

WHITE PAPER

10 Underused Strategies to Get Paid & Organic Content to Play Well Together



+44%

Social video ad spending forecast to grow 44% from 2019 to 2021, reaching **\$14.89 billion** next year.

You already understand the importance of organic social media: it's a cost-effective way to connect with followers, encourage word-of-mouth, and increase your brand's trustworthiness in the eyes of your audience.

You may also be on board with the growing number of brands using paid social. Social media ad spending is **projected to grow** from almost \$99 billion in 2020 to \$135 billion in 2025. Social video ad spending, in particular, is forecast to **grow 44% from 2019 to 2021**, reaching \$14.89 billion next year.

But unless you're strategically integrating paid and organic content—and analyzing the metrics for the two as a whole—you're missing out on a powerful combination that can accelerate your brand's growth through more effective campaigns and more engaged communities. You could be wasting time and money, too.

Ready to put paid and organic content to work for your brand? Here's how.

HOW TO CREATE THE PERFECT BLEND OF PAID & ORGANIC CONTENT

Finding the right balance of paid and social, using each one to improve the other, and layering both into your schedule in a deliberate way are key for social success.

Here, we share 10 strategies for getting the most out of your paid and organic social content. Some of these are well-known but little-used, while others are emerging approaches you can start using now to get a jump on the competition.

ORGANIC → PAID

Organic content is great for building engagement...but, used right, it can also help boost the success of your paid social ads.

01

Apply organic wins to paid strategy

No one likes looking through a feed full of good organic content and being jarred out of their scrolling reverie by the sight of an ad. Creating a consistent look and feel between paid and organic content can offer consumers a more positive experience that reflects well on your brand—and gets better results.

The content teams at the Portland Trail Blazers accomplished this by applying the best features of their organic content to their paid posts. The content team discovered that sports highlight videos that include slow-motion shots of fan reactions—jumping out of their seats, applauding, and so on—generate good engagement. So the digital team started including those same types of shots in their paid videos. “It’s a really nice marriage of the two types of content, and it doesn’t come off as an ad,” says David Long, the Portland Trail Blazers’ Digital Marketing Manager.

The digital marketing team then keeps an eye on their return on ad spend; when it dips below a certain benchmark they turn off the ad and replace it with a different one that leverages the same technique. “They saw what type of content was the most engaging organically and applied that creative insight to their paid strategy...and were able to see success,” says Nick Cicero, Vice President of Strategy at Conviva.

02

Leverage paid social to retarget inbound traffic

Targeting your ads by broad demographics or other large categories is only one step removed from “spray and pray” marketing, and the results are probably only incrementally better. Not to mention, showing ads to a group of people who meet only the minimum qualifications is a waste of money.

Instead, let your organic content help you focus your paid efforts on only the hottest prospects.

How it’s done: build content around low-competition keywords to attract traffic to your blog, then use calls to action to send these visitors to key pages on your site. Then retarget the visitors who spend the most time on these pages with paid social content.

This may seem like a roundabout way to target your paid content, but this savvy sequence not only saves money and improves results—it also makes your paid social ads feel less intrusive because they’re shown only to the most interested prospects.

PAID → ORGANIC

You're already...well, paying for paid. So squeeze the most you can from your paid content by using it to inform and improve your organic content.

03

Try starting with the ad

Most brands' M.O. is to produce organic content and then promote it if it does well to increase its reach. But some brands are flipping the order with excellent results.

"We're taking a different approach," says Zak Damman, Director of Digital Activation at the collegiate sports marketing company Learfield IMG College. "When we're setting up a campaign that has both paid and organic elements, we're starting with the ad. This gives us a lot more flexibility and leverage for things like creative calls to action, link preview posts, and so on. And then from there, we go in and post it out organically." Think of it as A/B testing different elements using paid content and then using the winners in your organic content.

Now Learfield IMG College's organic posts have the same compelling elements they would use in paid content—reinforcing the brand's voice and messaging throughout all its content while also increasing the effectiveness of their organic posts.

