What People Share On Facebook and Why They Share It

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Introduction
Do you have an uncontrollable desire to yell, “KABAMA-LAMA!!!” more frequently than you already do? Then you definitely need to create Facebook posts that get more shares. Because when Facebook page admins discover one of their posts has ‘gone viral’, they can’t control themselves. They yell out strange phrases. They fist bump, give themselves a high five, and show off their really bad dance moves. Hopefully they have someone in the office to share this with. Otherwise the accounting department sees it and starts looking for irregularities in the social media side of the ledger.

In this ebook, we’re going to teach you how to create posts that more people will want to share. It includes best practices, case studies, and some new research on how people interact with Facebook posts. First, we describe the Facebook marketing ecosystem for Facebook page managers. We differentiate between posts with different interaction goals. We discuss the concept of virality and whether it’s truly possible on Facebook or not. Then we highlight tips for creating highly shareable posts and discuss mistakes that make posts unshareable. Next, in our case studies, we discuss why real Facebook posts received an above average number of shares. Finally, for the geeks, we go into excruciating detail about the research we conducted for this ebook.

EdgeRank and Visibility
Most brands engaged in Facebook marketing have by now absorbed how EdgeRank can dictate their success or failure. For those who haven’t, the next couple of paragraphs will bring you up to speed.

Only about 1% of fans ever return to your actual Facebook page after they’ve liked it. The majority of people spend most of their Facebook time in their newsfeed, which are the posts they see on their homepage. No one sees every post from every friend or page they’ve liked. Facebook tries to show each person the things they’d be most interested in based on past posts you’ve clicked on, commented on, liked and shared. And Facebook tries to show you more of the same.

Only a small percentage of your fans interact with your posts when they show up in their newsfeed. The fans who don’t click on your posts stop seeing you there. That means your Facebook Page isn’t going to be seen by all your fans. In fact, Facebook said in February of 2012 that the average page was reaching just 12% of its fans. So, if you want your fans to see your posts, you need to get them to click on something in each post. That’s why people write so much about how to get people to like, share and comment on posts.
Paid vs. Organic Visibility
When Facebook disclosed a year ago that such a low proportion of fans were seeing fan page posts, they suggested that one solution to this problem was for brands to pay for more visibility. Paid visibility now means promoting posts with Facebook ads created either from a post on your Facebook page itself, or via the ad interface.

It’s better to create promoted post ads in the ad interface, because you have more control over targeting, including what parts of the world you want to see your ads. Unless you geo-target the post to the countries you want, when you create an ad and you don’t exclude friends of fans, your post may reach a disproportionate number of people in countries where Facebook ad clicks are cheaper. Facebook optimizes the number of responses, but in so doing, prefers people who might not be in your target market.

Another limitation of not using the ad interface is that the charge goes to the credit card attached to the Facebook account of the person who creates the post. And often, the person responsible for ads or posting is not the person who created the ad account or owns that payment instrument.

Two ways to create promoted post ads: on the left, from the Facebook page, and on the right, within the Facebook ads interface: [https://www.facebook.com/ads/manage](https://www.facebook.com/ads/manage)
The best practice, in our experience, for promoted posts is the following:

1. **PROMOTE YOUR MOST RECENT POST TO NON-FANS:**
   Go to the Facebook ad interface (https://www.facebook.com/ads/manage/) and set up a promoted post. Choose the box to “keep my ad up-to-date by automatically promoting my most recent post”. Target this ad with a combination of the demographics, likes and other criteria that fit your best potential customers. Every time you create a new post, it will be submitted as an ad for approval or disapproval by Facebook ad reviewers.

2. **PROMOTE YOUR MOST RECENT POST TO YOUR FANS:**
   If you want, set up one of these “latest post” promotions to non-fans, and then another one with the only targeting criteria as your own fans. The first ad extends your reach beyond your fan-base, and the second one ensures that as many of your fans as possible see your latest post.

3. **PROMOTE YOUR MOST INTERACTIVE POSTS TO NON-FANS:**
   Every week, check your Facebook Insights for your recent posts and see which ones have gotten more engagement than the others. These posts have proven to be more interesting, and deserve some extra long-term promotion. Create a new promoted post ad for this specific ad. These can run for months.

The long-term promotion of super-interactive posts won’t work if all your posts are about current events, holidays, “woohoo it’s Friday” and “boo its Monday”. You need to create some posts that address the lifestyle, obstacles and dreams of your target audience. These are evergreen topics that can be promoted with ads long-term. For that, we would refer you to Brian Carter’s strategy, “selling the dream” in the next chapter.

**Selling the Dream**

Brian fully discusses this concept in his book *The Like Economy*, but here’s the short version:

One of the first things we learn in marketing is to talk about benefits rather than features. “This printer uses a solid ink process,” is not as compelling as, “This printer produces consistently vibrant images on virtually any paper.” We need to answer the prospect’s questions, “So what?” and, “What’s in it for me?” When we do, we sell more services and products. But on Facebook, benefits aren’t enough. Benefits are about what you’re selling, which is relatively boring compared to funny images and astoundingly inspirational videos. Nobody invited this salesperson to the social media party. Ok Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn invited the salesperson, but we still have to be more social and interesting than in other arenas.

