



# OPTIMIZING FACEBOOK ENGAGEMENT

Based on the largest known study conducted on Facebook brand activity, this whitepaper gives the 10 keys for optimizing Facebook engagement.

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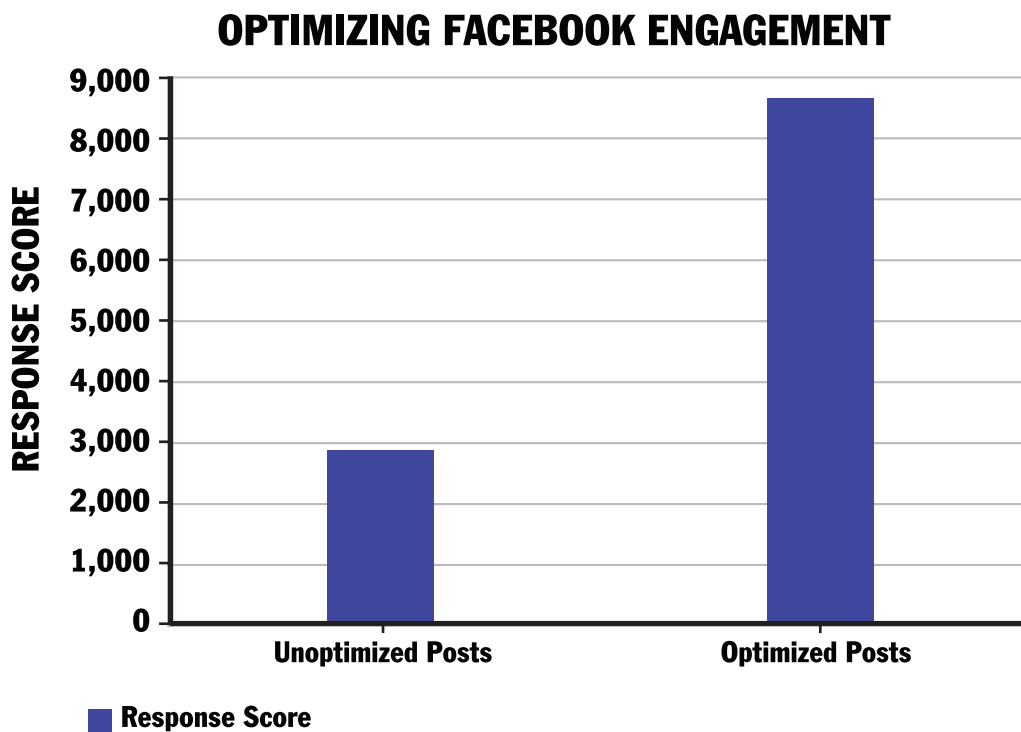
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# Type of Content: Text, Links, Photos or Video?

## Introduction

Based on the largest known study conducted on Facebook brand activity this whitepaper identifies the primary factors influencing engagement on Facebook posts, and summarizes the key findings as 10 keys for optimizing Facebook Engagement.

The chart below shows the difference in engagement levels (likes, comments and votes) seen when posts follow these guidelines and when they don't.



