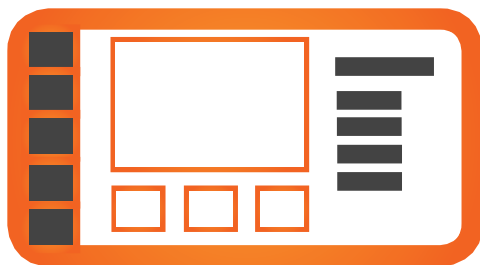


CRASH COURSE

on

THE FACEBOOK NEWS FEED



Everything you need to know about Facebook's News Feed and how it impacts your content strategy.

author's note:

On any given day, an average Facebook user's News Feed is filtering around 1,500 possible stories. But after Facebook's News Feed algorithm goes to work, **only 20% of these stories actually land in the user's feed.**

As marketers, it's our job to ensure the content we post falls into that 20%. Not by finding disruptive, spammy ways to infiltrate, but by understanding how to deliver the right message to the right person at the right time. Our business strategy should be focused on creating content that Facebook users find valuable, entertaining, or helpful.

Facebook has taken multiple strides towards creating a better News Feed experience as well as creating greater transparency about how that experience is computed. Keep in mind that your Facebook News Feed may not resemble the look of the screenshots that follow. This crash course will review the latest changes to the News Feed design (slowly rolling out to all users), how the News Feed algorithm actually works, and dive into how your content strategy should match it all.

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LESSON ONE

A Review of Facebook's 2013 News Feed Changes

A Recap of Recent News Feed Changes.

On March 7, 2013, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced the biggest change to the Facebook News Feed in its seven-year history. He emphasized how Facebook wants to give the world the best “personalized newspaper.”

That inspiration led to the creation of a multi-news feed, visually engaging, Facebook makeover. The makeover comes in three major parts:



VISUALLY ENGAGING STORIES



CHOICE OF DIFFERENT FEEDS



MOBILE CONSISTENCY

Let's dive deeper into each of these parts.