Think about what dreams you help your customers achieve. Your customers use the benefits of your products and services to achieve their goals and dreams. Do you empower them to fulfill their entrepreneurial destiny? Do you bring excitement and action to their lives? Do you expand their vistas? Do you support and enrich their family life? Take some time to identify these dreams—poll them if need be—and then use those themes to develop Facebook post ideas.
Don’t Overuse Text in Images
When you’re thinking about what images to put into your posts, make sure you’ve read Facebook’s Advertising Guidelines. They added a new guideline at the beginning of 2013 that images in promoted posts cannot contain more than 20% text. Inspirational quote posts (where the image is mostly the quote) work well organically, but you won’t be allowed to boost them with advertising.

To support this ebook, InfiniGraph created a short PowerPoint deck to explain how Facebook evaluates images and the PowerPoint includes a tool that helps you quickly gauge your image before you post it. Download it here (http://bit.ly/adtextchecker).

With visual promoted post ads, you’ll gain a number of advantages:

• You’ll reach a much higher proportion of your fans than your competitors do.

• You’ll attract new fans based on the actual content of your posts, sometimes at a really competitive cost per fan, which is a bonus, since that’s not the only purpose of these ads. New fans that came from posts are more likely to interact with your future posts, because they came into the page based on a sample of your posts!

• Your best posts will do good work bringing you attention and results for a much longer period of time.

Through trial and error, Marketo has also found that visual promoted posts on Facebook do particularly well. To ramp up the numbers of likes on a post, Marketo typically mixes a funny visual image, often in the form of a meme, and ties it to a strong business message. Particularly when you are in the B2B space, it is important to have a good mix of viral, fun content, with content that really speaks to your core competency as a business. Marketo also often adds a call-to-action at the bottom of the image to tie it even further to business pain points.

Take a look at this Facebook promoted post to promote one of their content pieces, The Definitive Guide to Lead Nurturing. Marketo took a viral image of the Godfather baby and mixed it with very targeted messaging about marketers: “My father taught me many things. Keep your leads close, but your opportunities closer”. Pretty funny right? Especially to the marketer!
But this promoted post seemed to resonate with not only marketers, but other viewers on Facebook that appreciated the visual image coupled with the message. As a result, this post was liked by 4,683 people and got 329 shares.

Don’t be afraid to try something fun if you are a B2B marketer. Remember, this is Facebook. People won’t just like a post for the sake of liking it, and they certainly won’t share it unless they feel it will resonate with their friends. So even if you feel like you are promoting something dry like a targeted webinar or whitepaper, make sure you create a fun visual that your audience wants to like and share. This will help get your message across in the B2B space.

**Definition of Likeable vs. Shareable Posts**

As mentioned previously, much of this ebook’s conclusions about what kind of posts get shares and what doesn’t comes from new research. AgoraPulse, a widely-used Facebook analytics and app provider, provided us with a large dataset to analyze. Much more information on this data and our conclusions is available near the end of this ebook in the Research section.

As we dove into the AgoraPulse data, it became clear that...

1. Some posts are super-shareable, but not so likeable (proportionally speaking). People may hypothetically like a post but forget to click on “like” after sharing it.

2. Some posts are super-likeable, but not so shareable. I’ll explain why this happens in both the Research and the Mistakes sections.

3. Some posts are super-conversational and receive more comments than other posts.

4. Some posts you create for lead-generation, so you want clicks on the link you include. These posts may have lower likes, shares, and comments than the three other types of posts.
How do we gauge the success of Facebook posts? We’ve learned it’s not as simple as, “Some posts are great, and some aren’t.” In fact, most of our “great” posts only excel at stimulating one type of interaction. When you conceive each post, decide which type of response you’d prefer. What is your goal for this post? Likes, shares, comments or clicks on a link? Sure, you want them all, and Brian wants a Lamborghini, but be realistic; choose your response goals for each post, and then send Brian money. Look at all your posts over the last month. Are they mainly getting just one or two of the response types? If so, think about how you can create posts that will stimulate the other responses.

Many companies try to put every response into one post. For example, maybe you’ve created posts that have a video link, a compelling preview picture, another website link, and more. But we find the results aren’t as good. Sometimes you might receive the bulk of your clicks on just the picture itself, especially with pictures that are only partially shown, or are much bigger than the preview, but little other response. Most likely, picture-clicks only are not the response you want, and definitely not one you want to pay for when advertising posts. So, the risk of going for everything is ending up with nothing. There’s not just one obvious action for viewers to take, so maybe they don’t take any, or they focus on the one you wanted least.

Keep it simple and go for one main type of interaction with each post. If you get lots of the other interaction, it’s a bonus. If you have a lot of experience posting on Facebook pages, you’ve seen that even when you’re trying hard, not every post gets great results. It’s not a matter of just wanting it. You have to test. And though the insights in this ebook will help you succeed more often, there’s no recipe yet that can always achieve exceptional results with your specific target audience for your specific business. You need to discover that success recipe yourself by trying new posts day after day, month after month.
Definition of Virality

It’s become cliché to call marketing campaigns “viral” when they aren’t. Viral marketing is a term that can be defined clearly with reference to the mathematical or epidemiological characteristics of real viruses. But many people misuse the term to mean, “of above average appeal”. Getting a few shares, or maybe even twenty shares, does not make your post truly viral. If you’re a marketing analytics geek you may be familiar with “K factor”, which is a measure of viral growth, either exponentially growing or exponentially expiring. We can’t use “K factor” in Facebook marketing at all, because EdgeRank diminishes every post’s visibility by 70-97%. Instead, we’d prefer to talk about “the shareability of individual posts,” which we can really only gauge in hindsight.