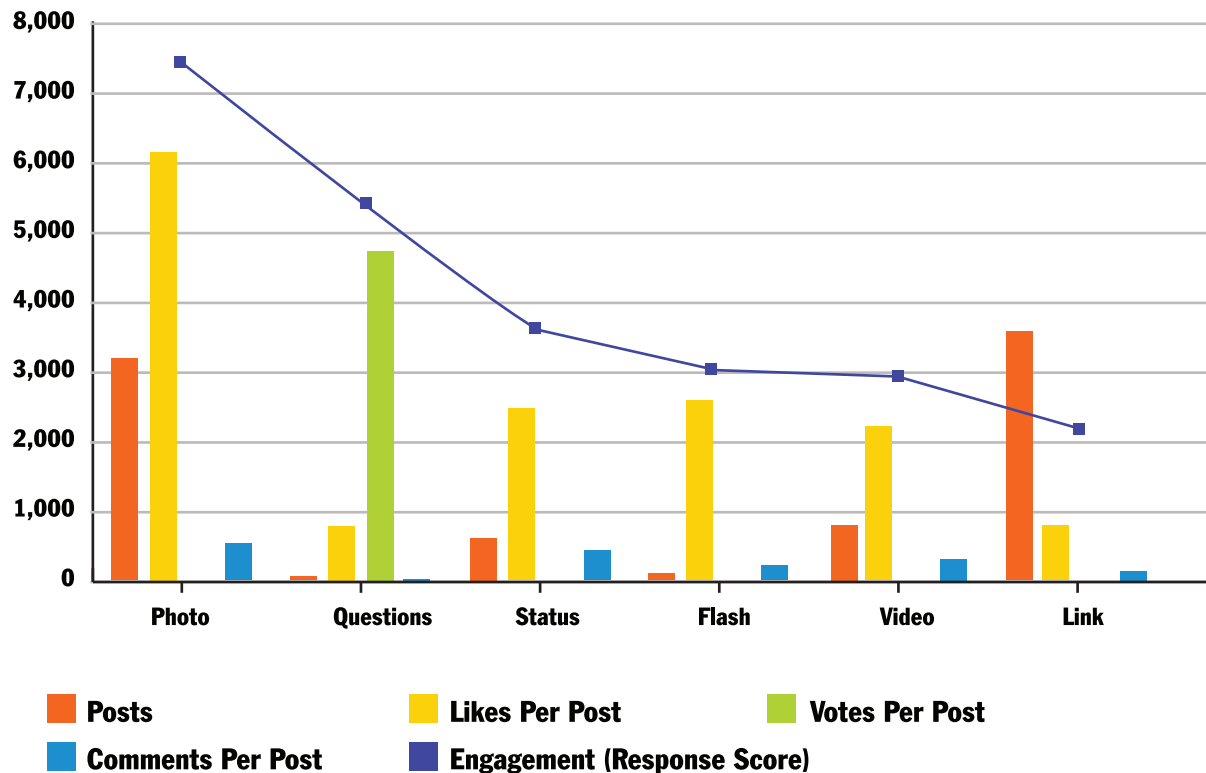
Facebook Engagement is a critical issue for social marketers, not only because consumer interaction has become a cornerstone of the new marketing landscape, but also because Facebook Engagement is critically tied to brand visibility on the platform. Content visibility on Facebook is controlled by Facebook's Edgerank algorithm (see Methodology section) which is heavily impacted by the Engagement metrics used in this report.

Track Social is a large-scale social media analytics platform that monitors the social media presences of over 10,000 brands on the major social media platforms. See About section for more details.

## Type of Content: Text, Links, Photos or Video?

First, we look at how the type of Facebook post – Photos, Videos, Statuses, Questions and Links – impacts engagement. Perhaps it comes as no shock that visuals and photos can grab attention. It might come as a surprise to see just how significantly photo posts surpass every other type of Facebook interaction.

**FACEBOOK ENGAGEMENT BY POST TYPE**



### For Facebook Engagement, Photos are king.

In terms of both Likes and Comments, photos far exceeded other post types in engaging consumer responses. With a response rate up to four times that of some Post Types, Photos provoke a more visceral response and allow a more immediate reaction from consumers on Facebook. Questions (or Facebook Polls as they are sometimes referred to) were competitive with Photo Posts in terms of eliciting a similar number of Votes in place of Likes.

# Many brands are consistently using the least effective form of Facebook communication.

The least effective form of Facebook Post was the Link Post, where the brand gives Facebook a link, and allows Facebook to construct the majority of the post from the content on the webpage corresponding to the link. Shockingly, the most under-performing Post Type, was also the most commonly used. It seems that the act of merely passing on information is not seen as engaging. For some companies such as news organizations, we can see how news dissemination via link can be effective; however on Facebook (unlike Twitter) users are more receptive to different types of content.

Perhaps most surprising of all is the poor performance of video as an effective engagement tool. The case can be made that video content is simply too demanding of the audience to generate engagement on a large scale.\*

## People may be skeptical that corporate videos will not be worth their time.

On the other hand it can certainly be said that once a fan interacts with a video, there is a deeper level of engagement, and this can be more valuable to the brand. Our results, however, are focused on the scale of engagement as opposed to the depth of individual engagement.

