Community Analysis: Monkey Pickles

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Introduction: Monkey Pickles

Www.monkeypickles.com, created by Huntz Colburn, is an online social media

community that encourages its members to actively participate by posting humorous content.

The company is located in Maple Grove, Minnesota. Monkey Pickles (MP) determines how

provocative or funny their content is from the comments and reactions of their followers, who

are called "Monkey Pickles". MP tries to make personal connections with its followers by

posting general information that may be overlooked, with a humorous twist. One example is a

video of a young makeup artist, Jenna Marbles, applying makeup on her mother. Under normal

circumstances, Jenna's video would not be amusing. However, through humor, the video is

captivating and entices MP's users to watch it in its entirety.

The MP website is simple to navigate through. The main page contains links to

Facebook, Google+, Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr, and Twitter. From the homepage, a user can

access the other areas of the site including "Nonsense", "Gaming", "Green Carpet", "Contests",

and "Pickled Nickel". All the pages with the exception of the "Pickled Nickel" page contain

humorous content (Alexa.com, 2017).

The Nonsense page is a collection of funny videos, articles, or humorous stories that the

members submit to the site and are posted by the MP staff. The Gaming page contains articles

about current games or trends in the online gaming scene. Gaming content include, Pokemon

GO, Clash of Titans, and Candy Crush. The Green Carpet page is primarily a collection of

videos made by online personalities such as, Miranda Sings, Annoying Orange and Jenna

Marbles. Although these personalities are not mainstreamed, they are active on social media

outlets. The contests page includes upcoming social gatherings sponsored by MP to promote the

brand and give away prizes to their users. Finally, the Pickled Nickel page is a marketing space

where sponsors such as Amazon and other companies can advertise.

MP maintains an active online community by providing witty and entertaining content to compete in the online social media market. They also encourage members to contribute humorous and entertaining content that can be added to the website. The content in the site is funny, well organized and entertaining. It provides the viewer with a break from real world events that are repetitive, tedious and usually not very amusing. The site prides itself on fostering a sense of community through their tailoring of the content they present and analyzing the feedback from their members and followers.

Through this online community, MP also markets and promotes the content they present. They interact with a wide range of social media to promote their brand and attract new followers. MP is working to be a competitive player in the online community scene. Currently, MP is ranked number 674,762 in the United States, according to Alexa analytics (Alexa.com, 2017). As of September 2016, Huntz Colburn has made a commitment to market the brand more aggressively by hosting parties and arranging meet-ups to bring the community closer together. Currently, most of MP's events are in Minnesota but they are planning to expand to California.

Initial Interview

On February 2, 2017, Huntz Colburn, the founder of MP, was interviewed. Mr. Colburn was initially contacted via e-mail and he promptly responded with a date and time for the interview. *(See appendix I)* During the interview, when asked about what the organization was seeking to accomplish, Mr. Colburn responded that he wants to bring people together and expand the brand name. He stated that, "originally the company was started as an advertising agency, but the community was left behind." Mr. Colburn states that, as of September 2016, his focus is to ensure that MP is an online community that brings people together. He is committed to leading MP in hosting events in Minnesota, Las Vegas, and California. Mr. Colburn intends to

put forth a marketing campaign that emphasizes pushing out voice guidelines, social advertising, Facebook groups, and press releases that can be eventually bridged offline (Colburn, 2017).

Mr. Colburn states that he intends to increase traffic to his website to a level that is similar to another humor based online community called "The Chive". Currently, he is sponsoring a "200 person Uno tournament and an arcade game night." Mr. Colburn states that they are partnering with local bars and nightclubs in the area to attract more users. They are also planning a major live event scheduled for 2018 (Colburn, 2017).

In March 2017, Mr. Colburn intends to initiate a marketing campaign to attract new users and to expand MP to all fifty states. Mr. Colburn is intent on hosting events at a variety of venues where people come together to enjoy humor. His goal is to partner-up with a variety of venues, like bars, restaurants, nightclubs, and places that have arcade games to expand the online community.