If you’ve looked into Facebook’s definition of the “virality” in their Facebook Insights, you’ve probably been disappointed that it’s not the sort of virality you were expecting. Facebook defines virality as the percentage of people who have created a story from your post as a percentage of the number of people who have seen it. A story is anything that can show up in the newsfeed, which could be something as unglamorous as “so and so commented on a post” without a view of that full post. But in terms of the strict definition, if the post isn’t always fully reproduced in these stories, then this isn’t a viral phenomenon at all.

What are all the possible types of “stories” that might be created from a page post? The list is virtually the same as all the user actions that go into the People Talking About This (PTAT) metric, which is also named in a deceptive way. Here’s the list of things that go into PTAT:

Users create stories when they like a page, post on the page wall, like a post, comment on a post, share a post, answer a question, RSVP to a page’s event, mention the page in a post, tag the page in a photo, check in at a place, share a check-in deal, like a check-in deal, write a recommendation, or claim an offer.

Do you think a fan is “talking about” your page or posts when they click that they’re going to an event, or check in somewhere? Are they talking about your brand when they like one of your posts? Not in our opinion. Nor are these truly “viral” activities.

So let’s forget about virality, PTAT and stories on Facebook, and just talk about what makes posts more or less shareable!
7 Functions of Highly Shared Posts

In addition to the 31,000 data points from 67 Facebook pages we, we also reviewed 30 days’ worth of posts from many other pages to find the most shared posts from each. Both of these surveys combined led us to creating this tip list.

Shareability is all about what the post does to people- it affects them in such a way that they want to share with others. Highly shareable posts do at least one of the following:

1. **GIVE**: Offers, discounts, deals or contests that everyone can benefit from, not just one sub-group of your friends

2. **ADVISE**: Tips, especially about problems that everyone encounters; for example, how to get a job or how to beat the flu

3. **WARN**: Warnings about dangers that could affect anyone

4. **AMUSE**: Funny pictures and quotes, as long as they’re not offensive to any group- sometimes the humor isn’t quite as strong or edgy- it has to appeal to a general audience

5. **INSPIRE**: Inspirational quotes

6. **AMAZE**: Amazing pictures or facts

7. **UNITE**: A post that acts as a flag to carry and a way to brag to others about your membership in a group that’s doing pretty damned good, thank you very much.

Here are some additional statistics to consider taken from a recent New York Times study on social sharing.

- **75%** say sharing helps them better understand and “process” news they’re interested in
- **85%** say the responses they get from posting and sharing on a social media site provide more thought
- **94%** consider how helpful a link would be to another user before posting it
- **68%** share as an advertisement for themselves, to give others a better sense of who they are
- **73%** say it helps them find people with common interests.
Of course, be sure to keep in mind these motivators and stats as you start developing social campaigns. Once you have created a campaign that is worth sharing, here some additional ways you can incentivize your audience to share.

- **Refer-a-Friend**: This campaign is centered around a compelling offer. Create special offers for both “referrers” and “referees”. If you are using a platform that enables you to collect social sharing data, you can gather metrics such as your biggest influencers on social.

- **Social Sweepstakes**: Create a contest and get your entrants to spread the word on your behalf. Social sweepstakes tend to really get a lot of shares since people want to be recognized for their contributions. Check out a recent contest that Marketo created asking Facebook fans to submit photobombs.

- **Polls and Voting**: Everyone has an opinion and they are usually more than happy to share it with you. Creating Facebook posts that engage your audience and compels them to share their opinions is a great way to ask for the share.

- **Flash Deals**: Create a fun visual way to represent a flash deal, or use a social sharing application that has the functionality to create a time-sensitive deal. Putting a time limit on your offer will really amp up your shares.
4 Mistakes That Prevent People from Sharing Your Posts

Some of the things we do that get in the way of shareability happen in the conception of posts. Some happen in the execution. But hands down these are the biggest no-no’s if you want your post to get shared:

1. Talking about yourself
2. Being too edgy or offensive
3. Being too obscure or niche
4. Asking for likes

Let’s look at why each of these doesn’t work.

Talking About Yourself Is Boring
Nobody cares that your employees went bowling. No one is impressed by your announcements. Sharing press releases often won’t get you shares. In reality, the only people everyone wants to hear talking about themselves is the President, the Oscar Winner, and the latest celebrity criminal. Even hall of fame athletes aren’t interesting to everyone. If reporters aren’t calling you, you don’t need to call a press conference. Your mom probably cares, and hopefully your spouse and your best friend, but that’s about it.

As alluded to in the “Selling The Dream” section, people most of the time are tuned into the radio station WIIFM (What’s In It For Me?). Unless you’re already a celebrity, even your biggest accomplishments are unlikely to get shares. When one of Brian’s books hit some of the Amazon bestsellers lists, his post about it got likes but not shares. When he posted a photograph taken by a newspaper in Norway when he spoke there, it got likes but not shares. The lesson is: People may “like” your success but that doesn’t mean they want to “share” it with anyone.

Every brand probably should do some amount of bragging, just so people know what’s going on, but moderate it, because it doesn’t always lead to shares.