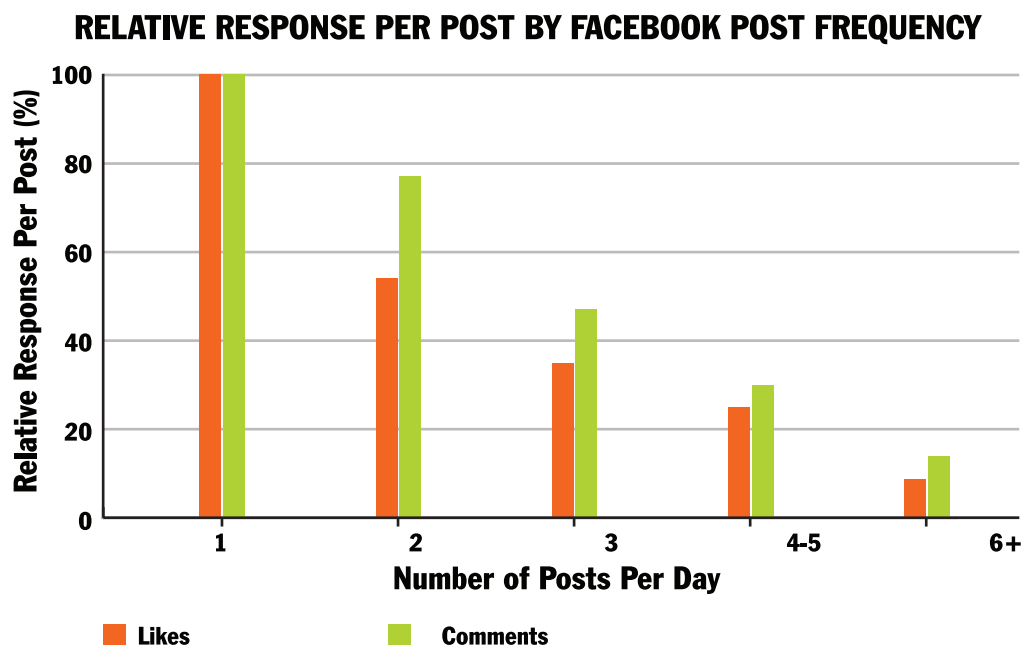
\*We have seen individual cases where video, as with all the content types, is a perfect fit for a given brand. It should be reinforced that the aggregate analysis conducted here can only be used as general guidance. Every brand should consider the nature of their positioning, product and audience in coming up with the right approach for them.

How much is too much? There is a common, and intuitive, assumption that brands should not post too frequently or they will annoy their audience, who in turn will become less receptive to brand messages. However, hard data on this has not been available until now.

It turns out that although posting more often does have consequences, it is possible to post far more frequently on Facebook than many brands believe.

We start by looking at the response level per post, as increasing numbers of posts are made per day. The response level at each Posting Frequency is represented as a percentage of the response received when a brand only posts once in a day.

Response Per Post drops off markedly as more posts are made.



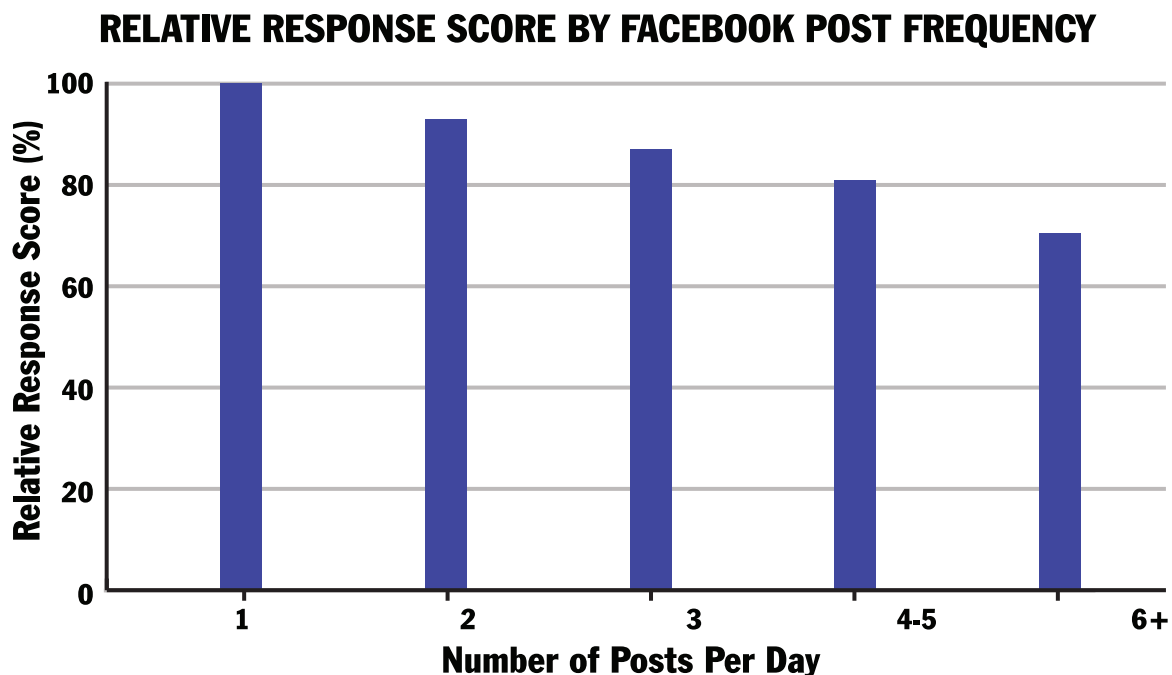
When a brand posts twice a day, those posts only receive 57% of the likes and 78% of the comments per post. The drop-off continues as more posts are made in the day.

