

How Visual Storytelling Through Social Media Helped Humanize a Brand

By Marissa Pick

While many brands and individuals are well versed at integrating social media into their organizations and strategic communications plans, there is still plenty of confusion.

Among the things I love about social media is the opportunity it provides for brands to converse with consumers and its ability to help communicators reach new audiences.

Your audience will tell you what it likes, either explicitly or through back-end analytics. Social media provides the perfect forum to engage with influencers on various platforms and develop and engage an interactive audience. If you're like me, you've found that some members of your community may be easier to reach on social media than in person.

Getting Visual

With social media success comes the integration of a visual social media-marketing plan. It's not a surprise that visual social platforms such as Instagram are on fire with brands and consumers. The human brain processes images 60,000 times faster than text, according to **3M Corporation**; and 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visually based, says **Zabisco**.

Visual social marketing is the new standard for driving a deeper engagement within social media. Marketers who are embracing visual content are seeing huge returns in terms of more readers, leads and customers.

The statistics below should help make the case for championing visual content into your marketing mix.

- 40% of people will respond better to visual information than plain text. (Source: Zabisco)
- 59% of executives would rather watch video than read text (Source: Forbes)
- Photos and images on Facebook generate 53% more 'likes' than the average post. (Source: HubSpot)
- Posts with visuals receive 94% more page visits and engagement than those without (Source: Wishpond)
- More than 300 hours of videos are uploaded each minute on YouTube.com. (Source: YouTube)

Case Study 1

Below I share several small cases from the **CFA Institute** where we identified clear campaign objectives and were able to measure success and share it internally, helping us incorporate visual storytelling into our marketing mix.

CFA Institute is a global association of investment professionals that sets standards for professional excellence through credentialing exams. The organization also champions ethical behavior in investment markets. CFA Institute has more than 142K members in 159 countries and territories.

Several years back, CFA Institute's social media strategy focused on driving engagement by leveraging visual images into its



Making the Grade: The CFA Institute used this archival image of test graders from the 1960s to have fun and generate buzz for an exam it was offering. Source: The CFA Institute

social media marketing mix.

It incorporated the rich history of the CFA Institute from its archive, mixing visual images into social media posts. We saw very quickly a boost in the response across social media platforms; engagement (likes, comments and shares) rose markedly.

To boost awareness of CFA's June exam, we created a post with this throw-back image. The image above shows graders in action from the mid-1960s grading credential exams at CFA headquarters in Virginia. It resulted in an instant boost in engagement over the normal metric for CFA posts. We now have incorporated visual images into our exam communications plans to help drive a deeper engagement with our candidates and members.

Case Study 2

CFA Institute wanted to take its visual social media marketing strategy to the next level and evoke emotions in its community through inspirational quotes.

Using Pablo by **Buffer** CFA quickly

developed branded images it could use across its social media platforms. It created a one-month campaign and give it a unique hashtag and ran a different Quote of the Day each day (see photo below).

The results were impressive. Within our Twitter account we generated 419K impressions, gained 8,200+ total engagements, gained 1,200+ retweets and saw more than 900 favorites of our posts.

With the success of the pilot CFA now has incorporated motivational quotes into the social media strategy and matured the design of the posts working with an internal team to ensure it's on brand and effective for our audience.

Case Study 3

The third case study aimed to test the use of video in CFA Institute's social media strategy with some paid budget allocation.

Posts with video attract three times as many inbound links as plain-text posts,



Words Worth: The CFA Institute ran Quote of the Day messages to inspire its community and raise awareness of its brand. Source: The CFA Institute

says **NewsCred**. Social video generates 1200% more shares than text and images combined, according to **Responsive Inbound Marketing**.

CFA Institute didn't want to miss an opportunity to be ahead of the curve on video. We decided to deploy on Twitter. An example of one of the videos is at right. It's a message from CFA Institute president/CEO Paul Smith congratulating candidates who took one of our tests.

CFA Institute tested 19 tweets within a paid campaign and had a hefty return, seeing a cost-per-view of \$.02 and a view rate increase of 20-30%, depending on content.

As a result, the social team began working with the video team to cut and produce shorter videos that could be incorporated into the Institute's paid strategy to help elevate content within our campaigns.

CFA Institute found its sweet spot for video at 20-30 seconds and continued to see impressive engagement rates far above Twitter's benchmarks with very low cost per view.

A Two-Way Conversation

Social media has revolutionized the way companies are able to communicate with their customers, making room for a two-way conversation instead of a one-way monologue. And hopefully you can take away from the mini-case studies above that one of the ways successful companies are taking advantage of social media is through visual storytelling. When done correctly it has the ability to drive increased engagement, increase interactions and drive a deeper connection between your brand and customers.

Bridging the gap between social media and visual storytelling can have a serious impact, and in closing, I'll leave you with my four simple rules to help you stand out on social



Face Time: A video message on Twitter from The CFA Institute's president/CEO Paul Smith to recent test takers adds a human touch to the brand. Source: The CFA Institute

media channels:

- 1) Be Interesting: It's not going to work otherwise. Tell a story through your social media channels and personal and professional brand.
- 2) Be Interested: Look around and find others who are sharing things you like, and then interact with them. Remember, engagement is key for long-term social media success.
- 3) Be Experimental: Have fun within reason and try things. There is little cause for conservatism. You may encounter failures along the way. Use them to learn and help you build a success story
- 4) Engage: Respond to comments from your audience promptly and with a human voice. Social media is a conversation, not a monologue. ■

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