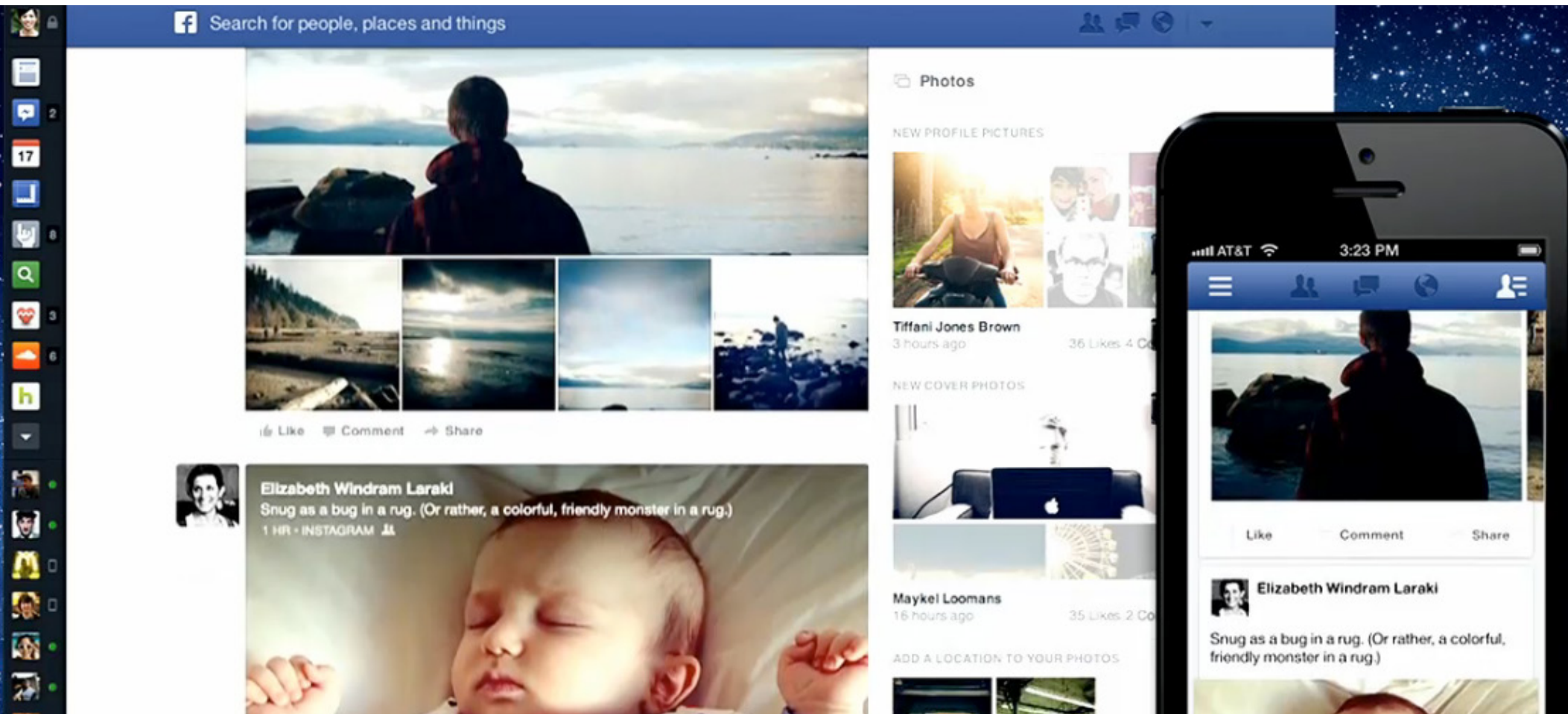


We want to give everyone in the world the best personalized newspaper in the world.

-Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook CEO

Rich, Visually Engaging Stories.

Facebook understands the growing visual world. The first thing you'll notice on the new News Feed is the obvious enlargement and enhancement in the way visual content is displayed. When you upload a photo through your page, it comes up much larger than ever before. The purpose of this is to put the spotlight on each particular user or page, one at a time.