Response per Post is important because it impacts your engagement levels, Edgerank score, and hence the visibility of future posts. However it is not the whole story.

It is the Response Per Day, rather than Per Post, that represents the total amount of interaction a brand is having with its consumers, and is representative of the total amount of touch-points they have to convey their marketing message.

So next we look at what happens to the Total Response, or Response Per Day, as the Posting Frequency increases:

## There is no significant change in Total Response as the Posting Frequency increases.



Interestingly, although the response per post decreases, the total amount of response stays more or less steady as posting frequency increases.

We need to emphasize that this result does not suggest that any brand can increase posting frequency without an impact on their total response levels, only that some brands are achieving this, so it certainly possible. Also, this study did not look at ancillary effects of posting activity such as people Unliking a Page, nor did we consider the sentiment of the response. However it was observed quite consistently amongst the brands in our study that increased posting levels were sustainable without a drop-off in total response.

Given that Response Per Day and Response Per Post are important we have calculated a Response Score that is a weighted average of the two.

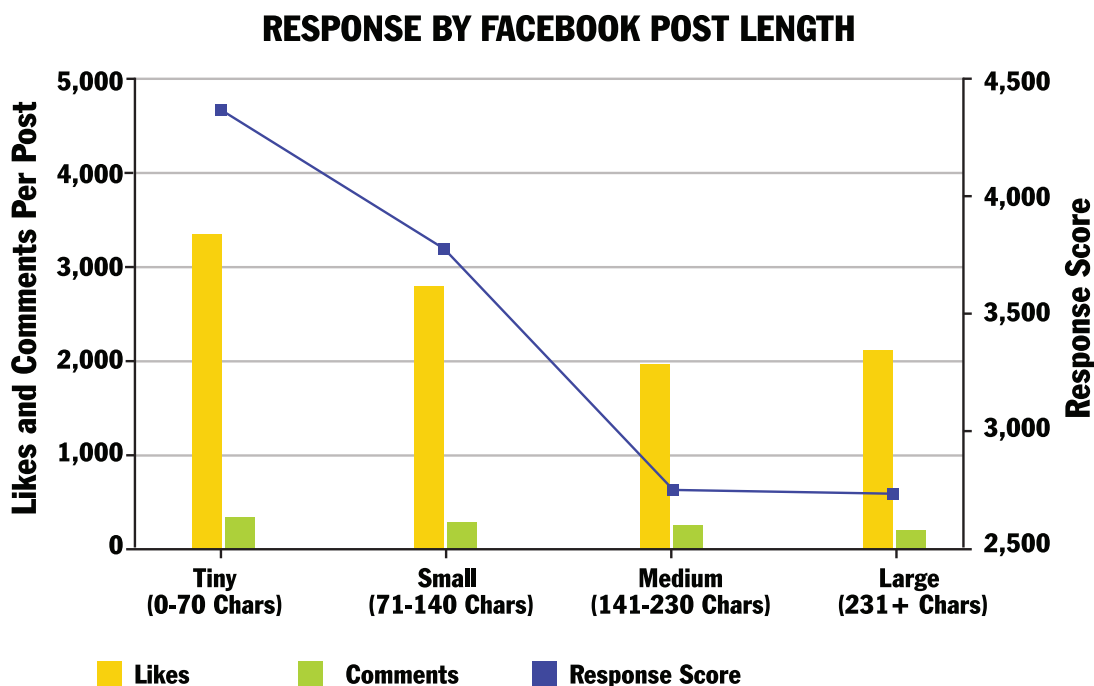
The overall Response Score does show a consistent drop-off in response to posting frequency. This is a warning that over-posting does have consequences, however the relatively modest rate of the drop-off gives brands an opportunity to perhaps post more frequently than they thought.

