Maximising the life of your content on social media through repurposing

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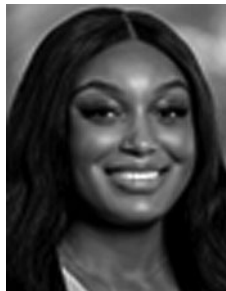
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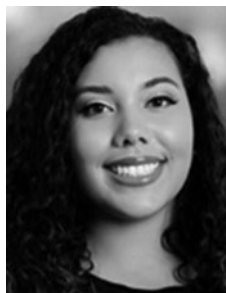
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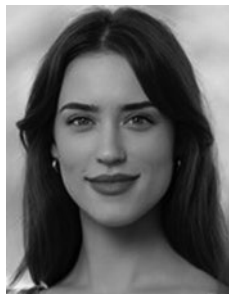
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Abstract

Content teams at higher education institutions produce a vast array of content, from written profiles to YouTube videos that share excitement leading up to an event. Social media teams often amplify this content once, and often look for additional sources of content to fill content calendars throughout the year. This paper showcases how, through repurposing, content is maximised to its fullest potential and can reach more audiences in innovative ways. This paper shares strategies on how to best repurpose content, examples from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and best practices for institutions to keep in mind.

Keywords

repurposing, video, social media, campaigns, higher education

INTRODUCTION

However large an institution's social media team is, creating fresh and innovative content to fill a daily content calendar can be difficult. How can a team ensure content is seen by the largest audience? One answer is to remix and repurpose. Repurposing content may seem tedious or not impactful to your overall strategy, but the practice can infuse fresh air into your institution's social media strategy. Repurposing allows a team to continue to gain value from a solitary piece of content or specific brand message. Repurposing allows social media managers and teams to get a head start on their strategy and content plans or calendars, freeing up time to strategise and improve overall workflow. Additionally, repurposing can help smaller teams fill content calendars without taking too much time away from other tasks. Carolina's social media team incorporates repurposing in much of its content calendar, and the team has devised strategies and best practices for other institutions to follow.

REPURPOSE LIKE A COFFEE SHOP: THE POWER OF REPURPOSING

Repurposing content is similar to the strategy of a favourite local coffee shop. Each coffee shop sells variations of the same thing — coffee — just in different formats. Some coffee might be iced. Other coffee includes added syrup. Some coffee is a bit more concentrated. By repurposing content, teams can take an already great piece of content, and enhance it to be used in a different way.

Additionally, repurposing allows teams to try something new with minimal effort. Adding a trending sound bite or humorous text over existing video allows a team to capitalise on a trend but save time by not having to produce brand new content from scratch. Experimenting with existing content allows a team to dip its toes into a trend but not exhaust extensive time or energy in the process.

Repurposing content also allows you to reach new audiences. Loaded caramel iced lattes and espresso shots typically have different consumers, much like how repurposing content in different formats, like a video or short Instagram story, can reach new audiences or educate in a new way. Throughout this paper, the team at Carolina will illustrate a few strategies on how to repurpose existing content and how content has performed in each format.

MAKE THINGS EASIER TO DIGEST
Creating 'snackable' video snippets

One way to make things easier to digest is through snackable video snippets, which can be compared to a condensed espresso shot. The short video snippets are quick and to the point and can allow you to break up chapters by topic or focus. Additionally, shorter videos allow you to share a piece of content to platforms that might have video time limits, like Instagram reels or Twitter.

Carolina recently utilised this tactic on a video profile of a chemistry professor named Brian Hogan. Hogan is well loved on campus and is open about his mental health struggles. Carolina content producer John Roberts produced a six-minute video about Hogan's college career, imposter syndrome, his marriage and his decision to start therapy. The content and social teams planned to publish the video on a university wellness day and share resources for students as part of a small campaign. While excited to share the thoughtful and beautifully produced video, Carolina's social media team was not sure if many students would watch the full 6:37-minute video in its entirety. Based on the analytics gathered from videos posted that exceed two to three minutes on platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, the team has seen differentiations in the engagement rate and amount of interactions received by videos that are longer in duration as opposed to videos that are shorter in duration. This differentiation depicts videos that are longer in duration having lower engagement rates and interactions while videos have a greater potential of having a higher analytic performance. In many ways, the audiences on Carolina's Instagram and Twitter accounts are similar, due to both having a large following from students and members of the broader Carolina community. With those audience similarities, it was seen as beneficial to model corresponding posting methods pertaining to videos. Because of that, and also because Twitter caps video lengths to two minutes and 20 seconds, the social media team asked Roberts to cut the video into chapters. The team shared those chapters in a Twitter thread, resulting in 8,441 impressions just on the thread and 300 engagements (Figures 1 and 2).