04

Use paid content to inform organic SEO

Effective organic content doesn't come cheap: creating videos, long-form copy, and other assets involves finding (and paying for) experienced talent, plus purchasing the tools they need to do their jobs. And SEO agencies charge a mint—but without their help it can be difficult to hone in on the search terms that will get your hard-earned content seen.

You may already be using SEO to strengthen your paid strategy, which is smart. But since you're already doing paid social, why not also use the data you're collecting to determine the most successful search terms...and then build or reoptimize your organic content around those terms? This is a cost-effective way to ensure that your organic content is filled with search terms you know will generate results.

Another strategy: "test" high-budget organic content by boosting a lighter (read: cheaper) version of that content on social to see how it performs.

05

Fill up more of the funnel with paid

We normally think of organic content for raising awareness and paid content for taking the consumer over the finish line of the lead funnel. "You create organic content that's tied around themes and campaigns and activations to entertain and engage your audience," explains Cicero. "And then you can use paid social to amplify the number of people who can see it, helping to build and drive engagement."

This is a time-tested strategy that works, but you limit the potential of paid by keeping it at the top of the funnel. "The expectation is that we're mostly just boosting native content around KPIs like video views and engagements," says David Long. "In reality, we're much more focused on lower-funnel considerations and conversion KPIs. Our content teams do a lot of brand building that naturally fills that top funnel, so we're using a lot of pay strategies to inch those leads along for some sort of conversion KPI."

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When you think about paid and organic and how they work together, you obviously have paid initiatives that are more related to driving ticket sales or some other initiative. But in the case of branded content you also have a public presence—which is your organic content. [Using both], you’re able to build that public persona and get really great fan engagement. You can generate a certain amount of inventory from your organic content, and then paid social allows you to reach new people. And if you know how to use data on what your fans are interested in and where they’re located to target the ads, you can do this at a very low cost.”

Nick Cicero
Vice President of
Strategy at Conviva

ORGANIC + PAID

These two types of content can also work together synergistically to make one another even more effective.

06

Merge your silos

Too often, a brand's content and digital marketing teams operate in their own little bubbles. The content team creates engagement content (focusing on likes and followers) and assumes that if it performs well, the digital team will pick it up and connect it to actual outcomes. "When I joined this function in our organization, I looked at it more from an engagement standpoint—fun highlights, big plays, the personality of our players," says Zak Damman. "I was a little naive to the fact that the way we acquire new fans that the paid team can target is such an important part of our organization."

"We don't necessarily bucket by organic and paid—in a perfect world, we want both."

Jack Patterson,
Vice President of Digital
& Social Media at
Learfield IMG College

More and more businesses are realizing that it's time to break down the silos so organic and paid content can work together to benefit the brand. "One thing that's come out of the pandemic is seeing how we've always been in silos: sometimes there's digital marketing, sometimes there's organic, sometimes there's partnership," says Jack Patterson, Vice President of Digital and Social Media at Learfield IMG College. "This is the time that groups need to work together and break down some of the silos. Too often people obsess on their own personal goals as opposed to the organizational goals, and this is a wake-up call to stop."

Business leaders have been talking about silos for 30 years, and you're not going to be redesigning your entire organizational structure in a day. But what you can do is encourage the paid and organic teams to collaborate on goal-setting and strategy and to adopt a consistent brand voice across all types of content. "[Digital Marketing Manager David Long] does a great job on the paid side of maintaining the voice we think is so important on the organic side," says Aaron Grossman, Director of Content for the Portland Trail Blazers. "And that's something that we've learned to emulate when we're sharing branded organic content."

07

Analyze behavior to choose paid vs. organic

Social media analytics platforms like Conviva Social Insights let you analyze not just your posts' performance, but also user behavior on social platforms. With this data, you can investigate behaviors that have lower motivations for paid social and behaviors that have higher motivations for organic social.