If you’re Kobe Bryant, Leonardo Messi or Oprah Winfrey you can talk about yourself. Otherwise, you should be talking about what other people are interested in. You have to help them get what they want. You have to care about their dreams. You have to “buy their chairs” (go watch the movie Phenomenon).
Edgy or Offensive Isn’t for the Family

Facebook posts are “content”. Content is part of culture. And people have widely different tastes in culture. Everyone likes different things, and some people hate things that other people love. So, there’s a continuum in content accessibility from general audience to shockingly offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America has been rating film content along that continuum since 1922. They use this scale:

- **G** (General Audiences)
- **PG** (Parental Guidance Suggested/Some material might not be suitable for children)
- **PG-13** (Parents Strongly Cautioned/Some material may be inappropriate for children under the age of 13)
- **R** (Restricted/Under 17 not admitted without parent or adult guardian)
- **NC-17** (No One 17 and Under Admitted)

When you post on Facebook, you need to understand your audience, and ensure the tenor of your content appeals to their sensibilities. But if you want shares, you need to think about the sensibilities of the mainstream. Something that seems ok to 45 year old wine lovers in Northern California might be considered offensive by conservative parents in Alabama. And internationally, values and sensibilities vary as well.

People have relatives and friends from all over. Even if your page is for people who like dark comic books, and even if your fans give you hundreds of likes, don’t expect these fans to share your posts with their parents or bosses or employees. If you want to increase your chances of getting shared, you need to tend toward PG, if not G rated material. This is why Facebook is made out of babies, puppies and bacon.

Facebook also flatly forbids pornography, hate speech, bullying, intimidation and harassment. If you plan to advertise your posts, there are additional guidelines including: images cannot even be suggestive, cannot be shocking, sensational or disrespectful, and so on. vii
Being Too Obscure or Niche Blocks Relateability
It’s great that you grew up watching Family Guy, but your parents may never have seen a full episode. We love that you love Doctor Who, but loads of people know nothing about it. Your interest in 1950’s theatre is cool, but your nephew doesn’t care.

Just as we need to appeal to mainstream values to get shares, we also need to consider what is common knowledge and taste, and what is not. This is why Brian’s physics jokes don’t work at open mics, but his dog jokes do. This is also a big secret on Facebook. They have touted the value of reaching friends for years, but often we have few or no friends who love the things we love the most. This is why, when we’re thinking about what people can share with their friends, we need to make sure we’re referring to mainstream experiences.

Asking For Likes May Block Shares
First, if you ask in your post for likes, you may get them instead of shares. It’s as if people are mainly willing to take only one action on a Facebook post, so make sure you know which action you want from them most. If you’re going to ask for likes, ask for likes and shares.

Think about who people are sharing your post with- all their Facebook friends- this can include their parents or children, and for some people, their employees or supervisors. So if you want people to share your posts, they need to be generally appealing, not offensive, and not make the sharer look bad in front of any of those audiences.
Highly Liked But Barely-Shared Posts
As we paid more and more attention to posts that got lots of likes and shares, one of the first hypotheses we developed was that, although most highly shared posts also got a lot of likes, there are many posts that are highly-liked but barely-shared.

Is this because people publicly approve of something, but don’t feel comfortable sharing it with others? Politics comes to mind- although there are some who share all their political views with everyone, many feel it’s not a topic of polite conversation. We don’t want to make our Facebook friends uncomfortable.

We suspect people view a “Like” on a post as something that happens between an individual and the person or page that posted it. This liking also bonds us with other likers of that thing. Since we’re not always sure who will see that we liked something, we consider whether it would look bad to others that we liked it. We may never publicly admit to liking (by clicking “like”) on a controversial post. But when we click Share, we’re obviously saying, “I like this so much I wish I had created it myself. I want everyone I’ve connected with on Facebook to see it. I’m ok with my family, coworkers, supervisors, bosses- and anybody else I’ve friended- knowing that I like it.” That’s why people are more likely to share a cute puppy picture than a picture of the book *50 Shades of Gray*.

Examples of Highly Shared Posts
These are some of the most shareable posts we’ve run across. Some have impressive numbers overall, and some just have exceptionally high numbers for that page or its niche.

It’s So Snowy Here, Are We on the Ice Planet Hoth?
This one was posted when the big news in mid-February was that another big winter storm system was coming in. Going by what percentage of fans shared it, this is the most viral post we ran across in our study. How viral was it? Even though the page that shared this post has less than 10,000 fans, it engaged 41,334 people. Wowza. One of the most viral posts is a Star Wars reference, and to the best movie in the only authentic Star Wars trilogy? Well, that’s just cool. And yes, we just made some geek enemies and we’re fine with that!
There Are Way More Aunties Than Mommies
This, the second most shared post in our study, reached twice as many people as its page’s posts normally do. It was posted by a page that primarily caters to mothers, but going with the “auntie angle” is smart because there are more aunties than mothers. Always a smart thing to do—think about who your audience is, how do they define themselves, and then what and who else are they? What else do they like? And the lynchpin? They asked for you to engage with it and share it in the picture itself.

Crazy Mountain Getaway?
This one engaged almost four times as many people as normal. We’re not going to pretend we know why this one was shared so much. To Brian, these rocks look gloppy and unattractive. Maybe it’s how the little rooms are built to look so much like the rocks… but it just goes to show you an important principle in Facebook marketing: you never know your audience as well as they do, and you have to test a lot of content to find what they respond the most to. In fact, they themselves may not know what they’ll love until they see it. So Facebook marketing always will involve some level of guessing and testing.

Only Aunties,
Can love you like a mother,
Keep secrets like a sister,
behave like a true friend,
and kick your butt if you need it..

If you are an Auntie who loves her nieces and nephews with all your heart, Click Like and Share.
Happy Friday! Everyone Loves a Photobomb

Photobombs are kind of amazing. And they are certainly of-the-moment. Everyone wants to crack a smile and laugh on a slow-moving-like-molasses Friday afternoon. This post from Marketo drafts behind the hot topic of photobombs to get people to like and share. For Marketo, Friday is the time for fun. So instead of posting something that ties to business value, they do a weekly Friday photobomb to generate shares and engagement. These do very well and it’s great to give your audience something to look forward to.

