Approaching Niche Verticals with a Startup Mentality

Presented by Spencer McKee
w/ The Colorado Springs Gazette & OutThere Colorado
Overview Takeaways

- Find a growing audience that is underwhelmed with content
- Focus on creating what the audience ACTUALLY wants
  - Engagement drives growth, so find the content that naturally draws an audience to engage
  - Sometimes what an audience says they want, isn’t what they want to engage with
  - Learn through examples of engagement
- Observe your audience and be willing to pivot accordingly
  - By looking at what your audience is engaging with again and again, you can hone your content to continually drive more engagement
- Make sure you’re creating something that makes money
  - Niche verticals are great because they offer the client a chance to reach a dedicated, engaged community.
  - Creating an audience is great, but is that audience appealing to the client?
    - Ex. Outdoor recreation lovers vs. a Quidditch appreciation page
What is OutThere Colorado?

- An outdoor recreation resource
- An outdoor recreation community
- A revenue-driving marketing platform
- Feature stories, news, planning tools, events—everything about experiencing COLORADO

![OutThere Colorado Image](image-url)
Timeline: OutThere Colorado

Stages:

1. Discovery
2. Launch
3. Growth
   a. Growth Optimization
4. The Pivot
   a. The Product Pivot
5. Maturation
6. What’s Next?
Stage 1: Discovery

- Searching for a gap
  - Is this an audience that’s likely to grow or already established?
  - AND
  - Is this an audience that needs content?

- Discovering the audience
  - Rapid growth of outdoor recreation nationwide
    - Colorado was at the forefront of this growth
  - Rapid growth of “experience culture” – more people wanting more “real world” in their lives
  - Lack of Colorado-centric, outdoor recreation-focused, digital-first community

- Now what?
Stage 2: Launch

- How do we capitalize on a growing experience -culture with a growing interest outdoor recreation participation?
- Heavy focus on utility as an online database of natural destinations
  - Potential gap in content, connection to real world, highly scalable
  - This approach SEEMED ideal
Stage 3: Growth

- How do we get an audience to use our platform?
- Blending engaging content with utility
- Driving growth through driving engagement
  - Optimize for engagement on a per platform basis
Stage 3.5: Growth Optimization

- We’ve created engaging content one or twice, but how can we do this systematically?
- Discovery of the VPA system
  - *viral prone articles
- Find one concept that works and make that success repeatable
- What are people engaging with AND WHY?
Stage 4: The Pivot

- The database wasn’t resonating with our users, while our niche brand and our content was
- “The Vicarious Adventurer”
- Other database options existed, but clickable, high-utility content did not.
- Shifted key growth tactic from high-utility to high-engagement
  - Engagement comes first. Otherwise, the content goes unseen.
  - Engagement drove the click, “utility” kept the audience coming back
Stage 4.5: Pivoting Product

- Clients want to get in front of an engaged audience...let’s help
- We’ve found the content that resonates, so let’s sell that
- Native content, sponsored content, content creation, content promotion
Stage 5: Maturation

- How to we expand our audience to other channels?
  - Focus on social, newsletter, audio
  - The database?
    - The number of heavy users is growing with the number of casual users

- How do we expand our product line to other options for clients?
  - Subscription program, events, deals, & more
Stage 6: What’s Next?

- Can one brand propel the growth of many more?
- What other demographics are we able to engage online?
- Reduce friction!
- Ex: Active 55+
Key Benefits of the StartMentality

- A small team means heavy involvement across roles
  - Push each member to be as close as possible to the content, the audience, and the product that’s being sold
  - Helps with a common disconnect between the content and the numbers behind what make content creation possible

- Testing new ideas is as simple as running a new test

- Always be prepared to pivot
  - Switching gears doesn’t have to be a complicated or inefficient process
  - If the whole team understands the brand, adjusting to change can be constant

- Always be seeking efficiency
  - Quickly scale the good to maximize the success
Building the “Right” Content for Social Media Promotion

- **Scroll Test**
  - Next time you’re on your Facebook feed, take note of how quickly you’re scrolling. A lot can be learned from this.

- **Focus on “good” social content**
  - “Keep the ball rolling”
  - Why did someone opt-in in the first place? GIVE THEM THAT
    - Ex. OutThere and the vicarious adventurer; Gazette and local news

- **Focus on engagement**
  - Engagement is a key indicator of “good” content
  - Engagement fatigue
Challenges & Pitfalls

- If you’re using engaging content to build and sell a brand, publish truly engaging content
- Don’t keep reinventing the wheel, find something that works and repeat
- Be aware of the fine line between engaging and click-bait
- Keep it efficient when possible
  - Ex. In-house vs. freelance network
Takeaways

- The start-up mentality fosters **involvement**, **flexibility**, and **efficiency**
- Find a growing audience that is underwhelmed with content
- Focus on creating what the audience ACTUALLY wants
- Listen to your audience and be willing to pivot
- Make sure you’re creating something that makes money
- **Listen to your audience and REACT ACCORDINGLY**
  - If you’ve got the audience and they’re not engaging, look at your content
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