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How to Build User Appeal for Media: Post-Event Documentation of the 7th Sina News Innovation Day

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Abstract

In the process of media convergence, technology-driven transformation has accelerated media innovation mechanisms while simultaneously intensifying the demand for high-quality content amid increasingly abundant channels and platforms. At the seventh edition of Sina News' Creative Day, themed "User Attraction," media professionals shared insights on adapting to contemporary development, producing quality content, and retaining users. Speakers included Xiao Jian, General Manager of Ergeng Culture ...

Full Text

How to Build Media User Attraction: A Report from Sina News' Seventh Creative Day

Introduction

In the process of media convergence, technology-driven transformation has accelerated media innovation mechanisms while simultaneously intensifying the demand for high-quality content amid increasingly abundant channels and platforms. At the seventh edition of Sina News' Creative Day, themed "User Attraction," media professionals shared insights on adapting to contemporary development, producing quality content, and retaining users. Speakers included Xiao Jian, General Manager of Ergeng Culture Media (Beijing) Co., Ltd.; Jin Dongwei, Deputy Director of the New Media Department at the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) News Center; Guo Ting, Head of "Weigugong"; Hou Zhenhai, Deputy Producer of CCTV's New Media News Department and Head of the CCTV News public account; and Zhai Honggang, Operations Director of Sina Pictures.

Content Revolution in the Mobile Era: Ergeng’s Grassroots Approach

The mobile era has ushered in a screen-reading paradigm where sensory engagement and full-body participation define the reading experience, making audiovisual content increasingly paramount. In this competitive landscape, Ergeng has distinguished itself by focusing on fundamental, ordinary stories—specifically, the narratives of grassroots individuals. By 切入 into the lives of ordinary people, Ergeng articulates the dreams of our era through intimate, small-scale storytelling.

Ergeng’s editorial philosophy represents a shift from focusing on objects to foregrounding human stories, emphasizing humanistic aesthetics over superficial spectacle. Following its Series A funding round in 2016, Ergeng rapidly expanded its urban footprint, producing city-specific “24 Hours” series for locations like Beijing and Chengdu. The Beijing installment featured a 90s-generation subway employee, an obstetrician, a senior-year student entrepreneur in Zhongguancun, and a foreign enterprise white-collar worker frantically purchasing school district apartments—each story documenting individual contributions to the city and capturing its pulse through seemingly minor characters. This approach demonstrates how five-minute videos can document our era through small yet meaningful events.

In terms of production capacity, Ergeng demonstrates formidable scalability. The company maintains rigorous standards for character selection and narrative development, applying these uniformly to both fresh graduates and partnered PGC (Professionally Generated Content) producers. Each five-minute film requires approximately 7-10 days of production, enabling a daily update schedule that yields over 100 films monthly and more than 1,200 annually across the company’s national network. Currently, Ergeng operates a dedicated column, “Storytelling with Ergengjun,” which solicits narratives from ordinary people—Beijing drifters, artisans, and other grassroots figures—through back-end messages, selecting protagonists whose stories and dreams collectively paint a portrait of the era.

Reconstructing Official Media: The “Guozi Xiaoxin” Model

Jin Dongwei articulated how users are undergoing reconstruction, forming communities based on shared interests and 诉求. In this landscape, social sharing has become increasingly important, with interest tags driving youth consumption patterns. The “Guozi Xiaoxin” account, SASAC’s official new media presence, has developed a three-part operational strategy following preliminary audience analysis.

First, content innovation follows the principle of “four qi and thirteen you” (four types of vitality and thirteen forms of substance). “Four qi” comprises: (1) gathering popularity through exclusive micro-releases of state-owned enterprise news; (2) boosting morale; and (3) staying grounded through micro-public welfare initiatives. The “thirteen you” includes: having form and substance,

sound and color, reciprocity (analyzing fan psychology—with interactive giveaways during Spring Festival proving most effective for follower growth), balancing soft and hard content, maintaining vertical integration, managing light and heavy topics, and preserving emotional resonance. Beyond this, Guozi Xiaoxin experiments with matrix services—pooling ideas, clustering development, and collective voice amplification—while employing personification as an effective strategy for bridging distances with audiences.

Second, the platform leverages professional knowledge-sharing communities for interaction, converting earned funds into charitable donations for impoverished schools in Ningxia, thereby enhancing service functions. Third, building relationships and emotional identification has become central to contemporary knowledge dissemination. Through serial brand activities and consistent storytelling over four years of operation, Guozi Xiaoxin has explored how to foster audience identification with its values and create emotional connections. The challenge ahead lies in evolving from brand storytelling to nourishing audiences' hearts and minds.