If you are looking to create additional video content without a video team, look at your current repository of videos, such as existing YouTube videos, b-roll or any footage your team may have on hand. Is there anything you can easily trim or turn into 'chapters' for longer profile videos? For example, perhaps a

FIGURE 1 Graphic showcasing screenshots from Twitter thread featuring video snippets
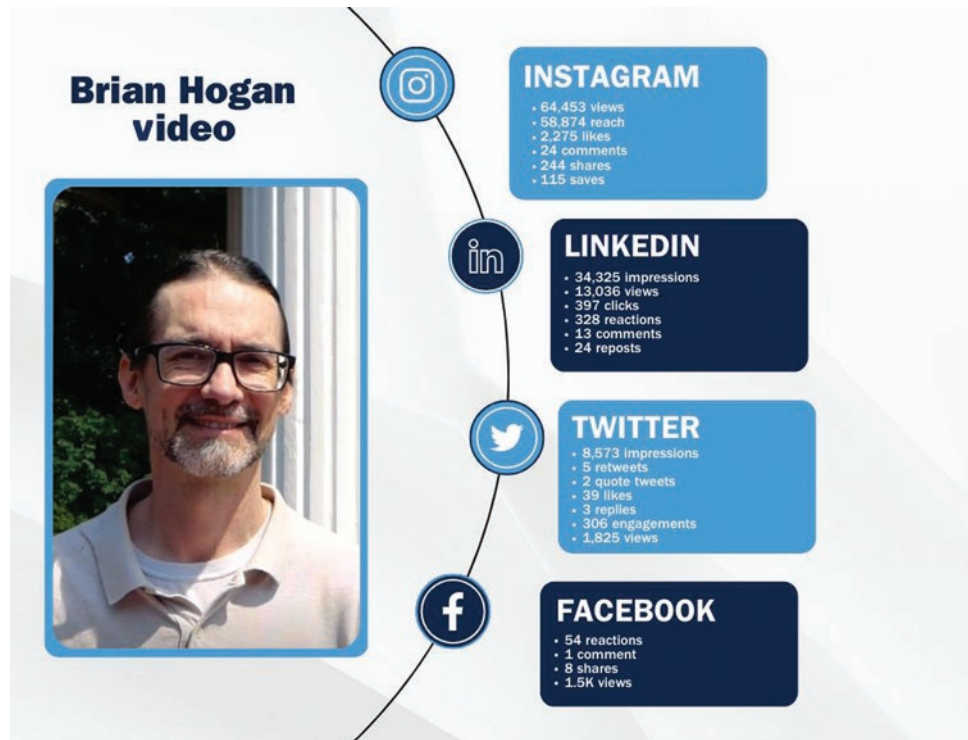

FIGURE 2 Graphic featuring overall stats for the Brian Hogan video

longer student profile has a few minutes in which the student discusses the clubs they are involved in at your institution. This section could be trimmed and used on its own at a time when your institution is encouraging students to attend organisation fairs and get involved on campus. When creating snippets for social media, tools like Canva, iMovie, InShot and CapCut can easily allow social media professionals to make edits quickly or even on a phone. Most of these tools also will allow users to create 'title' or 'chapter' slides and include transitions to add polish to the video.

Turning long-form content into short Instagram stories

Another way to make content easily digestible is to turn long-form content, like a written story or student profile, into a series of Instagram story slides. Similar to an iced coffee, Instagram stories are trendy and easy for viewers to return to or enjoy at their own leisure.

Additionally, members of Generation Z prefer it. Members of Generation Z — individuals born after 1996 but before 2010 — make up most of the traditional students at higher education institutions or those considering higher education institutions in the near future. In a 2021 report from Sprout Social,[1] 81 per cent of members of Generation Z favoured Instagram and Snapchat as their platforms of choice. Both platforms are extremely visual, and Instagram stories allow institutions to incorporate images, GIFs, video and interactive components throughout their slides to keep viewers engaged.

Carolina employs Instagram stories frequently, as the team often turns weekly feature stories that appear on the unc.edu website into story slides. Through trial and error, the team has found that Carolina students are more likely to tap through the account's Instagram story to learn more about a student, campus news or programme rather than scroll through a web page. This correlates to research that suggests using a combination of creativity and interactivity when capturing the attention of Generation Z.[2] Those in this age category want to do something — such as tapping, swiping, clicking — when landing on posts. Utilising interactive features like polls, sliders and question boxes allows for Carolina's team to engage its audience while amplifying its content (Figure 3).

Additionally, Carolina has repurposed a popular Instagram feed series into Instagram story slides as additional content. Carolina's 'Heels of the Hill' series, which started in 2021, features students sharing what they love about Carolina, their clubs and involvement and their favourite memories as a student. The photos and captions have been taken from the feed post and simply repurposed into Instagram story slides to create stories that students can easily click through and share.

Overall, Carolina has received positive engagement and comments from repurposing written stories into visual Instagram stories, especially for stories that focus on public health. Followers have noted that the format allows them to easily screenshot, pause and tap through, and the added visuals help make the content more digestible.

Breaking content up into a Twitter thread

As referenced earlier, Twitter threads are also one way to share lengthy stories or information in easy-to-digest and comprehensive posts. A series of connected tweets from one account,

FIGURE 3 Graphic of screenshots of examples of how Carolina uses Instagram stories to repurpose content

a Twitter thread allows you to provide additional context or an update to an initial post. Similar to how you might take small sips to savour your flavoured latte, Twitter threads allow your audience to consume small 'sips' of information at a time. An additional benefit of Twitter threads is that they are easy to add more information to if needed. By creating a thread, you can also incorporate additional photos, videos or graphics to make each singular post engaging on its own.

Carolina's social media team created a Twitter thread to share highlights about the university in the 2022 US News & World Report Best College rankings. For the thread, the content producer created engaging graphics for each highlight. Overall, the thread received 145 likes and 44 combined retweets, well above the

account's average retweet range of 5–17 (Figure 4).