## Size matters with regard to Facebook Engagement.

People on Facebook are tired, busy, bored, hungry and utterly bombarded with a wall of chatter from friends, acquaintances and brands. They don't have more than a few seconds to glimpse a message, mentally shrug, and move on. Brands need to use every means at their disposal to catch people's attention, and draw them in.

A picture is worth a thousand words – especially on Facebook. Earlier we discussed the benefits of Photo posting compared to other types of posts. However, what matters equally dramatically is the length of the text message you include with your Post – be it a Photo, Video, Link or plain Status Post.

## Smaller messages show a significant increase in response levels.





We point out that writing a small post is no guarantee of success. Nor is a long post destined to fail. It is also true that the benefit of succinct posting varies from brand to brand, depending on many factors such as the nature of their product and the attitude of their audience. However:

Post Length is amongst the most consistent factors that we see having an impact on engagement levels across the board.



It turns out that Twitter got it right. There is a distinct roll-off in Engagement level beyond 140 characters. Though roll-off does begin before that point, the now traditional 140 character size limit is probably necessitated by the need to fit in Urls, Hashs and other references.

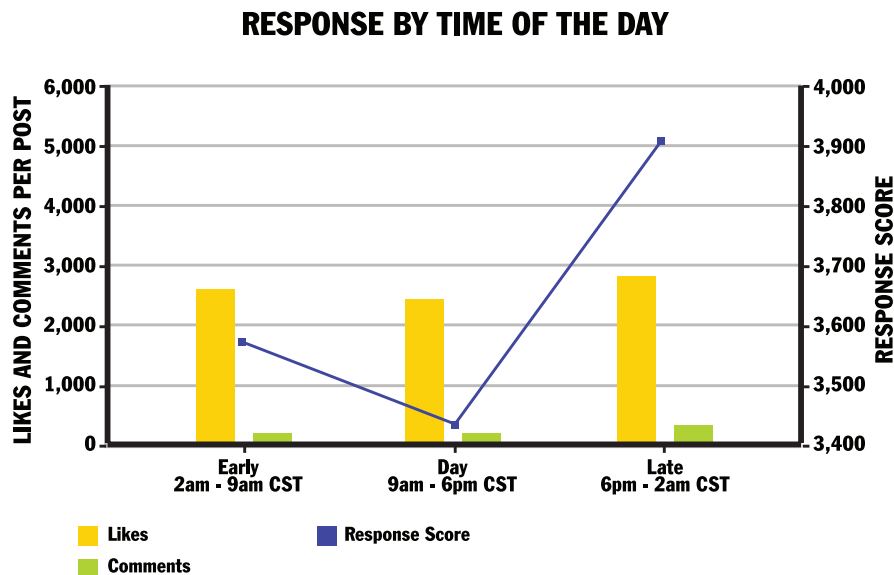
Facebook users consume most content from their stream, and a typical stream is a rapidly moving feast. Perhaps the one thing all Facebook Posts share in common is the certainty and speed with which they will soon be replaced by new content.

## With social content, timing is critical.

Hitting the target consumer at exactly the right time - when they are in the right mood to not only take in your content, but respond to it - is the goal.

Having national and global audiences spread across numerous time zones only exacerbates the challenges that brands face in getting the timing of their social activities right. While the majority of posting activity in this study was targeted at US based audiences, there is still a challenge in interpreting the data due to time zone differences. Hence we have split the day into 3 broad sections, specified in Central Standard Time.