Cultural Heritage as Digital Leverage: The “Weigugong” Approach

Guo Ting emphasized that new media operators must first understand their unique advantages and limitations. For the Palace Museum, its stunning visual assets represent a core strength—widely recognized and appreciated by followers. “Weigugong” (the Palace Museum’s official WeChat account) functions as a lever: on one side lies the museum’s profound cultural heritage, on the other, popular forms of public engagement, with the account serving as the fulcrum balancing both.

The operational strategy employs a rigorous three-tier review system and embraces a “de-editorialization” concept to bridge distances with audiences during communication. For visual content, “Weigugong” maintains strict standards—for instance, its 2014 solar term series ensured all seasonal images were captured 1-2 days before or on the exact day of each term, guaranteeing authenticity and demonstrating the museum’s commitment to sincerity. Content is organized thematically under clear topics like “Spring Brightness,” “Summer Coolness,” “Autumn Colors,” and “Winter Warmth,” alongside exhibition reports and institutional updates, providing strong directional guidance for audiences.

This thematic approach began with the 24 solar terms and evolved into monthly themes, cultivating follower loyalty and habitual engagement. Interactive activities further attract fans, such as coloring book initiatives during the “Secret Garden” trend or the popular “cute cats of the Palace Museum” series that uses animal imagery to bridge distances with the public. The team also produced follow-up reports on *Masters in the Forbidden City*, generating substantial readership. Throughout operations, understanding the Palace Museum’s hot topics and determining appropriate coverage angles—whether on Weibo, WeChat, or websites—remains crucial for retaining followers through quality content and

interactive methods.

Professional News Media’s Digital Transformation: CCTV News

Hou Zhenhai summarized the purpose of new media operations in three objectives: acquiring users, retaining users, and converting value. Since its November 2012 Weibo launch and April 2013 WeChat debut, CCTV News has expanded across platforms including Weibo, WeChat, Miaopai, the CCTV News App, and Toutiao, operating on the principle: “Wherever users are, CCTV News will be there.”

Content strategy has capitalized on the short video and live streaming boom. For serious news, 细分 markets demonstrate clear user demand for live broadcasting. During the MH370 incident, CCTV News employed an objective, calm approach, utilizing Weibo’s nine-grid format to transform each image into an infographic, creating a magazine-style narrative of developments. Major news events are covered through GIFs, short videos, and Miaopai clips, while WeChat operations adopt dynamic, single-camera reporting for compiled releases.

The 推送 schedule follows a fixed pattern of five daily pushes plus breaking news: a 6:30 AM morning bulletin for quick consumption of political, economic, entertainment, and historical content; mid-morning deep reporting; lunchtime coverage of morning developments with CCTV commentary; afternoon updates; evening commentary and analysis for post-work 深度 reading; and 睡前 cultural and literary content featuring host recitations. Each “night reading” piece maintains news relevance, anchored to anniversaries or current events, combining inspirational content with practical service information.

Understanding platform characteristics proves essential—WeChat’s 熟人社交, Weibo’s public square dynamics, and short-form social media 传播 patterns. Operations must continuously analyze user composition to ensure media presence wherever audiences reside.

Photo Journalism’s Value Proposition: Sina Pictures’ “Seeing” Column

Zhai Honggang shared reflections on users and content through Sina’s “Seeing” column, which he defines as in-depth investigative storytelling in the photographic domain. The column’s media value manifests in two dimensions: social supervision responsibility and public enlightenment.

First, “making the invisible visible” encompasses two meanings: revealing obscured facts that deserve public disclosure, and highlighting everyday occurrences that often go unnoticed. Second, media value lies in enabling audiences to think more deeply about their society and environment, developing more 立体 and accurate reference points through continuous information discrimination, thereby fostering more rational interpretation of events and contributing to overall public wisdom.

In an era of content homogenization, unique content becomes paramount. Originality constitutes distinctiveness, and distinctive content builds brand power. Regarding value creation post-traffic generation, operations must shift from traffic-centric to user-centric models. Traditional portals relied on traffic for advertising revenue, but personalized recommendation systems have transformed advertising into a service information delivery mechanism. The era of pure traffic has given way to the era of user value, as exemplified by new-generation TMD companies (Toutiao, Meituan, Didi) that prioritize individual user value over traditional internet models. Consequently, operations must increasingly emphasize user management, recognizing that a single user's commercial value far exceeds that of traditional internet traffic.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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