Kids Are Cute (and Annoying?)

Another winner from a parenthood-oriented page. It reached twice as many people as the page’s posts normally do and engaged about 5.5x as many as normal. It says “my kids are cute” and who doesn’t think that? It’s something that a lot of parents feel at one time or another, and it’s a cute way to vent some of that annoyance annoyance and feel camaraderie with a other like-minded people.

And about Fridays… Brian sometimes posts a funny photo on one of the other days of the week, because so many people are posting fun things on Fridays, it doesn’t stand out as much. Sometimes you follow the pack as a best practice, and sometimes you want to surprise people in order to grab more attention. Try a few different days out and see what works best for you.
Here’s Permission to say something you’ve been holding back

This contagious post gets us thinking: What does each group want to say that they normally can’t? If they were hanging out together, empowering each other, what would they say? Something playful or shocking? Or, in politics, something serious or contentious. In this example, something fun and indulgent.

Shoes are certainly a topic that many people can bond over. And who doesn’t want a new pair of shoes? Guaranteed that this post resonated with many like-minded individuals with a shoe collection, resulting in the high number of likes and shares.

Warnings and Tips

This one didn’t get a whole lot of shares overall, but it did get more than any other of the posts on this page in the previous month. This falls under the “people share tips” wisdom. The only thing we’d say about this post is that it is not one of the most interactive. One trap we see Facebook pages fall into when they’re first trying to engage people, is to focus on time-related themes—and by that we mean holidays, seasons and what day of week it is. These work to a degree, as they might with every possible audience. And tying it into the theme of this page (which was “getting a job”) is clever, but they could do better.
Like This (Telephone) Post
This one is dripping with clever irony. If irony is a fluid. Anyone who’s been on Facebook too long may be sick of commands to “like this post”, but the same thing painted on a real world telephone post… brilliant. If you haven’t been on Facebook forever, you still get a joke and the command. What’s crazier, it got more shares than likes, which illustrates that it’s not just what you tell people to do. Some posts are more shareable than others. This one is clever, funny, and relevant to the very network it’s being seen on. As social media experts have pointed out for years, tweets about Twitter and Facebook posts about Facebook and blog posts about blogging all do very well, because they’re relevant to everyone that’s seeing it.

The Inspirational Quote
These work very well, but if you’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all. Keep in mind that now, if you want to promote them further with Facebook ads, the text can’t take up more than 20% of the image. And they calculate that by dividing the image into 25 squares, so be careful not to straddle over too many of those imaginary lines with your quote.

Misery is the result of not being able to adjust to circumstances and staying in the situation. Two choices: Get over it or get out!

Or, you can do it without a picture! If it’s a good quote, it may work just as well. Of course, if your normal status (text-only) updates aren’t engaging, your EdgeRank for that will be horrible, but if you’ve done a good job with them otherwise, you can still get great interaction from an inspirational quote in a status update. The one below was posted on a page that has only 4,400 fans. Through paid ads, a total of about 14,000 saw it, and it was share 50% more than the average post.
Facebook Is So Funny Ha Ha Ha
We’ll give you one guess which Marketing Automation company posted the psychiatrist cartoon below? Yes, Marketo! It’s one of the page’s most shared posts of the last month. Why? Because it’s general audience humor and it’s about Facebook. This is a good time to share a very similar post from the American Heart Association. It’s similar in that, while it may not be the funniest thing you’ve heard all year, it is amusing, makes you stop for a minute, and most importantly, it’s not offensive. The problem with humor is that many of the funny people out there get their laughs by being inappropriate. If you have to be funny without going for shock value, comedy becomes a bit tougher, and the number of successful practitioners narrows. If you can achieve inoffensive humor, you’ve found a great competitive differentiator. And remember, even if you are a B2B company, you can always mix a bit ‘o humor in.

Stop eating so many vegetables. I can’t seem to find anything wrong with you.

courtesy of the New Yorker
B2B Marketing Songs, Of Course!
This post is unique, because no one had written a song for marketing automation yet. Marketo had the first such song written, along with a nice animation. It got widely shared because it’s positive and different.

Cute Animals Always Work
Dipping deep into the well of cuteness, we find a squirrel packing its huge cheeks with—probably nuts— but it looks enough like toffee to get away with this. Cute kids often work, but not always. Most people have nothing against animals—we’re brought up with cartoons and movies about friendly animals, we have pets in our houses and we love to go to the zoo or aquarium... so cute animals are a very appealing general audience subject to use to convey ideas or humor. They’re super shareable.

Additionally, this is the perfect image to illustrate what we mean about the 20% text rule and the 5x5 grid. You can see below the same picture with its 25 squares, and that the text is a bit too high from the bottom of the image. If they’d just put the text about 10 pixels lower, this would pass the 20% rule and they could use a promoted post ad for it.

How do you create your own grid? You can do it in Photoshop, and if you’re a real Ps guru, maybe do even better: go to your preferences and modify your grid to have 5 sections every 20%, using dots. But, the easiest way is to create a table in PowerPoint that you’ll reuse, and whenever you want to check an image, paste it into that slide and adjust the dimensions of the table to your image. It’s that easy.

