to say in order to adjust the offer to their needs and desires. This does not mean an institution should forget about its goals, but rather phrase its offer accordingly. In extension, this means that institution social media managers should CURATE the content which is being posted online. At this point it is also very important to give (as soon as possible) an immediate reaction. Do not leave your users unattended and their questions and comments unanswered. Finally CHASE — stay curious. Social media is a living organism that constantly adjust to its users and launches new possibilities. Staying behind causes a snowball effect — the longer you leave it rolling the harder it gets to stop it and keep up.

Summary

Regular online and social media activity supported by honest and reasonably chosen content can pay off. The Dialogue Center like/follow rate is about 1000 new profile likes per year. We have been on Facebook for 4 years, on Youtube for 3, on Twitter for a year and on Pinterest for almost 6 months.We are open to new applications, we browse, we use social media and we encourage everyone in our work environment to use it.

Despite the fact that many subjects we raise at the Dialogue Center „do not seem fitting" for social media, we try to keep the balance and use our tools in a way users accept and acknowledge. History can be told and discovered using social media, and it can be the first, hard step in communicating with those who do not seem interested in history (or local history).

Do not force anything but do not underestimate the force of social media. Think about the audience as your partner in dialogue. Monitor, analyze and evaluate. Have fun and try to understand. Finally, don't forget that #promotionneversleeps.

Centrum Dialogu // Facebook   Centrum Dialogu // Instagram   Centrum Dialogu // Pinterest

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