As part of Carolina's ongoing effort to share mental health resources with its students, the social media team uses Twitter threads to make resources across campus more accessible and easy to find for students. Each week during the academic year, the team shares campus resources or links to mental health articles on Twitter and Instagram. When the Carolina team set out to share a recent mental health resources Twitter thread, they thought it would be more effective to pair it with a visual component. As mentioned earlier, since one of Brian Hogan's main messages in the video is about his mental health journey, the team felt it was a strong fit to utilise in the thread. They included the shorter version of Hogan's video with their initial tweet, which resulted in great
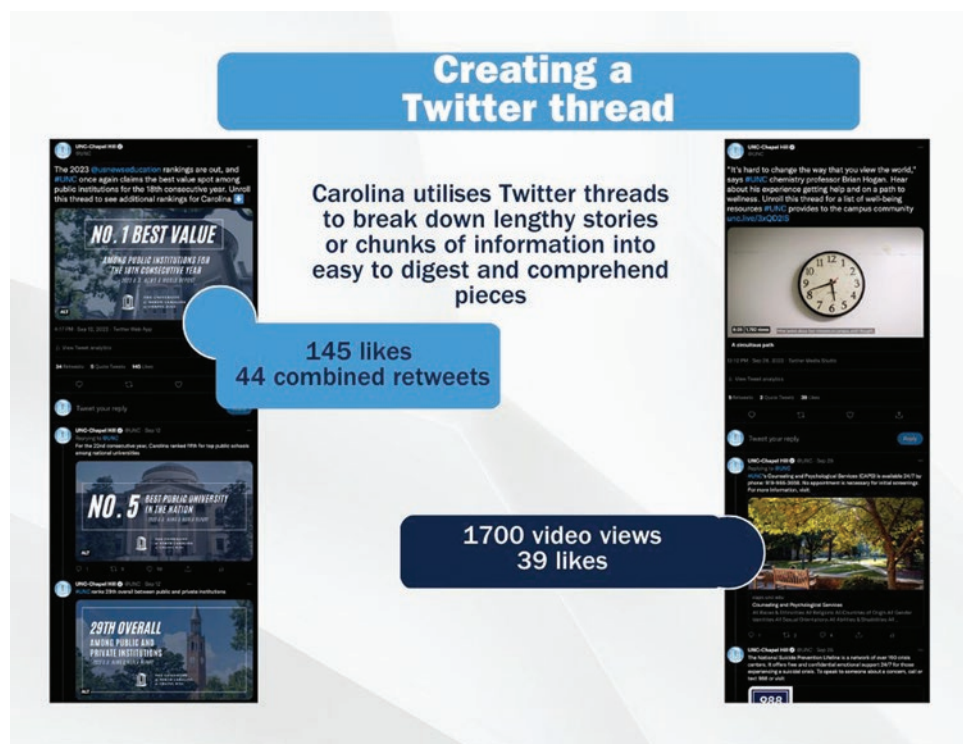
FIGURE 4 Graphic including screenshots and metrics of Twitter thread examples created by Carolina

performance from the thread. The video received 1,700 additional views and 39 combined likes on the thread.
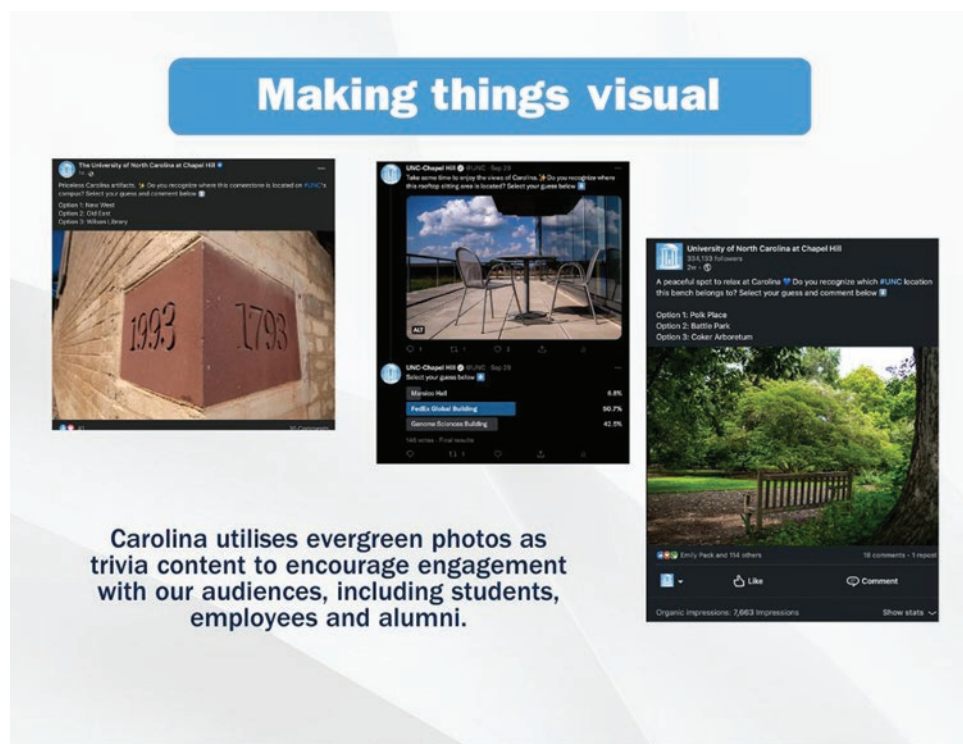
MAKE THINGS VISUAL

Sometimes, coffee is better experienced with friends. Similarly, turning your content into a visual experience and sharing it may connect you and your audience in meaningful ways.