This is really exciting for B2B because it’s a new way to make B2B marketing more interesting. The biggest sin on Facebook is being boring, because EdgeRank lowers your post visibility when people don’t interact with them. So don’t hesitate to try something like this! The lesson is try new things and think outside the box. Creativity can really catapult you to the head of the pack. So take a risk.
You Might Not Like This But You’re Gonna Share It
This one is a great example of something we discuss below in the research. There’s a subset of posts that gets a lot of shares, but not a lot of likes, proportionally speaking, and that often happens when you put out a warning of some kind, like this snow forecast. The ratio of shares to likes here is almost 50%, which is super high. So, keep in mind that warnings are important and a great way to get shares. Plus you’re doing a public service, but you’re not going to see a lot of likes on these. According to our data, with these posts that have a high proportion of shares:likes, you can get at least 50% more visibility than normal.

Well, You Don’t See That Everyday
People love superheroes, especially kids- so this one tugs the heartstrings too. Doing nice stuff for sick kids? That’s awesome. It’s very outside the norm. You don’t see that every day. That’s one reason to share stuff. They might have made a video, shown the kids and the impact on them with some background inspirational music. But pictures do well on Facebook because they can be quickly digested and shared. Videos take more time.

Window washers at the Children’s Hospital in Pittsburgh. We love to share nice things :)

Like · Comment · Share

erdale · Bangor

New Haven · New York

Like · Comment · Share

2,008 46 599
OMG Did You Realize This?
This seems obvious— but there are some interesting things going on here. First, it’s about Friends, which is such a well-known TV show that, even though Brian has probably never seen an entire episode of it (he catches portions of it before he realizes he should change the channel), he still knows who these characters are. But this is also about the common experience of aging. Time passes before you realize it— at an amazing speed. So we’re using a mainstream TV show to point out something amazing that people don’t realize that often. What thing is your target audience realizing? Or unaware of?

Negative Jokes Suck
Does anyone really confuse Wednesday with Saturday? Maybe for a split second when waking up. Or late at night when you shouldn’t be up because it’s a school or work night but you forgot. It certainly throttled the likes similar to the warning posts because this is a joke about something that sucks, so you might like the joke but you don’t like the thing they’re talking about. Just know that some of the most jaded and negative jokes don’t appeal to a broad audience.

MONICA AND CHANDLER’S TWINS WOULD BE 9 THIS YEAR.
PHEOBE’S TRIPLET WOULD BE 14.
BEN WOULD BE 18 AND EMMA 11.

Don’t you hate it when that happens, at least it’s almost Thursday
~ Lib

Nothing messes up your Saturday like realizing it’s Wednesday.
My Fans Posted This
Sometimes your fans post incredible things you never would have thought of. Here’s a really outside the box before/after pic for a fitness page. Including a cute kid? Win. However, there is a super low ratio of shares to likes here- and that could be for a bunch of different reasons. Remember, people only share when it makes sense to show their families and friends. In this case, it’s the weight loss success of the original fan, not that of whoever might share it. And with issues like weight loss, many people prefer anonymity, or at least not to discuss it with everyone. Sharing is about what we want everyone to know.

I Want Everyone To Think That I Think This Way
This example is inspirational, and inspiration is super-shareable. We believe people want to be more positive. And on the vanity side of things, people want others to think they are positive.

When you see a quote like this, when you feel galvanized and inspired, you want to pass that feeling on to the people you love. For a second we might wonder about the negative nellies who will criticize it, but we also know that by posting positive things, we grab the higher ground, and anyone that heckles us will look like a troll. So we share inspirational messages like crazy. This is part of what’s really unique about Facebook. There’s no dislike button. It’s about what we like and who also likes the same things we like. This post had a phenomenal share:like ratio, greater than 1:3. In the data we studied for this ebook, posts with higher share:like ratios reached 50% more people than normal posts.
Dog Chases Mailman Cliché Haha
Again, the humor that works on Facebook may be cliché, but it’s a general audience. Has anyone not heard that dogs hate mailmen? And if you have one, you know it’s true. There’s another funny image that’s gone around the Internet with a picture of a confused dog and the caption “Wait you mean the people at the door AREN’T trying to kill us?” All of these are jokes on familiar themes. And this joke was used on a fitness related page. How many times have people heard they should stretch? We get tired of some of the things that are important to hear. This funny picture puts old important info in a new, funny, likeable context. And because it’s accessible non-offensive humor, it gets shared like crazy.

The 80s Throwback Post
Everyone loves an 80s throwback. Seriously. Tapping into nostalgia from the past really livens up a post. Particularly if you pick a decade that your audience will really resonate with. Marketo posted this fun meme featuring Axel Rose from Guns N Roses saying “Welcome to the funnel…we got leads and names”. 3,293 people liked the post, it got 132 shares, and a ton of funny comments. Again, even if you are a B2B company, don’t be afraid of having a little fun on Facebook. Clearly, the more you can mix your core tenants with clever messaging and a kickass photo, the more you are going to encourage your audience to share.
A Moment of Marketing Genius

Marry an inspirational quote and a famous thought leader and what do you get? A moment of marketing genius! On Mondays, Marketo posts a “Moment of Marketing Genius” quote coupled with an image to liven up their fan’s Monday morning. This Einstein post worked particularly well in that it got 623 shares. Why so many shares? People love sharing quotes, and what’s more? People love sharing quotes that are said by famous geniuses, especially ones that everyone will recognize.

Hey Nerds, Check Out This Link!