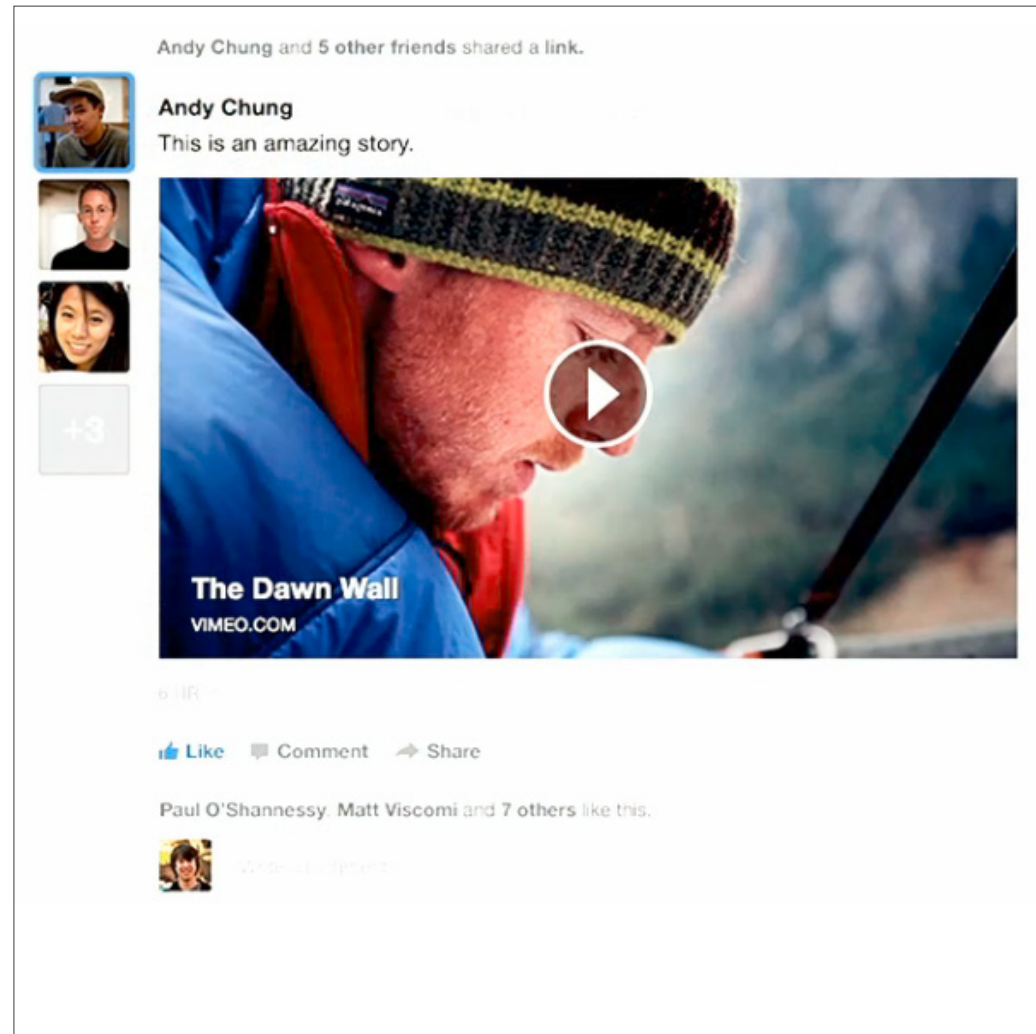
In addition to photos that are uploaded and posted as a status update, there have been some visual changes to the way users interact with your business page. For instance, in the old News Feed, if someone 'Liked' your page, your brand's logo or 'profile photo' would show up. This would sometimes include a featured page post to go along with the story. Now, this story shows up a little differently:



You can see that elements of the Timeline layout have been brought to the News Feed. Your cover photo is now more important than ever. What do users learn about your brand just from your cover image? Will they get a sense of what you sell? What you value? What you believe in? Under the cover image story, you see the faces of other people who like your page too. This helps users recognize which brands their friends are connecting with.


Those same faces you see under your brand's cover image could easily be found on the left side of a photo or video post. Previously, video posts would show up much smaller and be much less significant in the News Feed. You might remember the way link posts used to look — well, videos were featured in the same way.

Now, videos are much more pronounced, featured in exactly the same manner that images are featured. You can get a sense of what this looks like in the image to the right:




The small images you see aligning the sides of these News Feed stories are something you'll want to pay attention to as you're navigating this course. This is because the new design caters to content that has been shared frequently within a certain person's network. In the example previously, you saw a video that was shared by five different people, and by clicking on each face, you could see the activity and commentary that was left by each user.

A similar concept applies to stories that are popular both within and outside of the Facebook platform:

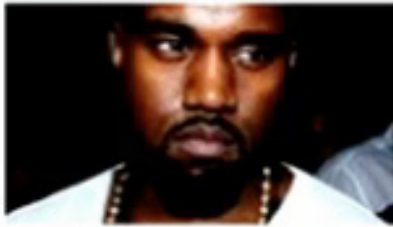


Recent Articles about Taylor Swift




Top 10 pop song 'goat editions': Taylor Swift, Kanye West, Bon Jovi

Share 5,936 Shares



Kanye West Disses Taylor Swift...Again! on Cambio

Share 5,522 Shares

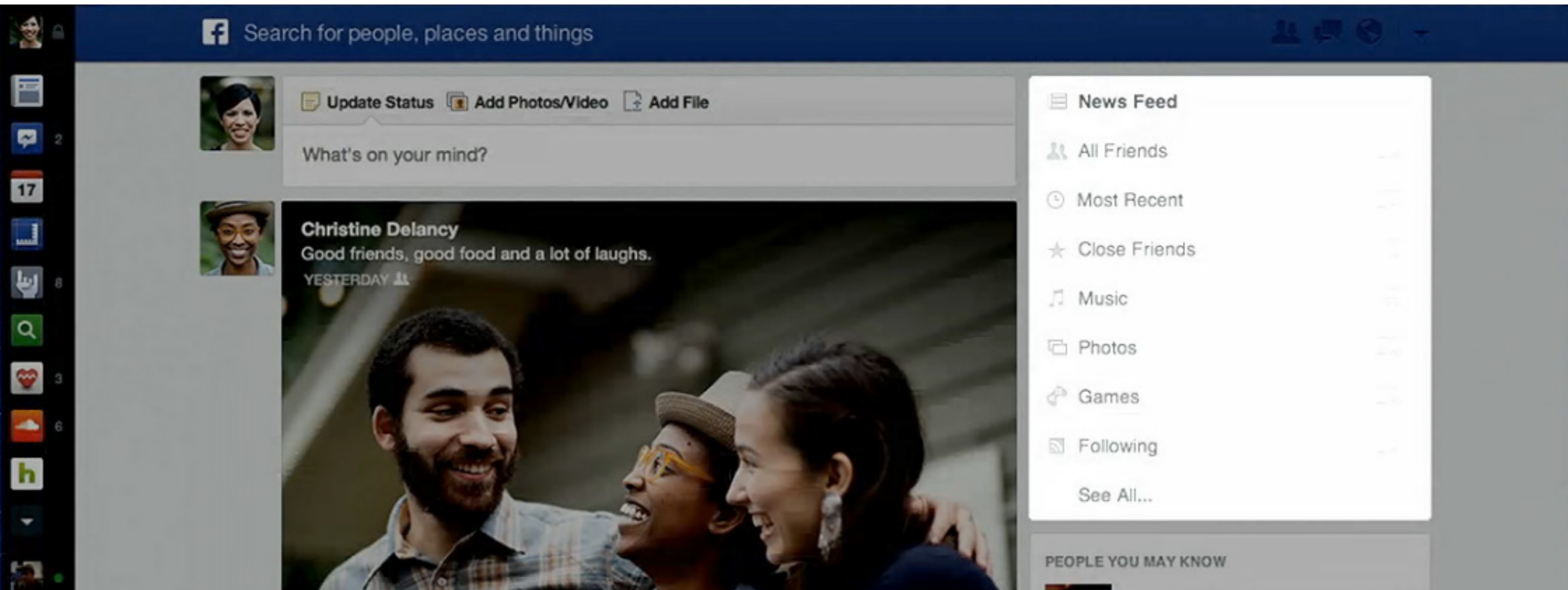


Taylor Swift's New Song About Feminism Is Pretty Catchy (And Blunt)

Share 4,942 Shares

Choice of Different Feeds.

The second new feature announcement from Facebook is “Choice of Feeds,” or the ability to toggle between different feeds of information by topics. It’s inspired by the idea that people’s News Feeds should include a mix of content from family and friends as well as news and information from the pages of businesses and public figures you follow — but that users should also be able to filter out these messages from one another. In fact, Zuckerberg noted that currently [30% of the content in the News Feed is content from Facebook Pages as opposed to individual users](#).



An Overview of the Various News Feeds:

Here are the custom feeds users can create and follow:



NEWS FEED



MUSIC



ALL FRIENDS



PHOTOS



MOST RECENT



GAMES



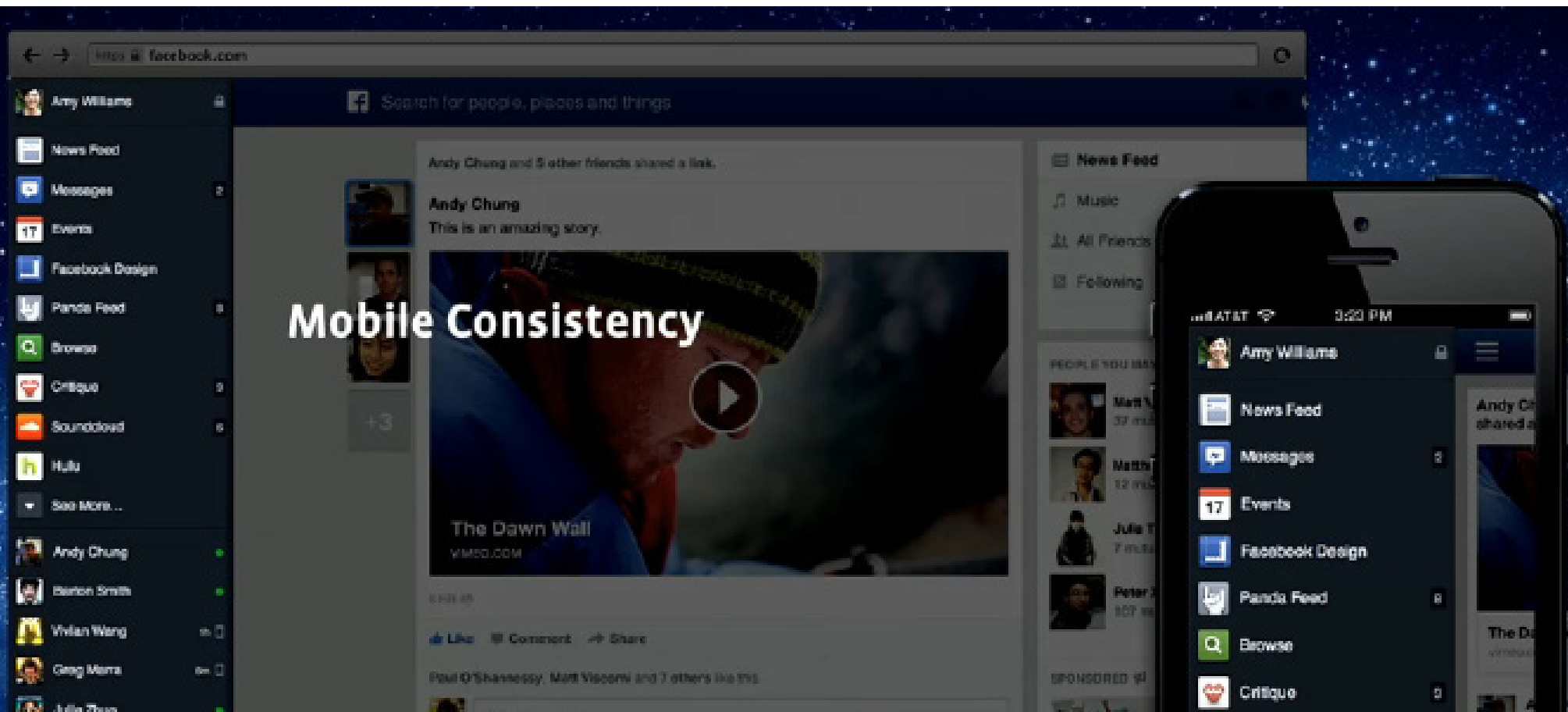
CLOSE FRIENDS



FOLLOWING

Mobile Consistency and Experience.

Lastly, Facebook now has the same look and feel across all devices — mobile, tablet, and web — creating a much more unified and simplified user experience. Most notably, the left-hand menu is accessible wherever you go within Facebook, and it's easy to navigate to the very top of the News Feed when you notice new stories have been posted.



LESSON TWO

How Content Appears in User News Feeds

How Content Appears in User News Feeds.

Before we share some tips for what content to post on Facebook, it's important to first understand how content is actually appearing in a user feed. Facebook recently announced that it would start posting more frequently about this very subject on its Facebook for Business blog, starting with a post titled [“News Feed FYI: A Window Into News Feed.”](#)

The company will now share information about how its ranking algorithm works, rather than keeping that information relatively secret. Facebook uses an algorithm called EdgeRank to figure out which posts you are most interested in seeing. It's comprised of three elements: affinity, weight, and time decay.



AFFINITY

Affinity is the score between the viewer and the 'edge' creator. How closely you are tied to the person creating the content determines this score.



WEIGHT

Weight is the value given to the comments and actions any given post receives. As they “Like” it, comment on it, tag it, etc., it gains in relevance to the community at large.



TIME DECAY

Time Decay is just that, the decaying value of the content as time passes. Today's news is news. Yesterday's news is history.

How does News Feed select stories?