Sharing an experience doesn't have to be a highly involved endeavour. It can be as simple as using a picture that has historically performed well on your platform and coupling it with an 'ask a question' or 'poll' feature.

Remember, your audience is probably following you because they strongly identify with or have an affinity for your brand, which means they are likely to be looking for opportunities to learn more about your institution and connect. Native features in social media platforms are a fast and easy set of tools your team can take advantage of to create and share interactive opportunities. As an example, Carolina's social media team posts weekly games of trivia and 'Guess the Campus Location', where it quizzes its followers on University of North Carolina-themed facts and locations both in its Instagram story, as well as in posts on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter (Figure 5).

A post featuring a bench at Carolina's scenic arboretum garnered over 7,600 impressions and 115 likes. The comments on the posts often come from people sharing their memorable experiences at Carolina. What was initially a way to fill a slow content calendar has turned into

FIGURE 5 Graphic including screenshots of visual content examples employed by Carolina

an engaging and interactive experience, and something that Carolina's audience looks forward to.

Share on multiple platforms

Just like the blending of espresso, steamed milk and foam make the perfect cappuccino, sharing content to multiple social media platforms introduces a pleasant combination of interchangeable content and messaging for your audiences to enjoy. By quickly adding more layers of content or resizing existing content for various platforms, Carolina has been able to reshare content across its channels and amplify resources and stories in unique ways.

Additional layers that are fairly simple to add include trending audio or text. Carolina's second most popular Instagram reel is a video snippet that shows fall at the university. To create this, the team used a short snippet of b-roll from an existing YouTube video one of our content producers filmed on campus. The video was then paired with a popular audio clip of rapper Nicki Minaj saying: 'No, I don't think you understand. I'm obsessed.' As of January 2023, the reel has received over 101k views, 384 shares and 173 saves (Figure 6).

However, sometimes you don't need to add anything extra to a piece of content to give it new life. You just need to resize or refit the content for a particular platform. Carolina's content team creates visually engaging student profiles and nostalgic videos that the team has been able to simply resize for Instagram reels and TikTok. A few examples include a profile of a graduating senior who served as the university's mascot, a tour of Carolina's Latinx Center and scenes from university life in the 1980s. By
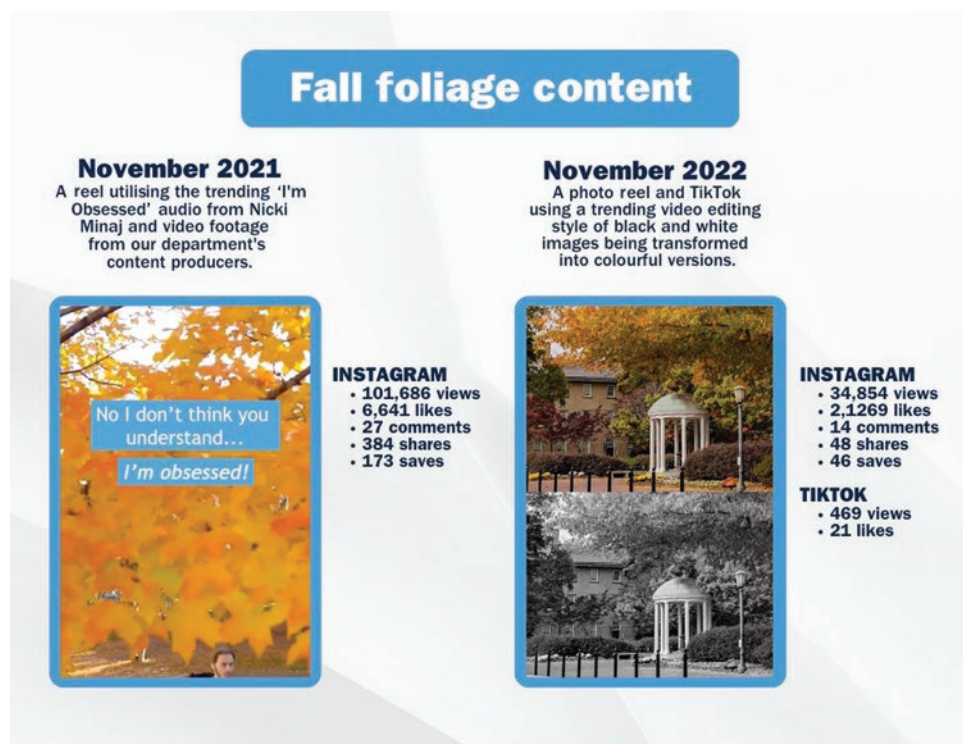
FIGURE 6 Graphic of the metrics from Instagram and TikTok for Carolina's fall foliage content examples from November 2021 and 2022

simply resizing for Instagram reels, each video gained around 30,000 extra views and resulted in a lot of saves and shares (Figures 7 and 8).

