



Background

Facebook has been a hot topic of discussion recently: there was the research and industry debate around whether teens are abandoning the social network; the hefty year on year rise in revenues announced; the complete overhaul of its positioning and the 10th birthday celebrations. Amidst all of this Facebook has released the 'Paper' App on iOS in the US offering 'beautiful storytelling from friends and the world.'

Details/Implications

Paper is the first project to come out of the new Facebook Creative Labs.

The Paper app plays upon a growing need for highly customized personal content, within

attractive and user friendly 'visual stories' (also very similar looking, perhaps intentionally, to Flipboard). The functionalities of the app also really play upon mobile specific features – users can swipe through content, tilt their phone to explore high-res, panoramic views of pictures, and stories/ videos appear full screen.

With smartphones more widely available it is easier for people to create and share their own miniature life stories with friends, family and followers. Beautiful images and videos are no longer restricted to those with large, expensive camera equipment and image editing software. Users can capture a moment in time, funk it up with an Instagram filter, and share it across their whole social network within minutes. Not only are users creating more content than ever before, but also increasingly becoming 'curators' of content. With all the content 'noise' there is a growing desire among consumers to weed out irrelevant information and see only that which interests them. The rising number of apps aiding this content discovery and curation (and the popularity of them) is testament to this trend: Pinterest, Tumblr, Flipboard, Zite and Foodspotting to name just a few and they all have one thing in common - they are extremely visually focused. And so is Paper.

So could the more visually appealing Paper eventually take out the main Facebook app altogether? The new Paper format does include the majority of the most popular site features including friend requests, messages and notifications. And given the success of Paper in the US already - rising to number 4 within the App Store only hours after its release - it is definitely one to watch. It is no doubt that other curation apps (Flipboard in particular) will be keeping a close eye on how the app grows within the US and elsewhere when it is available.

There are currently no advertising opportunities available within the app as its initial focus is on the native user experience. The release of the app is however an interesting move from a company that has recently repositioned its advertising focus towards reach opportunities, rather than engagement, with the app seemingly encouraging much more of the latter. If the functionality remains the same once commercial opportunities are introduced it would suggest that any brands attempting to push out content through it will have to think about content quality, and how it will cater to individual needs and interests. If anything, it will put more of a focus upon how community managers consider speaking to consumers and the content that they produce for them for this platform.

Summary

This app has been developed as a result of a growing consumer trend and results in the US to date appear to be strong. Flipboard and the like will be closely monitoring any progress to gauge the threat but it appears as though there is still a thirst within the market for such an app, despite the sheer amount already existing. While there are currently no advertising opportunities within the app it is definitely one to watch and community managers will have to consider longer term content creation plans for brands.