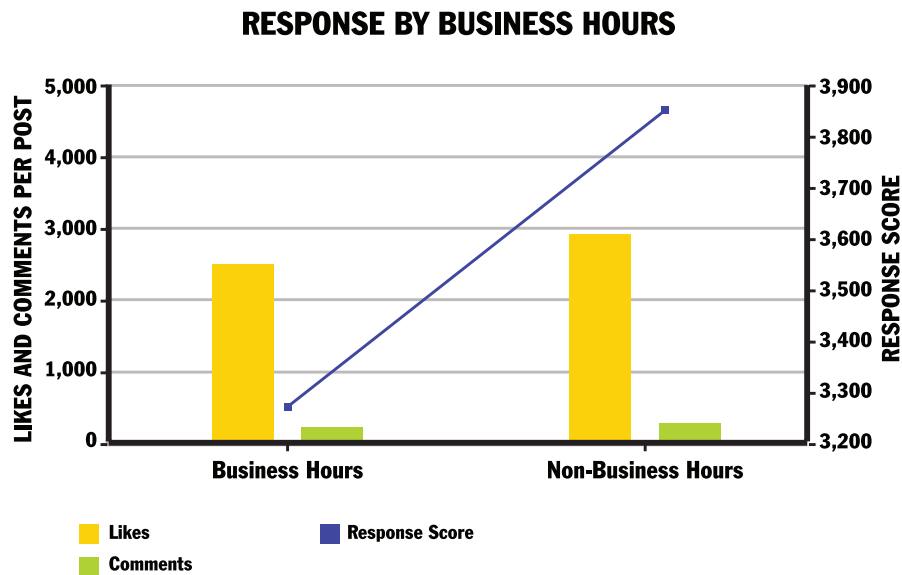
## Posts made in the evening get approximately 10% better response.



Off hour posting does not seem to be viewed as an intrusion by Fans. In fact, response rates are higher on average after 6pm.

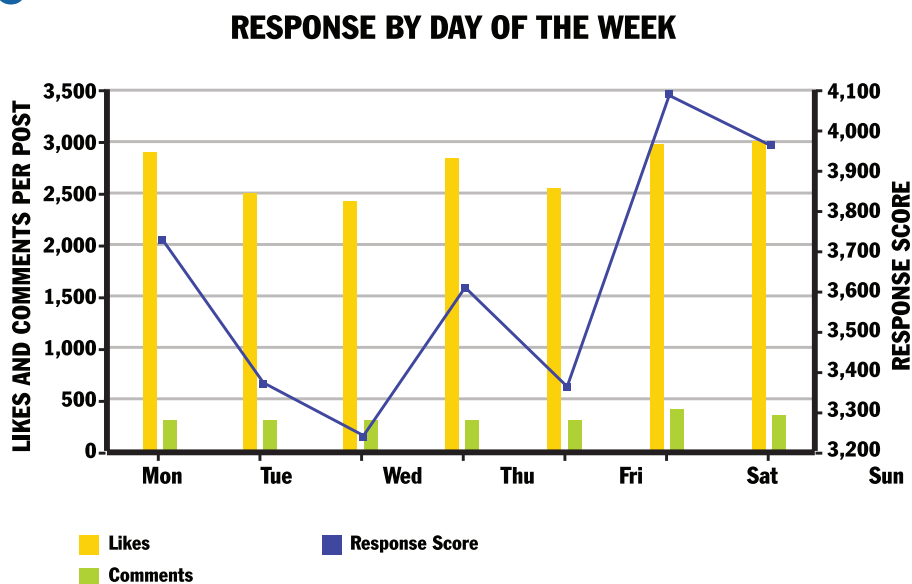
It could also be the case that the reduced posting frequency by brands on the weekend and evening time periods reduces clutter, creating more opportunity for those that do post to catch a Fan's attention.

Posts made outside of business hours get approximately 20% better response.



We combined all non-business hours posts, including posts on weekends, evenings and holidays, and found response levels significantly increased for posts made during non-business hours.

Posts on the weekend perform about 16% better on average.



We observe a dramatic increase in the number of comments received when a post is made on the weekend, presumably because people have more time.

As always, we need to reinforce that these are aggregate results. We observe a lot of variation between brands, and it is critically important to consider each specific situation and analyze each brand on its own merits.