Carolina's social media team keeps audiences on each platform in mind when writing copy in an effort to appeal to the distinct groups. For example, when sharing photos of students moving into residence halls at the start of the school year on Instagram (primarily a student audience), the team might write a caption that says how great it is to have students back on campus. On LinkedIn (primarily an alumni audience), the team may share those same photos but instead ask followers to share their favourite move-in day memory.

Collaboration also can help one piece of content become a series. For example, the team has frequently partnered with colleagues at University Libraries, who have access to archival video content. This collaboration has helped produce an ongoing series that showcases photos of campus life from years past. These posts often generate comments from alumni who fondly reflect on their days in Chapel Hill.

Another example of collaboration occurred as Carolina students were preparing to return to campus during the autumn 2021 semester. The team was approached by communicators from the University's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) to generate messaging to inform students of the various mental health and wellness services that are available on campus. Through the team's mental health content initiative, a goal was set of curating video content to amplify CAPS messaging and services. From this
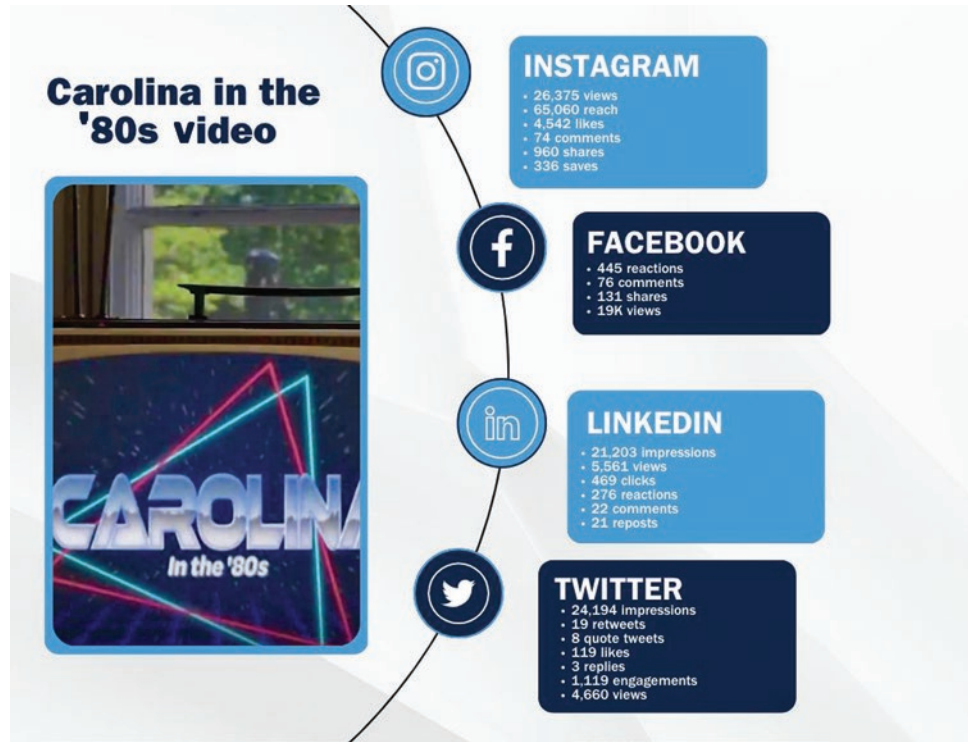
FIGURE 7 Graphic of the metrics from Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter for the Carolina in the '80s video
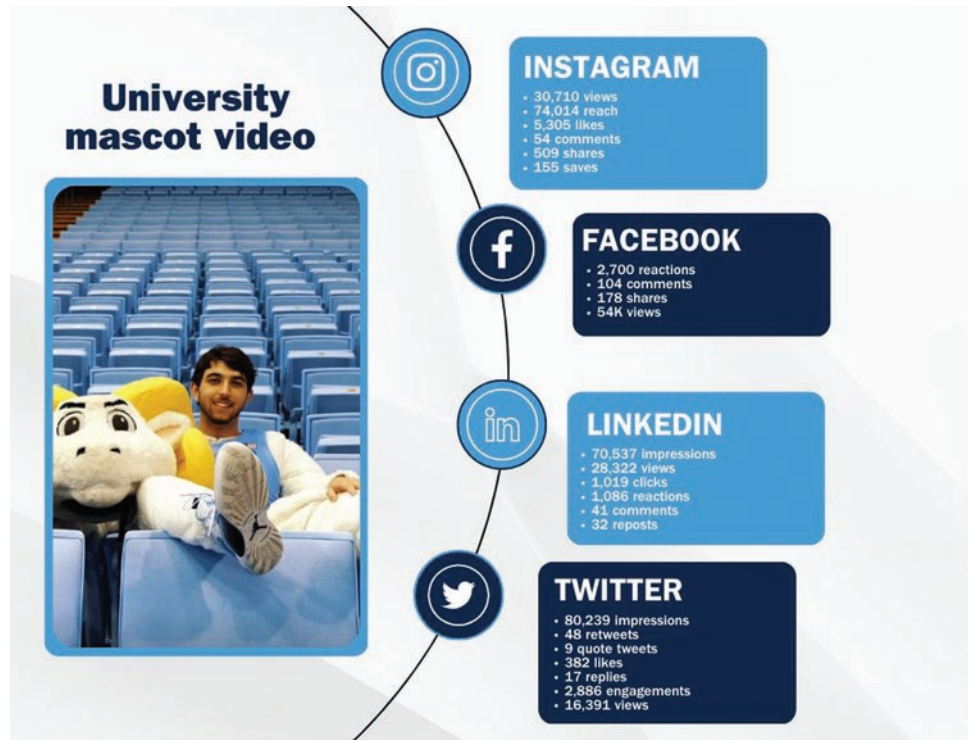

