

Our Duty is to Guide People to Real News and to Discern What's Fake



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[Behind the Scenes @Social Journalism Livestream](#) was explored by panelists Catherine Taibi, Bloomberg's Social Media Editor, Peter Himler, Principal, Flatiron Communications, and Helen Novicka, Marketing Director and Head of Digital Media & Strategy, Burson-Marsteller, on Thursday, September 14 at Cision Headquarters.

Moderator Chris Lynch, Chief Marketing Officer, Cision gave an overview of Cision's "2017 Global Social Journalism Study." This year 42% of respondents reported that they use more than five types of social media at least once a week for work. 80% used more than three kinds of platforms, and only 5% worked with only one type of social media.

Chris highlighted fake news. On September 6, 2017, a story broke about Russian businesses buying \$100,000 of Facebook political advertisements to impact the U.S. election. Chris asked Catherine how Bloomberg is handling fake news.

Catherine: Bloomberg is very cautious. We're publishing things that impact businesses. We need to be 100% accurate. Social media has made speed such a big thing which contributes to fake news. We don't aggregate. We're impacting a stock, or a

CEO. We'll take the extra second to make sure it's correct. At Bloomberg, our focus is telling our audiences the facts, without taking sides. We partnered with Twitter and livestreamed during the election so people could decide for themselves.

Helen: How brands manage their voice is being a strong storyteller, looking out for fake news stories, and getting ahead of it via social communication, videos, short-form content, and being ready to respond enables your audience to judge you. The impartial influencers are an authentic voice.

Peter: There are several people on the brand side. If it's hurting you, your brand, and your business, keep an eye on where the story is going, and whether it's going away. A lot of media companies are hiring companies to look at the stories, which can be problematic.

Take the case of Bell Pottinger, the British public relations firm that dissolved after the firm created an un-ethical, race-baiting campaign exploiting South African black and white residents to divert a scandal about the country's president: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/12/business/bell-pottinger-administration.html?mcubz=0>. They hired Russian bots to poison the media bots.

Peter was a panelist at The International Association of Business Communicators (IABC New York) which is exploring the subject of fake news and its danger to the public relations

While there, Peter said, "When a company forms an opaque advocacy group, or pays a 'think tank' to create and disseminate specious content to advance its goals, is that considered "fake news"? Today, this has evolved into state actors, including sadly, this Administration, create and disseminate knowingly false stories to prevail upon the court of public opinion.

What prevents companies from doing the same thing to stifle a

competitor, shareholders, consumers, and employees?” Read more here: “In Defense of the Truth’: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/04/opinion/trump-truth-wiretapping-obama.html>



L-R: Helen Novicka, Peter Himler, Catherine Taibi and Chris Lynch

Chris: We’ve discussed what the journalists and brands need to do. But, what about social media? Facebook said their goal is to fight fake news, and are changing their algorithms, and click bait. We want to be sure we that we don’t use sensational stories. Facebook hired third-party checkers that mark stories as fake news, but it’s hurting things because they miss so many narratives.

Peter: The BBC reported that Facebook is stepping-up its

efforts to fight fake news: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-40812697>, but Twitter has failed to take any responsibility.

Helen: While they're utilities in our lives, the media pressure is building. You're right, Peter, but for most businesses, it's the cost of doing business.

Chris: 73% of journalists say they are active on social media every day, and 31% use the tools for three or more hours per day.

Catherine: It's much less controlled coverage. In the past year, we've put a large focus on community driving content using Facebook, Facebook Live, and creating industry expert Facebook groups. We get negative and positive comments.

When Apple announced the iPhone X, our technology editor bought it immediately, and real-time, did livestreaming, and answered questions. We have finance and technology editors monitoring social media.

Chris: That environment creates an interesting challenge. The journalists' life has become more difficult.

Peter: Farhad Manjoo of The New York Times. Nearly all other NYT reporters would bristle at the idea of a DM pitch. You need to follow these editors on Tweet deck. Journalists are on Twitter and if it's an important story, I follow, listen, and see what they're talking about it. If you're a PR person and not doing this, you're doing a disservice to your clients.

Helen: We need to help our clients understand their audiences, including, looking at planning, mapping to their interest areas, having an integrated approach that includes events, and traditional journalism. The measurement piece is very important. The role of PR is to bridge that gap and close the communications threat.

Catherine: I get mixed reactions. Some of them love it, and believe it's changed their jobs for the better, and some feel it totally consumes them. You can't just be on Facebook and Twitter and miss traditional PR. It's harder for people to do their jobs.

Chris: The change is journalistic standards. The social stream is racing to create good content.

Helen: I don't think content is changing. The pendulum might be swinging back to long-form content. Audiences are looking for media organizations. We're still experimenting with social media and its range of content.