<div align="center">Metrics: Interview</div>

Data Tracking

According to Laura Green, Operations Manager for MP, the company actively tracks various metrics and employs a number of targeted strategies to drive the impact of the company's online community. During a phone interview on February 9, 2017, Laura Green, was asked questions related to: metrics used to gauge the impact of the community; gaining and retaining users within the community; measuring user satisfaction to improve the online community, and measuring success of the online community. *(See appendix II)*

MP's main priority is catering to its users by identifying who users are and creating humorous content that engages users and facilitates conversations. When asked about data tracking and the metrics employed by MP, Ms. Green, stated that Google Analytics and Facebook insight are core tools used to gather information on content reach and user engagement

(Green, 2017). Google Analytics is a web solution that allows business owners to gain information on their users and how users interact with web content (Batesole, 2016). Facebook's insight provides companies that use its platform to deliver content with tools that track, benchmarking, when followers are online, best posts, and user click-rates (Loomer, 2013).

Both Google Analytics and Facebook allow MP to check age range, gender, time on site, and location of its users. In addition, MP values content reach and user engagement. Ms. Green shared that engagement is assessed based on reads, shares, and likes (Green, 2017). Reach of content speaks to the number of users that view MP's content. More likes, comments, and shares mean that the content is reaching more users. MP prioritizes its investments in content that historically generate more reach because it is likely that future posts will gain more traction and increase engagement. The mission of MP is to create a light and humorous online community. Laura Green shared that posts that put a humorous spin on serious or trendy issues tend to generate more reach and are aligned with the company's values. Therefore, it is the company's strategy to focus on creating humorous content (Green, 2017).

MP does not currently have a sign-up feature for its community. Likewise, the company does not currently administer user satisfaction surveys. However, user satisfaction is a very important area for the company. Current, user satisfaction is assessed based on new likes, comments, and content sharing. Ms. Green suggests that if users are satisfied they will continue to like content, comment on posts, and return to the sites (Green, 2017). With this in mind, MP tries to cause a conversation with each post to drive user engagement and user satisfaction.

Achieving Community Goals: Interview

In a subsequent interview on February 6, 2017, Mr. Colburn shared with the interviewer what actions steps MP is taking to attract new users and to maintain the loyalty of its existing users, which are two essential goals of MP. *(See appendix III)* According to Mr. Colburn, the

community is working on a blended outreach program. Through this program, on-site meet-ups will be arranged for their members, also called MP. Members have common identifiers, like MP T-shirts and ID Cards, which they wear on such occasions. These meet-ups are in addition to the online content-centered member interaction that the community solicits. In order for its members to interact on the website, which in turn means potential revenue generation through per-click advertising, the community invites paid and volunteer content of humor from its users. Per-click revenue is a necessary goal to achieve for the community survival. The off-site and on-site blended interaction is expected to generate, what Mr. Colburn calls 'stickiness' to their community website. On-site meet-ups, initially planned for Hard Rock Cafe at the Mall of America and one in Anaheim, California, would include card tournaments, stand-up comics, and raconteurs.

One interesting action step that Mr. Colburn took came from his observation of back-end data analytics, in which he noted a sudden decline almost three years ago. He discovered that most of his members were suddenly spending most of their time playing Farmville instead. Farmville was a new online craze at the time. He immediately opened a MP Farmville account and thus, brought them back towards the community. In his own words, "People First, Data Second," he explained how he used Skype videos to communicate with the people, who liked his community on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, only to say 'Thank You.' This is in complete sync with what Patricia Anklam says in her book, NetWork: A Practical Guide to Creating and Sustaining Networks at Work and in the World. Anklam (2017) says that in networking, it is 90% people and 10% technology. Technology is no more than a medium through which one can reach people. Any successful community must devote its human resources to this ratio of focus. According to Mr. Colburn, "Businesses don't fail, it's actually people who fail."