When you do this you might notice, for example, that an organic video post has high engagement but a low completion rate. Try shortening that video for your paid ads. If you discover that the viewers who drop off early are likely to be watching the video with the sound off, add subtitles to help keep them engaged all the way to the CTA.

08

Layer paid and organic content

If you offer branded content, running partners' paid ads too close to one another can weaken engagement. "We don't want several brands sharing or doing a ton of branded content at the same time," says Damman. "We want it to be consistent, layered properly and authentically into everything that we're doing."

To make this happen, Learfield IMG College is developing an inventory tracking system for branded content to plan how much they'll be sharing during which parts of the game, so they can ensure they're not competing against themselves by sharing too many posts around the same time.

Whether or not you sell branded content, scheduling paid and organic posts too close to one another can cause one to cannibalize the other—and can muddle your data analysis as well.

"Our partners want to be partners for a reason: they want to be an authentic piece of the puzzle and feel like we're sharing our voice, which our fans recognize, as a part of their brand."

Zak Damman
Director of Digital
Activation at Learfield
IMG College

09

Combine organic and paid KPIs

You typically have separate KPIs for organic and paid content. But seeing the way these KPIs interact with one another can give you deeper insights into the effectiveness of your campaigns—and even the overall health of your brand.

“For the paid side, my main KPI is growth...but that ties very closely with my organic goals of engagement,” says Marley Pelta, Senior Manager of Digital at Wolf Entertainment, the company behind *Law & Order*, *One Chicago*, and other scripted dramas. “So if we’re growing but we’re not seeing a simultaneous increase in engagement, it’s not a successful campaign—because we really want engaged followers who are going to be part of the community by interacting with our content, and the content of our counterparts at the networks.”

In other words, if you based the success of your campaigns on only the paid metric (growth), you might have a huge social following on paper—but no one is actually participating, which defeats the purpose of a community. After all, a community of 20,000 people who actively engage with your brand and one another is worth more than a community of one million uninterested followers.

As another example, say you set the lofty goal of one million views per month. Including both paid and organic metrics gives you more potential strategies to hit your goal because you’re not relying only on one type of post. Now you can consider how to creatively combine strategies that work for each (or both) to help you reach one million views in total.

Other organic and paid KPIs that should be looked at in tandem for the best results include reach, total engagements, total views, total click-through traffic, and link clicks/traffic to your site. See below for more information on why it’s important to analyze paid and organic KPIs together.

10

Use the right tools

If you can't track the results of your paid and social content in a comprehensive way, you lose out on some of the benefits of combining the two.

That's because when you integrate the metrics for paid and social, you gain insights that you wouldn't get from looking at one or the other alone. "Having both paid and organic in one dashboard gives you the ability to make decisions by seeing the whole picture," says Cicero. "For example, if you're looking at just your organic published content, you'll certainly be able to see how that content performs with your audience—but you won't be able to see the impact of a large social campaign and what that might have done to your organic engagement numbers or your organic audience growth numbers."

Tracking paid and organic content in one place lets you build out full campaigns and measure them over time, allowing you to see the average engagements a particular type of content gets over time.

The social platforms' analytics dashboards aren't built to handle this. "The platform analytics are spotty," says Zak Damman of Learfield IMG College. "There are a lot of holes. I think that's where Conviva is stepping in and helping us out, as a lot of the campaigns we're running do have paid and organic placements. Being able to combine them and then pull reporting on both together has helped our team expedite that reporting process a lot."

More and more brands are becoming dissatisfied with the narrow views of their data provided by social platforms and limited analytics solutions. Luckily, new, robust tools are emerging that integrate analytics for both paid and social content—to help brands make better content decisions.

Says Learfield IMG College's Jack Patterson: "It's less about what happened on paid and what happened on organic...we want it all."

Looking for Better Data Insights?

Conviva integrates real-time paid and organic social metrics into one dashboard. Reach out for a demo or a free trial to explore how we can help you get the most from your social content.