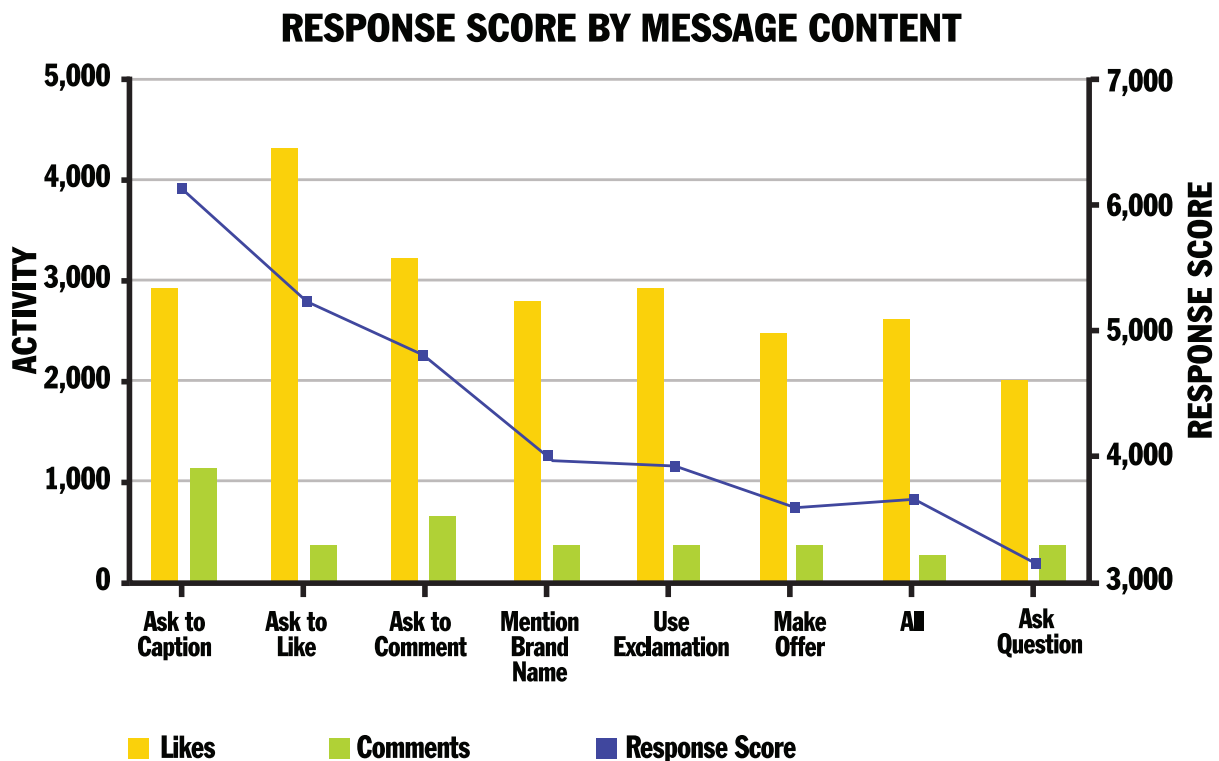
So far we've discussed many things you can do to increase the engagement levels of your posting activity on Facebook. Post Type, Frequency, Size and Timing all impact how people respond to posts. However the most critical aspect of a post is surely what it actually says.

Should your brand self-promote? **Answer: Perhaps.**

Can you raise your engagement by asking questions? **Answer: Not really.**

Can you blatantly ask for Likes and Comments without alienating your Fans? **Answer: Definitely.**

Every brand, product and target audience is different, so perfecting type of content is a unique process for each brand. However we are able to discern broadly applicable patterns. Not surprisingly telling your audience what to do has a significant impact.



## Explicit calls to action get the best response.

The best way to get people to comment is to ask them to caption, or fill in the blanks, followed by asking them to comment explicitly. The best way to get people to Like a Post is to ask them.

Mentioning a Brand's name in a Post had a mildly positive impact on response level, though we saw this vary a lot from brand to brand.

Surprisingly, Posts that asked questions performed worse than average, because despite resulting in more Comments, people were not disposed to Liking a Question.

It is key to understand that individual Posts should not be viewed in isolation. While caption Posts may be the best performing post we have identified, if all a brand used were caption Posts their audience would probably tire and stop responding.

