

Company: PR News

Client: British Council Russia

Country: Russia

Category: Best evaluation strategy

Summary

2014 was designated the UK-Russia Year of Culture (the Year of Culture) in a diplomatic agreement between the two countries. It featured hundreds of different events in the areas of arts, education, music, theatre, etc. held in Russia and the UK. Apart from traditional media exposure, the Year of Culture was promoted on social media to expose as wide and diverse an audience as possible to the many different events held during the year and raise awareness of the British Council's activities.

Why are we submitting this case for the Best Evaluation Strategy Award? The Year of Culture was conceived as a large-scale international project aimed at strengthening cultural ties between Russia and the UK and understanding whether its promotion was effective was a key factor in its success. Additionally, the many events held as part of it required different PR tools to promote. Such a project needed a thorough and comprehensive assessment to evaluate all aspects of its PR campaign and strategy and, if necessary, help make adjustments for future projects. We used novel methods which, apart from making actual measurements, can also be helpful in advancing social media measurement and evaluation techniques.

The British Council (the Council), which was the main organizer of the Year of Culture, is a non-profit international organization, *the goal of which is to develop cooperation between the UK and other countries in education, culture and arts*. It has been operating in Russia for over 20 years.

Objective

The Council hired PR News to evaluate the effectiveness of the Year of Culture's promotion on social media. As part of this assignment, we evaluated the quality of the Council's presence on its own pages on social networks, for which purpose the following goals were set:

- Identify results of the campaign;
- Evaluate level and quality of engagement for pages/groups/communities/etc. set up by/for the Council and the Year of Culture;
- Identify the most effective platforms for promotion;
- Analyze formats and topics of posts on the Council's pages;
- Identify directions for future projects.

These goals helped identify directions for analysis and select the most effective metrics for measurement purposes.

Research and planning

We looked at content posted from January 1 to December 31, 2014. At the first stage, we analyzed the content of the Council and event organizers' pages (exhibition, concert and play announcements on social network pages). As the key tool to evaluate the effectiveness of the promotion campaign for the Year of

Culture, we used a metric called integrated user engagement index which had been modified for the purposes of the project. We also evaluated content generation stability, a metric developed by PR News to analyze the structure of content flow and how regularly content was posted and in what amounts.

The wide range of events, which differed greatly in content and format, presented the main difficulty in developing a research strategy. Additionally, given that the format of media coverage usually depends on the news being covered, it created certain limitations in terms of the choice of metrics.

Creativity & Innovation

We developed metrics that recognized different types of engagement, allowing for better analysis of the Council and Year of Culture's presence on social media. Engagement per post is usually calculated as a total of user responses divided by followers/friends/subscribers (Appendix 1).

The latter approach doesn't exhaust all possibilities for thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of PR campaigns on social media, considering that engagement is affected by a variety of factors (type of medium, audience size, etc.).

For comprehensive evaluation, we used the integral user engagement index which takes into account type of engagement action (comment, like, repost); engagement weight coefficient; and audience size.

The level of engagement is determined by the actions users take. For the purposes of this project, posting a comment was viewed as the highest level of engagement because it requires a greater effort than clicking the "like" and "share" buttons. A share – though also a simple click of a button – weighs more than a like because it has potential to reach a larger audience. Finally, a like means a user's awareness and approval, allowing for users reached by content to be counted, and therefore has the lowest weight.

Depending on the PR goals and stage of a campaign, different types of engagement action can be assigned different weight coefficients. For example, likes and shares weigh more than comments when recognition of a brand/company/etc. is evaluated and comments are more important than likes and shares when customer/user loyalty and trust are measured.

Another factor in user engagement is audience size. When a post is published it is added to the news feed and regardless of the number of likes, shares and comments it gets, it *potentially* can reach all friends/follower/subscribers to the page/group/community/etc. where it is published. Given that, rating pages/groups/communities/etc. by reach allows measuring the effect of audience size.

The content generation stability index is a metric we developed to analyze all content over a given period of time, as opposed to a single post, by identifying spikes and dips in content. It reflects consistency of content flow or lack thereof, with a high index indicating a lack of content strategy and vice versa.

A steady flow of content keeps users interested and allows for certain attitudes and messages to settle in.

Strategy and implementation

The Council set a number of strategic goals to help it expand its presence on social media, which determined the choice of PR tools to achieve them most effectively. In order to attract the largest audience possible to an event, it needs to be made as much visible as possible. To increase visibility, which can be measured as the number of user responses, the event should be promoted on as many platforms as possible.

We tried to use methods and metrics that would fully meet the needs and goals of the Council's digital strategy. Used for such a large-scale endeavor as the Year of Culture, they proved to be effective in both evaluating the effectiveness of the campaign for this project and in laying the groundwork to help the Council develop strategies for communication with its target audience via social media.

Results

By using the above methods and metrics we were able to evaluate comprehensively the effectiveness of PR efforts to promote the Year of Culture and the Council on social media (see results of this work in Appendix 2).

- Events: the events with the highest engagement index were the 15th New British Film Festival, the Chekhov International Theatre Festival and the Wedgewood Exhibition. By promoting events dedicated to different arts, including cinema and theater, the Council was able to improve its visibility across a wide range of cultural areas.
- Platforms: Instagram provided the highest level of engagement, despite a small number of posts and a relatively low reach. VK had a high content generation stability index which translated into a high engagement rate (Appendix 3).
- The Council's pages: two VK pages were filled with content on a regular basis and had a high engagement rate despite having a medium-sized audience. The Facebook page had the lowest engagement rate and content was posted to it irregularly, although it had a wide reach (Appendix 4).
- In terms of topics, reviews (events to see and reviews of films, books, educational materials, etc.) achieved the highest level of engagement. Posts about English studies and infotainment posts to keep audiences interested (various stories, factoids, infographics, etc.) generated the same rate of engagement (Appendix 5).
- Surprisingly, contests with prizes held on a regular basis failed to generate much interest from audiences.

Based on these results, we identified key directions for the Council's promotion on social media. Overall, the Council's existing strategy needed only minor adjustments. For VK pages, we recommended paying more attention to the communication formats and topics that could be expanded after the Year of the Culture ended. On Instagram, we advised the Council to try and attract more followers to make this tool more effective. For the Facebook page, we recommended posting more content and on a more regular basis to maintain steady interest from users. Twitter proved to be a great platform for announcements thanks to reposts that reached a wide audience.

As a result of an analysis of the Council's activity on social media as part of the Year of Culture we evaluated the effectiveness of its PR efforts and the impact of the Year of Culture, outlined the boundaries and context of the Council's presence on social media, and recommended promotion strategies for future projects.