Mr. Colburn also validates Wenger, et al's (2009) concept of community orientations. Mr. Colburn calls them habits of culture. He says that each community gets used to using certain features on a site. These are the features of communication, like instant messaging or audio calling, or sharing pictures. He suggested we should not spend energies on changing these habits of culture. Instead, we should rather adapt to these habits by offering our outreach through multiple platforms. Mr. Colburn has his presence on all common social media and his users can connect with MP in their own ways.

Conclusion

Growth

Retaining and gaining new users is a critical priority for MP's bottom line. According to Laura Green, when MP first began advertising, it had about 15,000 users on Facebook, 7,000 users on Twitter, and generated about 750-2500 users per month. Today, the site has about 93,000 users on Facebook and 10,000 users on Twitter. Website tracking shows that user visits are up to 10,000 to 15,000 a month. Ms. Green anticipates that the site is poised to generate over one million page views per month based on current Google Analytics and Facebook insight data (Green, 2017).

Profit and Loss

When asked about success, Ms. Green, states that MP's success is an ongoing process. Ms. Green believes that the site's online community is successful through the content and engagement it generates for its unique set of users. MP specifically wants to create a site that does not focus on politics or mainstream ideas. The site is intended to be humorous and attract those that want to laugh. Ms. Green believes that future success for MP will be determined by gaining millions and millions of followers that all become loyalists to the site. Additional, success for MP means that the site is connecting new names and faces. In addition to connecting

users, MP focus is building a business and a brand. Monkey Pickle's community is operable only it is profitable. Therefore, MP is currently working on improving its profit margins. In addition to adding users and generating content, Ms. Green shares that MP's success will be measured by (P&L) profit and loss because the company needs money to continue operation (Green, 2017).

Recommendations

Although the MP online community does have loyal users, it is not broad enough to keep the community financially viable over long term. Remaining profitable has been a struggle for the business stakeholders of MP's online community. One observation that stood out when reviewing MP's website was the male gender focus of its content. Improving the lack of female-focused content could provide an area of growth for MP as research show steady increases in female users in online communities (Lin, 2016). In a study of Social Networking Sites (SNSs), Lin, et al., (2016) concluded that there is "evidence that gender effects should be considered in understanding the continued usage of SNSs."

In another empirical analysis of the antecedents leading to loyalty in social networking, French, et al., (2016) observed that content quality and system quality are the two factors that affect user satisfaction in a community. MP could make use of the quality of the content, as the existing humorous content ranks low in terms of its literary value and its comedic effect. A focus on quality of content, teamed with originality, could help improve the 'stickiness' factor needed to maintain user loyalty and ultimately improve profits.

Appendices

Appendix I: *Interview Reflection - Luis Ramirez – (February 2, 2017)*

  Huntz Colburn's, Monkey Pickles online community is, another example of how companies are taking advantage of people's enthusism to be members of a community that shares similar interests. Monkey Pickles did not start out as an online community, they began as an online marketing firm, One of the founders of the company realized that having a marketing firm without being able to market to a vast number of people is futile. Mr. Colburn then decided to build a community and subsequently market to the members of the community. Monkey Pickles began in Minnesota but has since expanded to has expanded to Nevada and California, and currently, there are plans to begin a marketing campaign to reach the whole United States.

  Mr. Colburn expects to expand the brand "Monkey Pickles", and to become a major competitor in the online community arena. Through this online community, Mr. Colburn also will continue to market and promote the content that is present within the Monkey Pickles website. Monkey Pickles is gaining momentum and traction to be a competitive player in the online community scene.

Appendix II: *Metrics and Success - Dowayne Davis's Interview With Laura Green (February 9, 2017)*

Central Questions: What metrics do they employ to understand their progress towards these goals? (e.g., issue turnaround time, customer satisfaction, external participant numbers and activity, lurker-to leader conversion, speed/quality of question answering).

Questions: What metrics do you employ to gauge traction of users and impact of your online community?