# The 10 Keys To Optimizing Facebook Engagement

- 1.** Get to the point with short, punchy statements. Try to stay below 100 characters. Avoid the temptation to add superfluous branding or product tie-ins as this is a common reason that message length increases unnecessarily.
- 2.** Where possible, let images do the talking.
- 3.** Be aware that audiences in general are wary of video content or referred links.
- 4.** Post when your audience is listening, not just when your business is open. Test posting on different days of the week and outside of business hours.
- 5.** If you want an action, often asking for it directly is the best way to get it.
- 6.** Captioning or 'Fill in the Blank' type Posts are a way of encouraging engagement less explicitly.
- 7.** Use questions wisely. They can encourage increased response via Comment, but actually reduce response via Like.
- 8.** It is possible to post quite frequently on Facebook without upsetting your audience. Increase posting frequency with care and monitor to find the frequency that is right for you.
- 9.** Regardless of how often you post, your content has to be relevant and interesting to your audience. View Facebook content as an integrated program, incorporating variety.
- 10.** Test and optimize constantly. Poor response will decrease visibility via Edgerank, which will then result in even poorer response. Hence, Engagement is critical in getting value from your investment in Facebook Marketing.

## Summary

Facebook Engagement is a crucial issue for social marketers, not only because consumer interaction has become a cornerstone of the new marketing landscape, but also because Facebook Engagement is critically tied to brand visibility on the platform.

## Edgerank

Facebook uses a proprietary algorithm called Edgerank to dictate the visibility of content in user's streams. The effect of this is that much content may be either reduced in visibility or not shown at all to a significant percentage of a brand's audience. And when there is a history of poor engagement levels, it can become an engagement death-spiral: low engagement produces low visibility, which in turn makes it harder to get high engagement.

## Brands

**To conduct this study we monitored the Facebook streams of 100 well-known brands that are highly active on Facebook:**

AOL, AT&T, Angry Birds, Applebee's, Audi AG, BMW, Bath & Body Works, Budweiser, Bulgari, Burberry, Burger King Corporation, CBS News, CBS Television, Chili's Grill & Bar, Christian Dior, Ciroc Vodka, CityVille, Coach, Coca-Cola, Converse, Disney, Domino's Pizza, Dunkin' Donuts, ESPN, Facebook, Ferrari, Foot Locker, Ford, Fox News, G4 Media, General Motors, Harley-Davidson Motor Company, Heineken, Hot Topic, Huffington Post, IGN, Intel, Jack Daniels Whiskey, Lamborghini, Levi Strauss & Co., LinkedIn, Live Nation, Los Angeles Times, MTV, Macy's, McDonald's, Mercedes-Benz, Miami Heat, Microsoft, Monster Energy, Mountain Dew, NASA, NBA, NPR, National Football League, National Geographic, New York Giants, New York Yankees, Nickelodeon, Nike, Nokia, Norwegian Cruise Line, Oreo, PepsiCo, PetSmart, Petco, PlayStation, Publishers Clearing House, Publix, Ralph Lauren, Red Bull, Redbox, Royal Caribbean International, Samsung Electronics, Sephora, Skittles, Sony, Starbucks, Subway, T-Mobile, Taco Bell, Target, The New York Times, Time Warner, Toyota, Twitter, UFC, US Navy, United Airlines, Univision, Verizon, Walgreens, Walmart, Warner Bros. Television, Wendy's, Whole Foods Market, Xbox, Yahoo!, YouTube, Zara

## Posts

Total number of Facebook Posts in study: 8,468

## Time Period

Time period: May 1, 2012 - May 31, 2012.

## Engagement

The definition of engagement we are using in this study is strictly limited to the response of an audience to posts, in terms of Likes, Comments and (for Questions) Votes. To represent Engagement under this definition we calculate a Response Score using a point system as follows:

<b>Like</b>	1 point
<b>Vote</b>	1 point
<b>Comment</b>	3 points

For calculation Response By Post Frequency we use a weighting between Per Day and Per Post metrics as follows:

<b>Per Day</b>	1
<b>Per Post</b>	.5

## Facebook Post Types

**Status** - The most traditional form of post, containing text.

**Photo** - Post contains an image (a photo uploaded to a Facebook album) and text

**Link** - A url is provided to Facebook which creates a post based on the content at that url. A text message can be added.

**Video** - Video is uploaded and can be played inline.

**Flash** - A flash file is uploaded which can contain video, motion graphics and any content that can be included in a flash file.

**Question** - A Facebook Poll contains a question and options to select from (which optionally can be also added by users).



Track Social was developed by Sprokkit, a full service marketing agency, and launched in 2011. Sprokkit and Track Social were founded by Morgan J. Arnold, a marketing entrepreneur with a PhD in Engineering. Sprokkit is an award winning, full-service integrated marketing agency specializing in mid-size and large brands. Clients include Carl's Jr., Hardee's, Denny's and Del Taco.



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