Peter: I miss the days when a less-fragmented media enabled a single story in a respected news organizations like *The New York Times* to spark a national dialogue, which in turn might spur regulatory or legislative action, presumably for the greater good:
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/peterhimler/2014/08/25/a-fourth-e-state-no-more/> – 16ebaf522e36

Chris: Do you see a rebound?

Peter: Ben Smith has built that up. There's a yin-yang about this.

Chris: Do you see an intersection of journalism and social media? People can talk back to us. What guidance would you give to journalists? Anyone can comment about anything.

Catherine: With our personal finance group, you must answer a question first to insure the people are legitimate.

Helen: We can use social media during a crisis, like Hurricane Harvey, and try to align with what an audience wants to hear. Peter hits the nail on the head. Being present and active, and using the opportunity to get closer to journalists.

Peter: I believe earned media is valuable. I'm hoping it stays

this way. I'm very bullish on traditional earned media.

Chris: It's not in the employ of a brand, but do you feel that people are being paid in the background? There's a separation of church and state in editorial versus paid.

Catherine: A lot of our live shows are getting sponsored. We want the advertiser to be part of the show.

Peter: Justin Smith at the Atlantic did this. **Quartz – which Smith oversaw at The Atlantic – is a model publisher by prioritizing its brand and eschewing programmatic:**

“Quartz's model from the beginning has been to never accept a banner ad or an IAB standard unit. Now the company is at a \$30 million run rate and a \$60 CPM, which is remarkable.” Smith said:

<https://digiday.com/media/bloomberg-media-ceo-justin-smith-digital-revolution-just-beginning/>

Helen: Co-creations. How do we get paid for what we do? Collaborate, and create a partnership with journalists. Now brands are telling stories, as opposed to announcing a story.

Peter: Buzz feed has been the poster child for sponsored content. They just announced they're going to accept digital display. I don't know if it's a trend, wanting early investors for an IPO.

Chris: How social media and journalism have moved forward has changed so much. Before, there wasn't a lot of effort to monetize it. Then, Facebook and others wanted to charge for engagement. Brands need to decide where they're going to go for paid.

Chris: What will be talking about in a year from now?

Catherine: Monetization. Facebook has tried several different things. Slap an ad in the middle of your ad, how can publishers make money, big changes in the layout of posts, fun

ways for users to flag fake news. Changes in the display.

Peter: Facebook is a platform, it's not a news organization. From a PR perspective, most PR people are doing earned media. Given all the new tools, that are paid, PR people need to think about what's available to them, such as influencer marketing.

The Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) Endorsement Guides say if there's a connection between an endorser and the marketer that consumers would not expect and it would affect how consumers evaluate the endorsement, that connection should be disclosed:

<https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/ftcs-endorsement-guides-what-people-are-asking>

Peter: But they don't. The FC is going to reign in on that.

Helen: Social may have a different emphasis depends on where it sits. It's a way to pay to use great content. A pay-to-play dynamic. Media revenue models will be hotly debated. I'll be interested to see how Facebook will grapple with that challenge. We're still at the start of something.

If you're on the Apple Communications Team you don't have to worry about paying, setting up interviews with their CEO's. If you're not a big company, like Apple, that's challenging.

Peter: I live and breathe this stuff. Email is the preferred mode of engaging. Be smart about your subject line. Look at journalists' twitter feeds. Learn about them, and be smart. Don't spam them. It's not that difficult.

Helen: Journalists are so busy, personal connections will also cut through that. Put the effort into creating a relationship. Trust is important and you're more likely to trust the people you know. Connect, as opposed to just pitching to them.

As a panel observer, I started thinking about zombies taking

over in science fiction and horror movies. Now “bots,” or “zombies,” malicious programs used by cybercriminals are taking over our computers. Today, the increase in social bots makes it difficult for social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to regulate the problem of fake news, hate speech, and misinformation.

Josh Smith, a researcher at CASM, told Sky News “What we’re interested in is botnets that are extremely clever in the way they behave. If you’re trying to be a real person... you need to employ quite sophisticated tactics... Pinpointing who controls bots is tricky.”

Philip Howard, professor of internet studies at the Oxford Internet Institute, said: “It’s tough to say where the bots come from. We know, depending on the country, between 10 to 20% of all the social media traffic over Twitter is driven by these highly automated accounts”:
<https://news.sky.com/story/invisible-election-social-media-bots-proving-low-key-in-2017-10907641>

In the new social media environment, chat bots and artificial intelligence (AI) are generating huge changes. We know little about the amount of fake news that is out there. We need to stay on-top of what’s real, and what isn’t:
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/laurencebradford/2017/07/24/how-chatbots-are-about-to-change-communication/#4cae9e284aa8>

***About the Author:** Wendy Glavin is Founder and CEO of Wendy Glavin Agency, based in New York City, offering marketing, public relations, and social media. Wendy is a 30-year veteran of corporate, agency, consulting, and small business ownership. Wendy has worked across a wide variety of B2B2C industry sectors, and is a published writer and guest speaker. Email her at: wendy@wendyglavin.com*