As mentioned earlier, the average person has 1,500 stories a day that could flow through her feed. Facebook sifts those and tries to present the 20% (about 300 stories) that it believes are the most relevant. Here are specific ways Facebook is handling this:

1. Last Actor

Facebook will look at the last 50 people you interacted with and start showing you more of their posts in your feed. You may have noticed this one in action recently, since it has already been rolled out.

2. Chronological by Actor

When one of your friends is posting lots of stuff in a flurry of activity, you'll see those posts in chronological order. Facebook still hasn't completely figured out when to apply this and when not to. But still, a step in the right direction.

3. Story Bumping

Facebook has started to “bump” stories that you’ve missed back up into the top of a user’s News Feed so that a user won’t miss important items. In tests, Facebook has seen greater engagement as a result — **people were 5% more likely to engage with a post from a friend, and 8% more likely to engage with a post from a brand.** And in general, they read a greater percentage of the stories in their feed, Facebook says. Here’s what bumping looks like:



4. Public Popularity

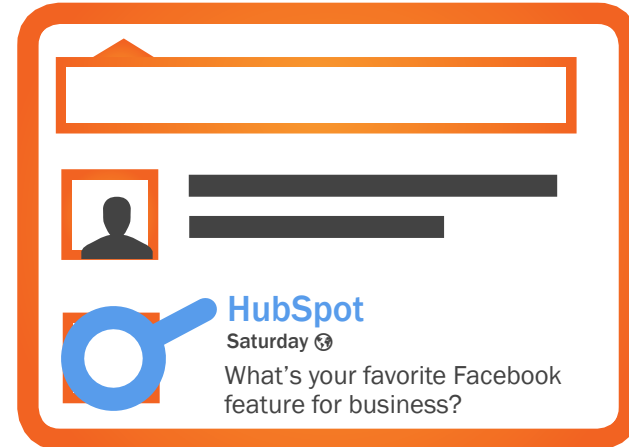
Facebook takes actions such as liking, commenting, or sharing by the world at large into account when surfacing content in a user feed. The more users who like a post, particularly users you're friends with, the greater the likelihood Facebook shows that story in your feed. Conversely, Facebook is less likely to show a post in your News Feed if its been hidden or reported by others.

5. Post Type

Facebook tracks the type of content you've interacted with most in the past, and then presents you with posts of that type more frequently. For example, if you like and comment on photo updates more often than video updates, Facebook will likely show you more photo updates in your feed.

How do you optimize for the News Feed?

Now that we have a better understanding of how the News Feed actually selects stories, let's review some tested practices that have helped businesses land in more user News Feeds.



1. Publish Visual Content

According to our own research, [photos generate 53% more likes than the average post and 104% more comments than the average post](#). In our study of 1,545 B2B and B2C companies in October, “the average post” included text, link, and photo posts. Text and link posts are those published through the “Status” option on a page’s composer. They can take the form of text-only posts or link-based posts that pull in an image thumbnail.

With the emergence of a photos-only feed, the weight placed on photos could increase even more, calling on the ever growing importance of visual content.

Naturally, if photos are garnering the most likes and comments, they are also gaining the most value based off the EdgeRank algorithm. We adopted a strategy of, whenever possible, using photos to promote content. This means using images to promote a link, rather than just the link. Here's what this difference looks like:



2. Plan Photo-Focused Ads

While Facebook did not speak to how these News Feed changes impact ads, according to an interview published by the [MIT Technology Review](#), when asked how the new design will affect ads, a Facebook representative said, “The idea of making things richer, more immersive, includes ads.”

Furthermore, the article states, “Speculation about the changes include the possibility that Facebook will add additional mini-feeds segmented by content (such as one just for photos), as well as bigger, more targeted ads.” Only time will tell, but it’s important to start thinking about your ads from a visual perspective.