IBM is one of the biggest companies that provides B2B services. A quick scan of their Facebook page tells us a couple of things: #1, they only post links (they need to experiment more) and #2 these are nerds talking to nerds. By far, the most shared post in the last few months is this one, about improving the speed of the internet. It’s a brag, because IBM scientists discovered it, and as we’ve said, some bragging is good. Also, it’s about the internet working better and, hey, aren’t we on the Internet right now? So this post has built-in relateability just like when we post on Facebook about Facebook.
OMG Routers Are So Funny

The most shared Cisco post in the last six months was holiday-oriented. We try to avoid holding these up as great examples, because any company can use a holiday and get great response from it, but we really liked the creative implementation of this one. They carved their logo into a pumpkin (or PhotoShopped it, but it looks real enough), and added wires to make it a “Route-o-Lantern”. Clever.

To make up for the holiday example, we showed their second most shared post in recent times, a giant Cisco IP phone. This is a sight gag, which is visual humor. What can you do with your products or services, making small things big or big things small? How can you put together things that aren’t supposed to be? Ever noticed how a circuit board looks like a city? That kind of thing.
Finally, I’m Old Enough To Write On The Walls Again!

Deloitte is one of the big four professional services firms, whose offerings include financial, risk and tax services. Their most shared post in the last few months is a photo album from the 2013 World Economic Forum in Davos. They took over a walkway used by the most powerful men and women in the world. Through social media they asked people some important questions about business, innovation, and society. Leaders attending the conference saw the wall evolve over days as Scriberia sketched peoples tweets. This is an extremely creative campaign- combining tweets, crowdsourcing, graphics, and bringing the 1% and 99% together. It’s innovative, visual and relevant, and that’s why it was shared so much. What events can your company leverage? How can you partner with other companies to do more interesting campaigns?
Hey Apple Users, Our Stuff Is Better!
Microsoft’s Facebook page is doing a lot of things well— they’re posting stunning images to promote new Windows themes, they ask questions via nicely branded images, and they post links their fans respond to. This post was the most shared in recent times. It’s another brag post about how many Microsoft products were chosen by Engadget readers. We know that the PC/Microsoft vs. Apple debate can be almost as polarizing as politics, so we believe one reason this post was shared so much is that PC/Microsoft users can say, as one actually did when they shared it, “I have three of these four, pretty proud of me :-(” Sharing this photo says to others, “Look, a lot of other people and a big web magazine all think I’m right.”

You Love That You Know That This Isn’t Real
You’d expect that PhotoShop’s Facebook page would be all kinds of awesome since photos are the most engaged with type of content on Facebook, and PhotoShop experts create amazing images. The page doesn’t disappoint. It was actually quite hard to choose which of their posts to highlight, but as usual, we let the numbers decide for us. The first lesson is: whatever you do at work, if it can become an advantage on your Facebook page, do it!

Also, many of the posts on their Facebook page that do well get into the geekiest elements of how to do more with PhotoShop. What made this image so shareable? We think it was:

1. The obvious modification of reality— it jumps out at you.
2. Putting something we’re familiar with (cut along the dotted line) in a context that clashes (you don’t cut roads with scissors)— this is a typical humor technique called clash of context.
3. The fact that there’s a video of how he used 130 layers to do it. That’s a super geeky extreme how-to.

Has it become clear to you yet that good marketing on Facebook requires creativity? If your company doesn’t have it, hire it or outsource it.
The Research

Overall, this book comes out of having paid long-term attention to hundreds of Facebook pages. In partnership with AgoraPulse, we looked at in-depth data for 67 Facebook pages— that doesn’t sound like a large number of pages, but we looked at up to 50 posts per page, for a total of 2,953 posts and a total of 31,423 data points— and that is a lot to look at. We had to go through every row of this data, and filter and sort and measure it 20 different ways, so it was very time consuming.

To our knowledge, the most interesting study of how Facebook pages were faring with engagement and visibility was conducted by Facebook itself. They announced in January 2012 that the average page was reaching only 12% of its fans organically. Brian helped PageLever publicize an earlier study that discovered that, on average, only 7.49% of fans saw posts daily from a page they’d liked.

Note to AgoraPulse clients: all this data was anonymized to protect your data’s confidentiality. We looked mainly at numbers related to posts. We did review how a number of outstanding posts performed and analyzed that in relationship to the page’s topic and audience. But nowhere in this ebook do we disclose the name of any of the brands we studied.
Research Findings: Overview
First, a disclaimer. The interaction rates in this study are high overall, because we chose to pull from higher in the engagement pile than lower- we needed to find overachievers at sharing. So, please view these findings as typical for the more interactive pages. We hope in the future to have the ability to pull even more data and give a more truly average picture of the data. Also, InfiniGraph is currently working on a benchmarking feature for a future release.

The average Facebook page in this study reached a number of people equal to 19.7% of fans, although not all were fans.

The average page reached a number of people equal to 11.2% of fans organically; 10.0% to page fans, so 1.2% of the organic reach was to non-fans through things like friend stories and posts seen through Like Boxes.

The average page reached a number of people equal to 7.7% via paid ads; 0.4% to page fans and 7.3% to non-fans. This suggests that, of the fans you could potentially reach via paid and organic, 89.6% don’t see your posts.

About the pages studied:
- The minimum number of page fans was 2,974; max was 1,815,197; average was 275,685.
- The post with the most shares had 8,274.
- The post with the most likes had 75,450.
- The post with the most comments had 7,432.
- The most shared post reached a number of people equal to 77.9% of its fanbase.