Answer: I use Google analytics. Within Google analytics, we check age range, age, gender, time on site, and location. On Facebook, we look at total reach and engagement. We also use Facebook's page insight features. On Facebook's page insight, it tells us how many people we have reached. We also assess user engagement. Engagement is assessed based on reads, shares, and likes. More likes means that we will invest more in that post. We target these posit because it is likely that we will gain more traction and reach. We look at organic reach. If you make a post and it gets like and shares, it is getting more reach. Organic reach comes in the form of likes and comments.

Answer: I compare data from year-to-year using Facebook insight and analyze data spike during times of interesting news. Monkey Pickle takes a funny approach to sharing information. For example we may spoof, create a fun post, within serious news. This generally, sees spikes in likes and engagement.

Question: What data do you find important to track? I.e.: number of posts, etc.

Answer: We constantly keep going back to Google analytics, age location, top pages, and organic reach. Knowing and identifying the people that like our content and your page is most important. It is always people first.

Question: Do people sign up for Monkey Pickle? If so do you track sign up rate?
Answer: Monkey Pickles does not have people sign up. However, it has a VIP club. When monkey pickle first began advertising, it had about 15,000 users on Facebook and 7,000 users on twitter. We generate about 750-2500 users per month. Now we have about 93,000 users on Facebook and 10,000 users on Twitter. Website tracking shows that user visits are up to 10,000 to 15,000 a month. By the end of the year, I anticipate that we will have over 1 million page views per month.

Question: Do you gain feedback from customer satisfaction? If so, how?
Answer: We track customer satisfaction through engagement. We view customer satisfaction through interaction and time spent on our site. We do not yet employ customer feedback surveys. We however, gauge customer satisfaction by analyzing users views, new names coming in, and comments. We try to cause a conversation on a each post to drive user engagement and user satisfaction.

Question: How do user visit your visit? Organically and/or via third-party?
Answer: Users mainly visit our site through social media site such as Facebook and Twitter. We do also gain some organic visit. However, social media sites drive traffic to who we are after. They, social media, all work well for us.

Question: Do you use SEO (search engine optimization) data? If so, what do you pay attention to?
Answer: Yes. This is a front-end tool for new customer acquisition. We use this to attract new users and drive traffic to or site.

Question: Any other important things to note about data of your site?
Answer: The biggest thing about Monkey Pickle is that we want to know about our user's age group. Know our users age group is important because it also us to better tailor our content to our users and by targeting those specific age groups. We believe that humor changes based on the age group. Understand the age group of our users, is very important to Monkey Pickle's metrics and approach.

Question: Is this organization successful? What recommendations would you make? What does success look like for your online community?
Answer: Yes. We are getting there. I believe our online community is success through the content and engagement is generated for our unique set of users. We specifically want to create a site that does not focus on politics or mainstream ideas. The site is intended to be humors and

attract those that want to laugh. I believe future such for us will be determined by gaining millions and millions of followers that all become loyalists to our content. Additional, success for Monkey Pickles means that the site is connecting new names and faces

Question 8: How else would you measure Monkey Pickles success?
Answer: Ultimately, we are building a business and a brand. Out community is operable only if we are profitable. We are currently working on improving our profit margins. In addition to adding users and generating content, our success will be measured by (P&L) profit and loss. We need money to continue operation.

Appendix III: *Phone Interview with Mr. Huntz Colburn of Monkey Pickles (February 6, 2017) - Hafiz Saleem*
- Attracting new users is one of the goals
- Conversation starters on the website
- Not only the quality of the content, but also the quantity
- Follow up through Facebook analytics
- Questions like: What's another fun thing to do with Shampoo?
- Surviving on a singular source of income from Monkey Pickles
- Display ads 1/10th of the revenue
- Blended presence: Online and on-site
- Wants to be done with consultancy business in a year
- 10 million page views target
- Onsite playing cards tournament planned
- Hardrock Mall of America, one of the venues.
- Monkey Pickles T-shirts as an identifier
- Official membership IDs
- "People First, Data Second."
- Skype conversations with Facebook followers
- "Businesses don't fail, people fail."
- Monkey Pickles Farmville account
- Each social platform has its own culture; no cross-moving suggested.

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