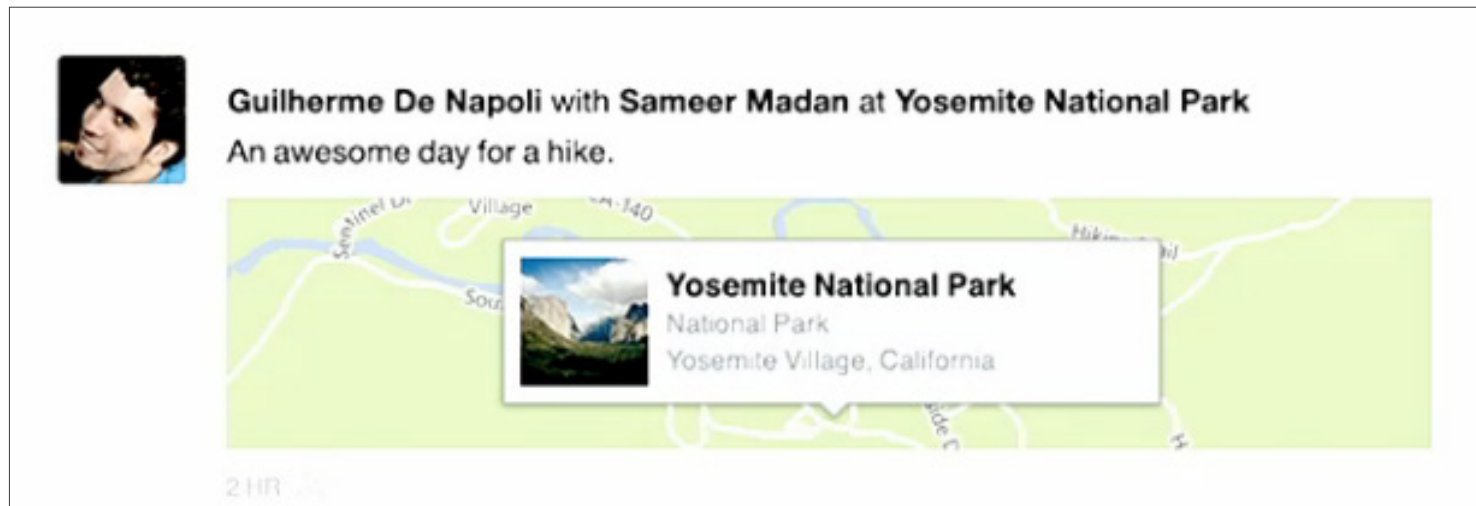
While previously posts with links primarily showed meta titles and descriptions, the new News Feed magnifies images, makes the title clearer, and provides a better summary of the content. Facebook’s response to the question about ads begs us to believe that ads will begin appearing in a similar fashion.

The main takeaway here is to start thinking about the visuals you can pair with your advertisements as strong and persuasive ad copy won’t be enough in this new age of Facebook.

3. Influence Users to Check-In to Your Business

When Facebook launched Graph Search, it came equipped with the ability to search for content based on location. Results in Graph Search are often local. For example, if you search for the word “coffee,” Facebook’s Graph Search returns results on coffee shops near you.

Facebook’s visual changes make check-ins more visible in News Feed, as you can see below. By finding ways to influence more people to check-in to your business, you’re creating more ways for people to see your business. You could accomplish this by adopting a FourSquare approach and offering deals to the most frequent visitor — via check-ins — to your business.



4. Focus More on Your Evangelists

With the new Facebook News Feed, users will be able to look at content posted only from their friends. That means that even if someone likes and follows your business page, they may never see your posts because they filtered them out by looking at the content posted only from their friends.