Research Findings: Engagement
What fans did when they engaged:
- 0.4% of fans commented on the average
- 3.4% of fans liked the average post
- 0.4% of fans shared the average post

Note: this does not include other types of clicks on posts
That means that of these three types of engagement:

People like posts eight times as often as they comment or share on them.
Research Findings: Other Correlations
We explored the relationship of various metrics to prove or disprove some assumptions. This was accomplished with scatter graphs and R values. If you’re not familiar with statistics, the R value tells you how much two measures are related. Finding a high amount of correlation does not prove that one thing causes the other (we like to say “correlation is not causation”), but if there’s a low correlation, chances are that neither causes the other. In other words, if we check what Facebook has told us, that getting more interaction on our posts yields greater visibility, we can confirm this somewhat with a high R value.

When we look at R values, we’re either looking for a strong correlation, no correlation, or perhaps more or less correlation than another relationship (if, for example, we’re looking at whether comments or likes create more post visibility). The numbers we need to reach medium or strong correlation, unfortunately, depends on the sample size. We found it safest to just compare the R values for each relationship to prioritize which things were most related to increased post visibility.

Here’s what we found:

Page Fans and Shareability
The number of fans on a page has does not correlate to what percentage of fans see your posts, then share those posts (R=0.048) – having more fans doesn’t make your content more shareable. That seems obvious, but it’s nice to have data to back it up.

Comments and Viral Reach
We were surprised to find one of the strongest correlations were between comments and viral reach- substantially more correlation than between shares and viral reach. That may surprise some people, but when you read the definition of viral reach, it’s “people seeing stories about you doing things on Facebook,” not necessarily people seeing shared posts, and not necessarily even sharing posts. So, in this case, it looks like Facebook may be more likely to show your friends that you’re commenting on a post than other types of engagement. If you’re an admin for your Facebook page and you hover over the number of people who saw the post in the lower left hand corner, you’ll see the breakout for organic, paid and viral reach. Usually, we see more viral reach for posts that have more comments.

Comments and Reach
Comments also are more strongly correlated with organic and fan reach than shares or likes. In order, the most correlated with visibility are comments, shares and likes. This actually makes some sense as it might be an attempt in the EdgeRank algorithm to adjust for how much more frequently people like than they share or comment.
How Often Do People Share?

One-third of the posts we reviewed did not get shared at all. Actually we expected a higher portion of posts to be unshared, because the initial perception was that not many posts are highly shareable. In reality, on a day to day basis, it's easy to get a couple of people who work for the brand or who work for the brand’s agency to share posts, but it's harder to get more than five or ten people to share a post. How many posts had more than 5 shares? Only about half of them. Only 20% of posts were shared more than 50 times. But these numbers aren’t as meaningful as percentages, because what if you have a million fans? How many shares are significant?

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Only one out of every 200 post viewers who saw a post shared it. Only about 20% of posts were shared by a higher proportion of viewers than that.

Likeable vs. Shareable Posts

Highly shareable posts in terms of share:like proportion. We found some posts get shared to an exceptional degree, but not liked nearly as much you might expect. Other posts get a crazy number of likes but not shares. What’s going on? Do we have to choose between shareable or likeable? We examine specific posts like this in the last section of this ebook, but to find that data, we first looked for an average share:like proportion, then looked at that relationship amongst the most shared vs least shared posts, and in the most liked versus least liked posts.

Highly-shared posts (shared by more than 1.7% of viewers) had a share:like ratio of 30% - shareable posts still received more than three times as many likes as shares. Asking for shares may help, and asking people to like doesn’t seem to affect shares, positively or negatively. So why not ask for both?

Low-share posts (shared by less than 1.7% of viewers) had a share:like ratio of 9.5% - less shareable posts received ten times as many likes as shares. Only 1% of these posts included the call to action to “share” in the text of the post. Asking people to share works but may lower likes. We will continue to assume that the topic, point of view, or picture in the post trumps all user behavior, but this may make you think more about whether to include an interaction call to action in your posts.

About 29% of posts had some likes but no shares, but only 0.1% of posts had shares but no likes. Unsurprisingly, it’s more common to like things than to share them.

Only 0.2% of posts had shares equal to likes, or more shares than likes; these are typically posts about sad topics, or warnings. One was a recall of a children’s toy due to safety issues.

We looked at 66 posts that were liked at an above average rate but not shared vs. highly liked posts that did get shared; 15% of the unshared but highly liked posts asked for a like, while only 4% of the shared and highly liked posts asked for a like. Separately, we analyzed posts that asked for both likes and shares. Only one out of nine (11%) of these received no shares. They all received likes. Compared this to the 98 posts that only asked for likes; 35 of them (36%) received no shares. Eighteen posts asked only for comments; one-third were not shared while all were liked.
Conclusion
You should read this ebook and do what it says. :) Ha ha. This is our revenge on English teachers who insisted we write pointless, redundant conclusions. Yes, we do feel better now. KABAMA-LAMA!!!

We hope you find this ebook helpful. Please reach out to us with questions or to share your successes. Tell us about your super-shareable posts!

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Brian’s is the author of The Like Economy and LinkedIn for Business and co-author of the bestselling Facebook Marketing. He has 13 years experience with Google, Twitter and Facebook marketing, both as a consultant and marketing agency director. Most importantly, he has a dog named Brad Pitt, and his 101-year old grandma thinks he’s the bees knees.

If your company needs help managing AdWords ads, Facebook ads or SEO, or you want an audit of your AdWords, SEO or social strategy, contact the Carter Group today.

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