FIGURE 8 Graphic of the metrics from Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter for the university mascot video

FIGURE 9 Graphic of the metrics from Instagram for the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) walkthrough video

partnership, it has been possible to curate Instagram stories, Twitter threads, video content and more to ensure that students are informed of the beneficial resources available to them through the course of their collegiate journey at Carolina. One example was a video that took the viewer on a tour of what an initial visit might look like at the office. Drawing from the popular 'POV' (point of view) videos that help audiences feel like they are taking part in the experience, it was possible to show students what they could expect during a visit and where to find the office on campus (Figure 9).

Make a story a visual experience

While it may take a bit more work to produce, turning a text-heavy story into a video with images can breathe new life into content and introduce the topic to a new audience. Video content is like a creamy, indulgent Frappuccino — it is a tantalising treat that's hard to resist, and just like a Frappuccino, it is easy to enjoy at your leisure.

While text and image content can be effective in grabbing your audience's attention, research has shown that videos can generate up to 1,200 per cent more shares than image and text content combined.[3] According to data from InVideo, videos have higher average completion rates compared to other social media content, with TikTok videos under 15 seconds clocking an impressive average completion rate of 90 per cent and videos over 30 seconds registering 60 per cent.[4] This indicates that users are more likely to watch an entire video on this
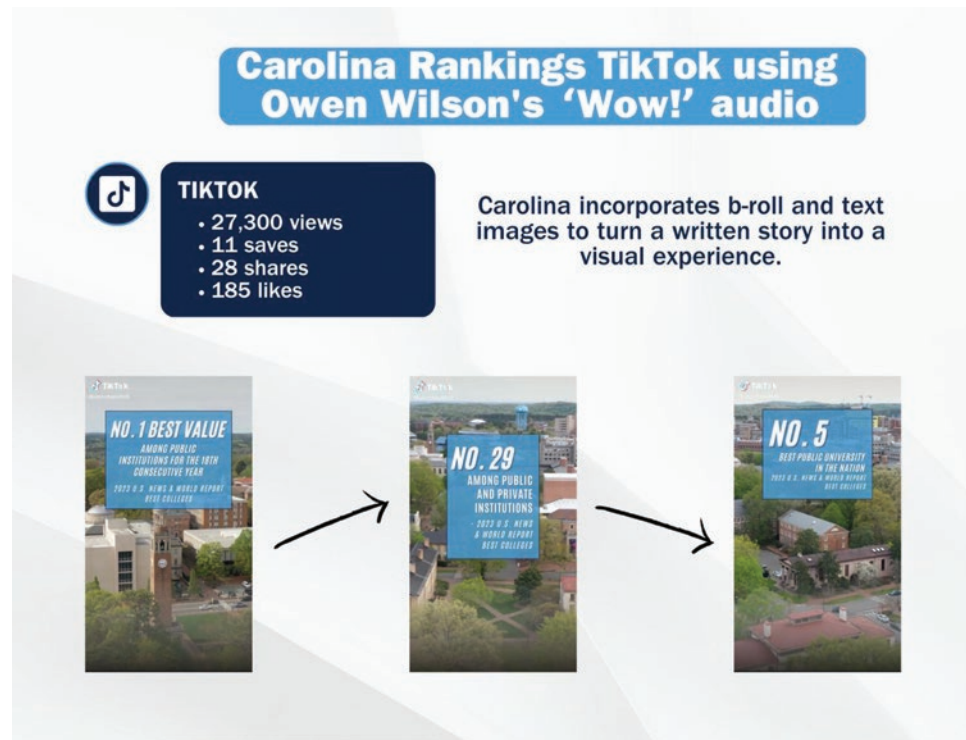
FIGURE 10 Graphic of the metrics from TikTok for Carolina's video on college rankings

or similar platforms, leading to increased engagement and reach. Additionally, the vertical format of these videos makes them well suited to viewing on mobile devices, which are the primary way that many people access social media.

This research suggests that institutions should consider splitting up longer videos into smaller segments for posting, as noted earlier. Alternatively, creating a short, engaging video to drive traffic to a written or longer video piece has been an effective part of Carolina's social media strategy.

A simple way Carolina utilised this strategy again was to compile b-roll of text images showcasing its various college rankings. The video featured three slides set to a trending audio clip of actor Owen Wilson saying 'Wow!' and received over 27,000 views, 185 likes, seven comments, 11 saves, and 28 shares on TikTok. This

strategy of turning a written story into a visual experience through the use of b-roll and text images was effective in driving strong results (Figure 10).

This video was fairly easy to produce using a design tool, and teams could easily recreate using a tool like Canva. Including b-roll sourced from the university's content repository and adding text on top with the trending audio made it possible to quickly create a piece of content the same day the written story was published.