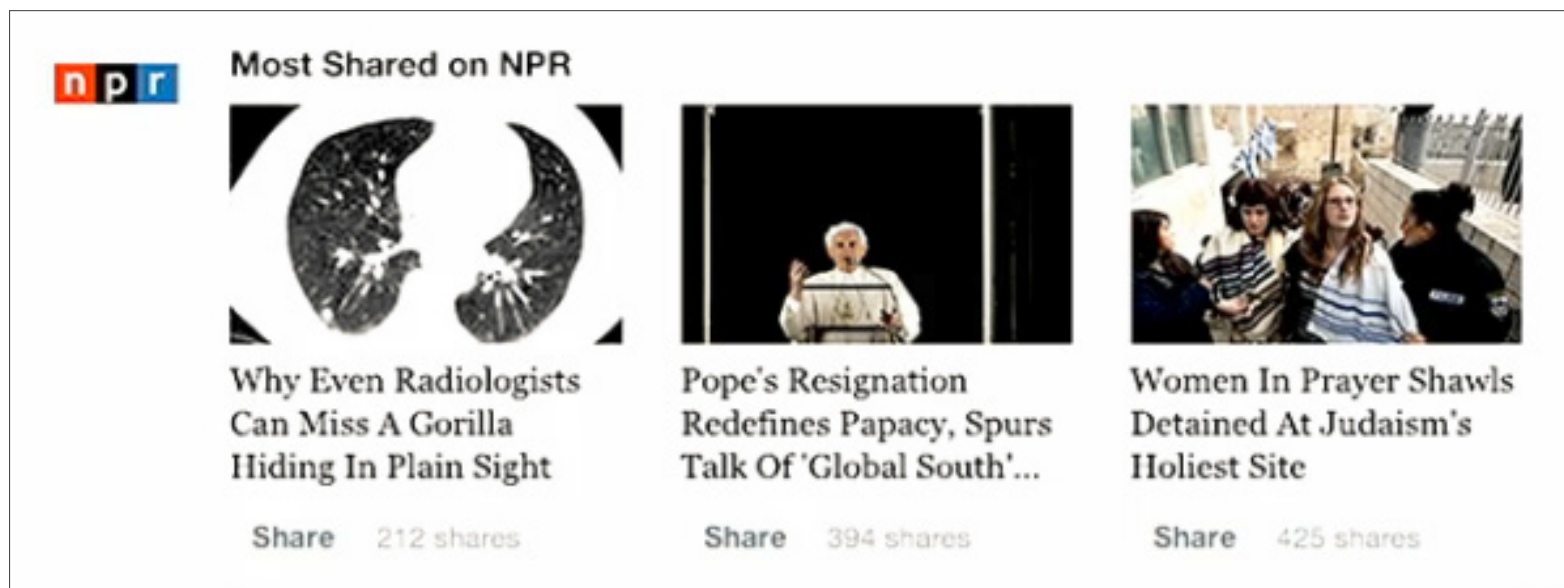
Your solution to this is to focus more on your evangelists and customers. Your evangelists are the lovers of your brand. They are the people who find you remarkable, and share your updates with their own Facebook friends. Whether they are customers, or just pure fans of what you do, these people will be instrumental in your success on Facebook.

Find out what these evangelists are most passionate about, and share content that directly targets them. Do they love hearing the new donut flavors you're rolling out? Do they enjoy reading the marketing pick up lines you come up with? Do they care about the newest features in your product? Whichever it may be, that is the content that your evangelists will share, too. And that action of sharing will put the content in the friends-only feed of all the evangelists' friends, increasing the reach of your content.

5. Create More Compelling Content

The way Facebook plans on surfacing top-shared articles reminds us of a LinkedIn Today-like method for featuring top content. This means it's in your best interest to use Facebook as a way to promote your more public-facing content — such as blog content, for instance — to try to get your best content more viral reach.

But here's the secret when it comes to creating viral reach: It's all about sharing compelling content. Facebook is exploding with content daily, and unless your content stands out from the crowd in terms of value and interest, it won't gain the visibility it needs. As shown below, Facebook will, in a news-like fashion, aggregate the most shared content from a publisher, and include the company logo alongside that. As a content creator, you'll need to work hard to create remarkable content that is shared so widely.



Course Complete.

You now have a grasp on Facebook's News Feed. From here, there's two ways to look at its complex moving parts. You could ponder inventive ways to infiltrate user News Feeds in order to push your content in front of more users, or you could focus on creating remarkable content that is targeted to your followers and customers.

The latter approach is what we've seen work best. Use your Facebook Insights, [Facebook's analytics tool for business pages that provides consolidated post-specific data](#), to drill down on which posts are generating the best results for your posting strategy.

Best of luck!

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