In another example, Carolina's content team created a photo essay of artistic murals around or near the campus. While a powerful piece on its own, the social media team decided to promote the content and the murals by creating a short video featuring the locations. The text on the video included the mural names, and the caption encouraged curious viewers to

FIGURE 11 Graphic of the metrics from Instagram and TikTok for Carolina's video on the murals of Chapel Hill

head to the written story to learn more about the artists who created each mural. While a bit more work to produce, the video's performance showcased how powerful visual content can be in reaching new audiences. This particular piece of content brought in 5,227 content interactions, 69,646 plays, 271 shares, 181 saves and was featured in an article by Sprout Social (Figure 11).

Overall, creating video content to complement a story is a refreshing way to showcase your stories and other content on social media, with the potential for increased engagement and performance.

TIE IN A KEY MOMENT

Repurposing content to tie around a key moment at your institution or in the world is an easy way to get new, excited eyes on your content.

One way Carolina was able to use repurposed content to capitalise on a trend or moment in the world was our Final Four collaboration with Duke University. The two storied rivals faced each other for the first time ever in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Men's Basketball Tournament in April 2022. While many across the world knew about the rivalry, those outside of North Carolina were unaware of the proximity of the schools and the extent of their collaboration. Carolina's social media team worked with Duke University's social media team to create a campaign across several social media platforms, including a 40-second video that included campus landmarks from each school and showcased the proximity of the institutions. Two versions were then created, one to appeal to Carolina's audience and one for Duke's. Horizontal versions of the video were

shared on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube, and vertical versions were shared on both institutions' Instagram and Duke's TikTok. This ensured the video was shared in an optimised format for each respective social media platform.

Along with a video, Carolina and Duke worked on a collaborative Twitter thread and Instagram story trivia using examples of collaborative research the two institutions work on together. Each team then repurposed the points of collaboration shared on Twitter into an Instagram story using the interactive quiz sticker. The answer to every question was Carolina and Duke. The performance of the collaborative content showcased the power of two schools working together. Across solely the collaborative pieces of content — the Twitter thread, 8 Miles of Collaboration video, and trivia content — there were over 290,000 impressions and over 20,000 forms of engagement.

While not every institution will face their rival in a Final Four game, teams can utilise the same theory across campus or with community partners. Another way Carolina has implemented this is through partnering with the university's housing department to create a 'bucket list' for students. Carolina's social media team reached out to the housing communications team for permission to take their written 'bucket list' story and turn it into an Instagram reel. Upon approval, our team captured 30 seconds of footage walking around campus and added text from the blog to the video. We then used the collaborator tool when posting on Instagram to include Carolina Housing. Therefore, we were able to add a fun and engaging element to each social account through a collaborative post. This reel brought in 67,167 video views, 3,399 likes, 257 shares and 239 saves.

HAVE SOME FUN

While social media can be a beneficial way to share key messages about university news, it is important to also incorporate fun elements to keep audiences across each platform engaged — and even entertained. Some of the methods that are part of Carolina's strategy to cultivate fun factors include using popular photo and video editing trends, utilising trending audio and discovering innovative ways to showcase campus experiences.

Earlier in this paper, a few examples were shared of using trending audio in posts. This tactic serves as a catalyst for the content's fun and engaging element. Another example of incorporating trending audio is the team's use of the popular song 'Take My Breath Away', which featured in the 1986 film 'Top Gun', in an Instagram reel of campus scenes. The reel was published shortly after the release date of the film's sequel, 'Top Gun Maverick', to take advantage of the conversation around the film and to potentially bolster views from audience members who recognised the song from the original film and the sequel. This reel amassed 40,708 views, 2,338 likes, 130 shares and 40 saves.

The team's use of the trending sound bite from Tariq AKA 'The Corn Kid' during his interview on a popular YouTube show, 'Recess Therapy', in a reel and TikTok is another example of how trending moments on the internet and in pop culture can drive engagement and make for fun content. The team's take on the trend showcased the various sights and scenes of Carolina's campus paired with the 7-year-old internet sensation emphasising that he 'couldn't imagine a more beautiful thing'. On Instagram, the reel received 107,402 views, 8,561 likes, 482 shares and 198 saves. This has become one of the team's highest

FIGURE 12 Graphic of the metrics from Instagram and TikTok for Carolina's video utilising the 'Corn Kid' audio

performing reels, garnering over twice the amount of views it typically sees on a reel (Figure 12).

Utilising content production and creation tools has allowed the team to effectively streamline its content development process while including whimsical transitions and design elements to capture the attention of audiences on each social channel.

The combination of the team's use of video editing trends and trending audio is depicted in the rendition of the upbeat 'If We Were' trend that circulated on social media platforms in the autumn of 2022. More than 140 photos of student and campus life and a specific theme that those images corresponded to were utilised within this reel and TikTok. On Instagram, this video generated 66,856 views, 3,811 likes, 415 shares and 139 saves, and on TikTok, this video garnered 8,037 views, 777 likes, 24 saves and

10 shares. Based on the team's average metrics for Instagram reels, this piece of content received nearly double the views and many more likes, shares and saves than typically seen on the team's other videos. Likewise for TikTok, many of the team's other videos at the time that this one was published struggled to receive even 1,000 views. This content not only depicted how incorporating creative editing styles and trending audio can bolster audience appeal, but it also showcased the many elements of campus life at Carolina in a fun and engaging way.

Moreover, the inclusion of fun and innovative elements into social media content, especially within the higher education space, has the power to generate a sense of community and pride among the differentiating audiences across our platforms. In our case, by ensuring that captivating design elements or trending

audio are incorporated into our content, we are able to amplify the essence of life at Carolina in a unique way.

TAKEAWAYS AND TIPS FOR BEST PRACTICE

In today's ever-changing social media landscape, it can be difficult to know the type of content that may resonate with an audience and to continue to produce quality content frequently enough to capitalise on trends. For smaller teams or teams of one, some days you may not have time to create fresh content to fill a calendar. The phrase of 'work smarter, not harder' is constantly used in discussing social media strategy and content calendar creation. Repurposing allows teams to operate more efficiently and use the time saved from creating content elsewhere, such as managing engagement, resetting strategy or researching trends. Carolina's team has been able to operate more efficiently and use that time to discuss social media trends, research algorithm updates and revisit strategic goals more often than was possible in the past.

While it is important to stay nimble and know how to adapt quickly when creating social media content, when it comes to maximising the life of your content on social media through repurposing, there are a few takeaways and best-practice tips that will always be relevant.

Keep track of trends. Social media trends come and go quickly and staying up to date requires a combination of tools, networking and patience. It can be tricky to know where to start, but a great place is with the creation of a brainstorming group or space with others in your department, institution or field. What type of content do you see across social media when you use it? What trending audio do you hear in Instagram reels and

TikToks that your institution's account could repurpose?

The Carolina team recommends the following resources on how to find emerging trends on social media:

- Use the TikTok Creative Center. While TikTok is a relatively new social media platform compared to other leaders in the space, it provides a wealth of information regarding trend discovery and analytics.[5] The Creative Center allows you to filter through songs, hashtags, creators and videos. Using the hashtag section, you are able to dive into what is trending and view details on what types of videos are created using a specific hashtag.
- Follow other institutions and leaders in your field. While not all trends will work for all institutions or their brand voices, following other institutions is a great way to see how schools are using popular trends.
- Use the Instagram Explore tab. The Instagram Explore section is a great way to see videos that are gaining a lot of engagement.

Carolina's team meets weekly to discuss trends, brainstorm ideas and make decisions about what content to post to the flagship channels. Team members also join a campus-wide group where colleagues across the university can ask questions, discuss trends and brainstorm ideas. The team recommends keeping a database of trends or setting up a meeting schedule for larger teams where you can discuss trends you have seen on social media that you can potentially repurpose.

To make repurposing even easier, create templates for your content. Having a few batches of designs and templates premade will make it easier for your social media team when the time comes to

FIGURE 13 Graphic of the metrics from Instagram featuring high performing user generated content utilising '#TARgram' and '#BarkTheSound'

make content. All they have to do is insert text, make slight adjustments and, *voilà*, they are good to go! This also helps ensure a consistent brand identity and visual cohesion across your channels. Content creation tools, like Canva, or project management tools, like Trello, are a way to save brand identity colours, logos and templated designs in a tool that is easy to access via desktop and mobile. Templates can also help smaller teams or teams of one easily take part in trends but not take too much time from other responsibilities.

Keep a repository of evergreen content. Life happens and can sometimes throw off your posting plan. Having a backlog of ready-to-go evergreen content can be a lifesaver in those unexpected moments. One avenue to generate evergreen content is to crowdsource user-generated content through hashtags. For example, the Carolina team encourages their audience to use hashtags like '#TARgram' and '#BarkTheSound', which is a play on Carolina's alma mater 'Hark the Sound'. After obtaining permission from the person who posted the photo, the team members at Carolina save the picture and make a note of the original poster's username so they can later give credit in the Carolina caption. Having a few of these approved and available can help when the content calendar has gaps or if plans need to shift quickly (Figure 13).

Create engagement. Asking your followers questions in your posts and engaging with answers will always be in style. Find a way to frame your copy into a question that will encourage your readers to respond in the comments section. This is an easy way to add new life to a photo or

evergreen story and draw out nostalgia in your followers. Make it a priority to respond to people who engage with your posts. Even simply liking the comment can go a long way.

Be mindful of your video's aspect ratio. Using the appropriate dimension for the platform you are posting on is the difference between looking professional or amateur on your social media platform.

CONCLUSION

Repurposing content allows institutions to take a great piece of content and make it even better by giving it another life. Teams of any size can utilise tactics like trimming videos, adding new audio or emphasising snippets of a longer piece, to repurpose content in a fresh way.

Repurposing can allow teams of any size to build content plans or calendars and create solid pillars for their strategy. Ultimately, this can save time and improve overall workflow and morale for teams that may be tasked with more than just social media. Templates and planned content like Carolina's recurring Trivia Tuesday features, allows the team to manage busy seasons easily and continue to produce a high amount of content when team members may be out. It also frees up time for the team to research trends, platform updates and ways to revise our strategy to continue to produce content that resonates the most with our audience.

Like a favourite coffee shop, Carolina has incorporated innovative ways to repurpose content and looks forward to trying new ways to share the great work of the university.

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